

# Appearing Grace

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Preacher: Paul Dudley

[ 0 : 00 ] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 19th of December 2004.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled Appearing Grace. It is based on Titus chapter 2 verses 11 to 14.

Santa is back in town. He's bigger and brighter than ever before. Everywhere we turn, there's the jolly fellow.

In our shopping malls, on our TVs, there are even more movies out this year than ever have been before about Santa. It's interesting when we think about Santa, isn't it?

What's your view on Santa? My three daughters, Olivia, who's five, she came to us the other day and she said, Look, I know Santa's not true. I don't really believe in him.

[ 1 : 04 ] But how about we just pretend he's real so I can go write a letter to him on the email.

Georgina, my three-year-old, she thinks he's great.

She goes to the shopping mall and goes from Santa to Santa because she knows each time she goes up to a Santa, she gets a lolly. Caitlin, she's not so sure about that white fuzzy thing, that caterpillar that hangs around his mouth.

Well, I have three concerns about Santa. My first concern is, is he real? As I was growing up, I believed in Santa.

Christmas Eve, we would set out on a table some Coke, some biscuits and a note wishing him a happy Christmas. A little note telling him that the reindeers could go get a drink from our dam just over in the back paddock over there.

And it was normally a jolly time. Now, I had a few concerns as I got older, thinking about this. How did he get around to all those children?

[ 2 : 13 ] Secondly, I wondered, how did he eat so much and drink so much? I mean, I know he's a jolly fellow, but that's a lot of drink to be drinking on Christmas Eve. And my third one is, we had a big chimney, you know, a great fireplace.

My big concern was, what about those poor children who didn't have a fireplace? How would Santa get there? I'm not sure that Santa is real.

In the passage that we have tonight from Titus, you might like to have it open as we have a little glance at this tonight, this Christmas time. In the passage we see there that grace appeared.

Titus chapter 2 verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared. The birth of Jesus Christ. Grace has appeared.

A real birth in a real place. Not made up. If you went back to the days of King Herod and you were living there, you would have seen the events.

[ 3 : 23 ] If you went to the town of Galilee, a town in Galilee called Nazareth, you would have seen Mary and Joseph. Imagine being a fly on the wall when the angel, a real angel, appeared to Mary.

What about travelling on the road to Bethlehem? A real road. Mary and Joseph heading to Bethlehem. What about the shepherds, the angels, the star, the wise men?

We all know the story. But they're real. It took place at a real time in a real place. This was a real birth of a real person.

We have the records of it. Men who died for the truth of what they said. We know the story so well. Yet we don't want to trust in the reality of the birth of Jesus.

We don't want to believe that he was a real man. That he was really born in a real place. Yet he was.

[ 4 : 32 ] Jesus is real. My second concern I have about Santa is, does he really bring the presents? Now, I'm a fairly intelligent young child and I would be looking at all the presents under the Christmas tree and I noticed there would be a few from Santa to Paul.

That would be me. But when I looked at this tag and compared it with the other tags that came from mum and dad, I noticed that the writing was awfully similar. Does Santa really bring the presents? In verse 11 we see there, For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. When I was at school, we had a record book in which anything that we did wrong was written into it. It was a week by week system. So if we did something wrong, the teacher would get out the pen and start writing in it. Of course, I got in trouble occasionally, mainly for talking and rocking on my chair.

But anything that you did wrong, that was a bit of a surprise, I imagine, for some of you, that talking would be a problem. But anyhow, it was one of those things, you know, I'd be sitting in the back of the classroom. Are you talking in the back there, Paul? Yes.

[ 5 : 49 ] And out I'd come with my record book and the teacher would write in it the things that we'd done wrong. The problem was, four things wrong in one week meant that you would come back and clean up the school on Saturday morning. Six things wrong and you would be caned.

This was a fairly severe punishment, I thought, but that was the way it would be. A record book, having all the things that we did wrong. Imagine if God had a record book for each one of us. A record book which God would put down the things that we did wrong and the good things that we didn't do. And we lived the lives that we wanted to be, the way that we wanted to live them, rather than the way that God wants us to live them.

And God kept a record of them. At school, occasionally, someone would steal a record book that had a clean sheet in it.

That way you could have a clean record when you came to show your teacher at the end of the week. Look, sir, no points. Because the reality would be a very different record book for that person who stole it.

[ 6 : 55 ] Imagine if someone would come and take the punishment for us. The sins that are in our record book in heaven. Someone with a clean slate who would take the punishment for us and make us pure and spotless.

Jesus came to bring salvation. In verse 14 we see there, He gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own.

Jesus dies on a cross. A real death. A death that should have been ours. Taking the punishment that should have been ours.

So that we might be a part of God's treasured position. This is a great salvation. This is a great present. The grace of God appeared bringing salvation to all.

I used the record book illustration that I just gave you a moment ago at St Andrew's Cathedral School in Sydney. And as one of the parents walked out, she was irate. Why do you talk about Easter at Christmas?

[ 8 : 16 ] Jesus came to die. That is the great message. He is our great saviour. That is why we need not to leave the message of Christmas just at the cradle.

We need to tell people of the great salvation. The great present that Christ brings to us. My third concern that I have about Santa.

He doesn't really offer any solutions to changed behaviour. You know the song, don't you? You better watch out. You better take care. Why?

Because Santa's coming to town. And you know that he's watching you whether you're being naughty or nice. I think that this is just a great scam by parents, this song.

I have three children. I know what it's like this time of the year. School's finished. They're just so excited about Christmas. And you start taking them to a few carols. And they start getting tighter and more wound up.

[ 9 : 16 ] And they start becoming a little bit more ratty. And you're starting to, it's just pandemonium. This is a great song. Hey listen, you want to get your presents? Santa's watching you.

And of course it would bring in my own life a little bit of change for about five minutes. But it would not bring lasting change. The third great thing from this passage is grace appeared bringing us salvation.

But thirdly, grace appears to train us. We see that in verse 12. Training us to renounce impiety and worldly possessions, passions.

And in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright and godly. You see, many think that Christianity is all about do's and don'ts. Don't do this.

Do this. Don't do that. And so many people live their lives trying to live these moral lives. And trying to pull themselves up by their bootlaces.

[10:21] Trying to bring salvation for themselves. Trying to bring about a change in themselves by their own mental willpower, their inner strengths. But lasting change.

Change that will lead to an everlasting life. Is a gracious gift that God gives us. It is God's grace. Not only does God's grace bring us and forgive us and bring us into that relationship. It changes us. It brings about change in our lives. The word here that we have training at the beginning of verse 12.

Is a picture of that of a parent. A parent teaches and trains their children. Guides them. Instructs them. Punishes them for their wrong behaviour. And encouraging them in the good behaviour. All done in the name of love. That their children might benefit from it. This is the picture, this beautiful picture that we have here in this verse.

[11:23] We have a picture of God training us. As a parent might train a child. Bringing us into a relationship with God.

Bringing out those positive characteristics. And trying to punish those of the misbehaviour. It is necessary for bringing up children.

It is necessary for us. In our relationship with God. Well this news of training. This training that God does in our lives.

Is an encouragement but also a very sobering thing. It's a great encouragement because it means that God is the one who takes the initiative in our lives. It's not left up to us to do that. It's not left up to our own strength to try and do it.

Because we can't. It's left up to the God who trains us. The God who is infinitely wise. He is the one who sets our training program in order.

[12:25] But it's also a very sobering fact. You see not all when they get to that final day. When they say Lord, Lord. Not all will actually enter.

Many will make a profession of their faith. Many will sign cards. Many will come up to the altar calls. But not all will go in.

It is those who display evidence of God's training in their lives. God working in their lives. God working in their lives. God working in their lives. This is a very sobering message for us.

We see in this picture. A picture of God's salvation. And God's training. Going hand in hand together. I think at Christmas we often talk about the forgiveness.

That Christ came to bring. But we also need to remember. That he came to train us. To change us. Into the people that we ought to be.

[13:34] While Santa is back in town. As I said. He's bigger and brighter than ever before. I have my concerns about him. But I pray for both myself.

And for us. That we will not be uncertain. To the truth of Jesus. That we will be. That we will know. That Jesus is the grace of God.

Who has appeared. That he brings salvation to all. Training us to renounce impiety. And worldly passions. And in this present age.

Live lives that are self-controlled. Upright and godly. While we wait for the blessed hope. And manifestation of the glory. Of our great God. And saviour Jesus Christ.

He it is who gave himself for us. That he might redeem us. From all iniquity and impurity. For himself. A people of his own. Who are zealous.

[14:31] For good deeds. May that be said of us. On that great and final day. When Christ appears. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Goodness, been. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Earth ■■■■■■■■■■■■. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.