

Jesus is better than Christmas

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2019

Preacher: Geoff Hall

[0 : 00] I think of Christmas as a child and fun time with the Relos. I think of getting a bit older and getting presents that don't break after a few days.

I think of sitting on the couch with no work in sight, watching the Boxing Day test or the Sydney to Hobart. I think of all the happy memories and the excitement of catching up with family and friends. Is that what you think of? Christmas is great, isn't it? In fact, I think that there is not much better than Christmas.

Because Christmas is for everyone, isn't it? And it seems to impact everything. The shopping centre transforms.

Santa brings his warmth and cheer. Holidays are coming. Maybe they'll come for Melbourne eventually as well. I mean summer. Maybe summer will come. And for some beautiful reason, we always have amazing food, which is nearly as fun to talk about as it is to eat.

[1 : 11] Christmas is like everyone's birthday at once, isn't it? But even better. I often marvel at how Christmas is able to do this.

It's like it has some special power. Do you know what I think it is? I think it's what Christmas promises. Just have a think about it for a moment.

Doesn't Christmas promise so much? Happiness, fun, joy, satisfaction. Even a kind of peace and unity among all people.

And in a sense, I think it does bring these things, doesn't it? But what I've been wondering is, does Christmas promise so much because of what we want Christmas to be?

We want Christmas to be like our memories and like our dreams. We want Christmas to be warm and sparkly. We want Christmas to be joyful and happy and satisfying.

[2 : 17] And so we work hard, don't we? We cook lots and we spend money and we plan parties and we decorate churches. And try and make Christmas deliver on its promise.

Its promise of joy and happiness and peace to all. And you know what I think? I don't think this is bad.

I think it's good to make Christmas good for ourselves and for those around us. And God bless you if you work hard to make Christmas joy filled for others.

But sometimes I feel a tension with the Christmas promise. Sometimes I feel like the promise of Christmas in the ads and in the air is loftier than we can manage.

For starters, it seems to me that the promise of Christmas is only for some. No matter how much we do, there will be some who suffer at Christmas.

[3 : 26] But more than this, I think that even for those who receive the promise of Christmas, it's still lacking.

What do I mean? I mean that the promise of joy and peace and happiness of Christmas, it tends to have quite an abrupt ending, doesn't it?

Do you notice that? The fridge overflowing with cold meat is back to normal by New Year's. The back to school ads are coming thick and fast, which as a kid was a burden on my soul.

The decorations come down. Santa disappears for 11 months. He must be well paid. And the warmth of the shopping centre fades, doesn't it?

But on top of all this, the excitement and the expectation of joy and peace and renewal and whatever else Christmas promised, well, it's over.

[4 : 29] And we're back to our normal lives facing another year. Perhaps you've felt this tension before. I wonder how you feel about it.

I'll tell you what I think. To be honest, I'm still going to celebrate Christmas the way I always have. I'm still going to have fun and see friends and family and eat more than I'm comfortable with.

I'm still going to watch the cricket and enjoy summer and be merry. Because Christmas is great. And I truly don't think there is much better. I'm not here tonight to tell you that Christmas is bad or that your tradition is wrong.

What I want to tell you is about a way better Christmas promise. One that is even more lofty and grand than the one that comes around each year.

The Bible story that was read before was about a woman called Mary who lived in Israel. She was about to be married to Joseph, who was a descendant of the great king David.

[5 : 45] But before Mary and Joseph were married, God sent an angel with tinsel in its hair with a promise saying, You will give birth to a king.

But Mary wondered, how would this happen? She couldn't possibly give birth. She was a virgin. But the angel told her that this would be a particularly special king.

He said that the Holy Spirit would overshadow her. Meaning, God's spirit would impregnate her with a son. And that he would be the son of God.

And that he would rule on King David's throne forever. This message from God is very special because God's people were expecting a special king.

Many years before this, God made a promise to King David. King David was a great king. He defeated all of Israel's enemies and he brought an era of peace and stability and wealth that Israel had never known.

[6 : 56] And which was lost not long after him. As a kid, waiting for Christmas is like the hardest thing in the world.

You can see the presents. You can feel the excitement. You might even be able to smell the food. And you keep hearing, just be patient.

It's so hard to wait, isn't it? Israel were waiting for a thousand years. So God's promise to Mary at this first Christmas was grand indeed.

A king like David, who would rule forever. What a great Christmas promise. But it's right to ask the question that I did before, isn't it?

Would this promise deliver? Would God really provide this divine eternal king? And this is the right question.

[8 : 03] We want to know if God will deliver. We want to know if his promise carries any more weight than our annual Christmas promise. And the answer is in the passage that we heard.

The angel told Mary about her relative Elizabeth, who was also pregnant by God's miraculous power. So Mary went to visit Elizabeth.

It was around the Christmas tree and back to here. And did you notice what happened when Mary arrived? I'll read it again. It'll be on the slide. At that time, Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice, she exclaimed, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear.

But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy.

[9 : 15] Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her. As soon as Mary arrives, we see how God has been at work in both of these women.

All Mary did was say hello. And Elizabeth's unborn child leapt. And Elizabeth shouted with the power of God's Spirit.

Why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me? Blessed is she who had believed the Lord would fulfil his promises to her. This supernatural reaction, it shows us two things. Firstly, God delivered on his promise. Elizabeth wasn't responding to a report from Mary. She simply heard Mary's greeting and declared God's praises.

That he had done for Mary what he said he would. And secondly, that the one who believes God's promise is blessed. This makes God's Christmas promise way better than we might have thought.

[10 : 26] This is what makes Jesus better than Christmas. Because God's Christmas promise is not only a divine, eternal king, but it's his blessing to whoever believes it.

And what does the Bible teach us about this blessing? Life that never ends. It's here that we see the comparison between the promise of Christmas and the promise of God at Christmas.

It's here that we see why Jesus is so much better than Christmas. Christmas is great, but it ends.

Jesus' rule never ends. Christmas is fun, but its warmth fades. The life Jesus gives those who believe him lasts forever.

The promise of Christmas is exciting, isn't it? And if that's how you continue to celebrate yours, I'm sure you'll have fun and feel good each year. I know I will.

[11 : 37] But Christmas with the promise of God is better. A perfect divine king who rules forever. A blessing of life from God to all who believe.

This is the Christmas promise that I am holding on to. To a perfect king and a better blessing. His rule will never end.

His life will never fade. And when the fleeting joys of our Christmas and this life are finished, those who believe God's special Christmas promise, King Jesus, will live forever.

How about I give thanks to God? Thank you, God, for the better promise of Christmas.

King Jesus who lives and rules forever. Thank you that you will bless anyone who believes this promise with everlasting life. And we ask that you would give us a fun, happy and joyful Christmas.

[12 : 40] Amen.