

Christmas Fullness

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- [0:00] It's the most wonderful time of the year, with the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you be of good cheer, it's the most wonderful time of the year.
- It's not a happy start.
- It's the most wonderful time of the year, with the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you to be of good cheer, it's the most wonderful time of the year. It's the most wonderful time of the year, with the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you to be of good cheer, it's the most wonderful time of the year.
- It's full of hope, we call it a season of hope, of a better year to come. And it's full of joy because of all those things. And after you've celebrated the whole day, often at the end of the day you kind of sit back, full of food and fun and fellowship and all the rest of it, and you're full of satisfaction of a day well lived.
- A Christmas has this fullness about it, doesn't it? And it's out there in the world too. I mean, Woolies have finally got their shelves full again, just in time for Christmas.
- [1:50] And people are a bit fuller of what they call the Christmas spirit. You know, they have a bit fuller of joy and peace, a bit more full of kindness and patience. Until, of course, tomorrow in the sales.
- And then it's on for young and old, isn't it? And that's the only problem with this Christmas fullness. It just doesn't last, does it? And sometimes it's not as full as it could be because of issues in your life.
- And even when it starts off full, the day itself sometimes is cut short by busyness. People have to leave and go elsewhere. Or it's, I guess, spoiled by fractured relationships or the kids fighting or perhaps failing health or even more so a missing loved one.
- And so this Christmas fullness, it doesn't always last. But what if it could? What if it could? What if our hope of a better year to come was a reality?
- Well, Jesus came so this Christmas fullness could last. You see, our first reading is a standard Christmas reading from Luke chapter 2.
- [3:05] But this year we've been going through the book of John at church leading up to Christmas. And so I thought I'd do something a bit different this year and look at John chapter 10, which was the second reading. Now, you might not think it's a very Christmassy reading with all the talk of sheep and shepherds, but there are a couple of Christmas connections.
- For example, there were shepherds out in the fields nearby. We just sung about that, didn't we, on that very first Christmas. And so it's one connection. Both readings talk about Jesus, the reason for Christmas.
- So there's another connection. And for me personally, Christmas lunch today is not turkey, but lamb. So sheep. So there's another connection for me personally. I think I can smell it in the slow cooker even now.
- So there are some Christmas connections. But more than that, John chapter 10 speaks about how Jesus came into the world that we might have life to the full.

That we might enjoy a kind of Christmas fullness that does last. This is how our passage starts. Point one, verse seven to nine on your sheets, or I'll put it on the screen.

[4:16] So Jesus begins by saying, verse seven, therefore, Jesus said again, very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. And if you sit down to verse nine, he says the same thing again.

He says, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.

You see, as I said, on that very first Christmas, there were shepherds out in the fields at night. And in those fields, there were often these stone enclosures, often with thorns on top of the stone to stop foxes jumping over the top, where the shepherd could gather his sheep.

And the shepherd himself would sit in that gap of that stone enclosure and become, as it were, the gate. And so at night, the sheep would pass through this shepherd gate to come into the enclosure and find protection from wild animals to enjoy a good night's sleep.

Then in the morning, they'd pass through this shepherd gate, as it were, out to the pastures to enjoy a good day's food. I mean, what a life, eating and sleeping.

[5:35] Sounds like our dog, actually. But here's a picture of a shepherd acting as a gate to save his sheep by giving them both protection at night and pasture by day, that they might enjoy life to the full for a sheep.

Well, Jesus is saying here that he is this shepherd gate for us. Through him, we too can be saved and given protection and pasture that we might enjoy life to the full too.

So verse 10, he goes on to say that. He says, You see, Christmas is not just a time to enjoy fullness, but also to remember Jesus who came to save us and give us both protection and pasture, as it were, that we might enjoy life to the full.

How does he do this? Well, by being our good shepherd, point to verse 11. He says, I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

You see, we've just sung in Hark the Herald Angels Sing, glory to the newborn king. Thank you, all two of you. Excellent. Glory to the newborn. Excellent.

[7:01] Okay, we've got about five more. Excellent. But when we think about it, we haven't actually always followed Jesus as our king. Have we? Nor have we always lived God's loving way.

Rather, like sheep, we have sometimes gone astray. Preferred to live our own way. As Frank Sinatra famously sang, I did it my way.

Yeah. But the Bible actually caused this sin when we ignore God and do things our way. It might not sound so bad to us, but it leads to problems.

I mean, imagine that, you know, I am king and Ricky's king and Ian's king. And, in fact, the whole congregation here and in the cry room, they're there. You're all the boss.

What happens when you want the same thing? What happens when you want the same sale item tomorrow in the sales and you both reach for it at the same time? What happens if you want the remote to change Netflix to watch your channel or your program?

[8:03] Or, more seriously, what happens if you both want the same bit of country called Gaza or Ukraine or Syria? It just doesn't work, does it?

It leads to fighting and suffering. Sin actually causes problems between people. But also between us and God. Because to ignore God and live my way is really to mistreat God.

It's really to say that you're not God, actually. I'm God. Which is incredibly offensive, more than we realize. And it means we have a broken relationship.

It means that we will have to suffer consequences, just like in life. I mean, imagine you're looking after some kids, whether you're babysitting for someone, whether they're your own kids or grandkids, nieces or nephews.

And then they start bossing you around as though they're the boss. It doesn't end well for them, does it? They get in trouble. And it doesn't end well for us either with God.

[9:04] God is just and so he must one day hold us accountable for the times we've either mistreated others or mistreated Jesus as the king or mistreated him as God. But, of course, God loves us and doesn't want that for us.

And so he sent Jesus into the world as the good shepherd to lay down his life for us at the cross. And at the cross, he took our judgment in our place to protect us from it, give us protection.

On Monday last week, I'm sure many of you heard about that school shooting in Wisconsin in the US. And it reminded me of another one that I may have mentioned to you before. It was just two days before Monday's shooting, which was the 12th anniversary when a teacher, Victoria Soto, gave her life to save her students at the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.

One of the headlines at the time was heroic teacher who gave her life to save terrified children. You see, she laid down her life to protect her students by taking the bullets for them.

Well, Jesus laid down his life to protect us, not from bullets, but from our sin's judgment, by taking the judgment for us. The big difference, of course, is those kids do not deserve the bullets, neither do the teacher.

[10:27] But we deserve our sin's judgment. Jesus didn't. But he still laid down his life for us. So that we might be saved.

And given, firstly, protection, not from wild animals, like we saw with the sheep, but from that sin's judgment. And then secondly, given pasture, not in terms of grassy fields, but in terms of life to the full.

In other words, life eternal. You can't get much fuller life than eternal life, can you? And not just full of years, but full of good things, full of Christmas things, if you like.

The things we enjoy in life. A Christmas fullness that does last forever. There will be a strain that might not make Christmas all it could be.

There will be no more fighting, no more fractured relationships, no more failing health, no more missing loved ones in Christ. There will just be perfect bodies with perfect people in a perfect world, enjoying every good thing with each other and with God.

[11:36] And it won't be boring. Some people have said that to me before. They said, I don't really want eternal life. I'll just get bored. But you won't get bored.

There will be heaps to enjoy. And we'll still have work to do. But it will be so enjoyable and meaningful that it will feel like we're always on holidays. It will be like Christmas fullness that lasts forever.

Christmas is often about the kids in particular, isn't it? So I was thinking, how can I explain this from a kid's perspective, the life to the full? And so I think it's like a kid having a party with all his friends and family and everyone at the party getting one of these.

It's all traversing on each other, Chups. Oh, sorry. I can see a kid straight into the floor. There you go. There you go. I've used that before and I had a kid down the front and you should have seen his eyes.

Life to the full. With all his friends, with God, with our brother Jesus, enjoying everything, good thing in life. It will be unimaginable bliss. This is what Jesus came to give us.

[12:53] Now you might think, oh, that's all well and good. You know, eternal life in the world to come where there will be no more bad stuff, only good stuff. But what about now in this world? Well, this life eternal actually begins the moment we believe in Jesus.

And so it actually begins in this world. And we can start to enjoy some of those things, some of those Christmas fullness that Jesus brings.

Yes, sure. We have to wait for some parts of that Christmas fullness. We will have to wait for no more financial pressure, no more fighting in the world, no more failing health. But we can enjoy other parts of it now.

Things like enjoying extended family. And not just biological family, but spiritual family, church family, God's family. We can enjoy giving and receiving.

Not so much presents on one day, but giving and receiving help each day. We can enjoy the peace of knowing God loves us and has forgiven us and is with us to help us in life.

[13:57] And the satisfaction of a life well lived. And not just on Christmas Day, but each day. For as we help others, it brings us satisfaction, doesn't it?

That we enjoy things when we help someone out. It actually makes us feel good, doesn't it? Or as we follow God's wisdom, it brings us satisfaction. Or as we do God's work, it brings us satisfaction.

Because every contribution we make for God has eternal significance. If you want a legacy that lasts, do things for God.

It will last an eternity. Which will mean a life well lived. And that will bring us satisfaction too. The point is we can begin to enjoy life to the full now.

And not just on Christmas Day, but every day. With a certain hope that no matter what next year brings, our eternal future is secure. We have a fuller life to come.

[14:59] And that brings us joy every day. My wife caught up with one of her friends last week. And sadly, her husband has terminal cancer. Their son just finished VCE and said, Dad, I'm so glad you made it to my graduation.

Can you imagine having to say that? That's how precarious his life is. It's hard for them. And yet they still know joy now. Not just on Christmas Day, but each day. Because they're surrounded by their church family.

Who supports them. They know God's peace and presence. And help for them. They find satisfaction in giving to others. And they have a hope of no more cancer to come.

In the next world. All of which gives them joy each day now. In this world. You see, Christmas is not only a time to enjoy fullness. But also to remember Jesus.

Who came to give us life to the full. A life of Christmas fullness, so to speak. That we can enjoy in part in this world now.

[16:03] And will enjoy fully in the world to come later. If though we believe in Jesus. And so do you. Do you believe in Jesus?

I mean, he alone is the shepherd gate. Through whom we receive that protection from sin's judgment. That pasture of life to the full. For he alone is the good shepherd. Who laid down his life for us.

So do you believe in him? And for us who do. Then two things. Enjoy now the life he brings. By making the most of that Christmas fullness he's already given us.

I mean, it's hard to enjoy the extended family he gives us. If we never meet together as family at church and the like.

It's hard to enjoy the giving and receiving that we can. If we never give and receive help to each other. It's hard to enjoy the peace of God with us.

[17:02] If we never look to God to help us. It's hard to enjoy the satisfaction of a life well lived. If we never do work that will last. And it's hard to have joy each day.

If we forget our future hope. And so first of all, enjoy now. The life he brings us. By making the most. Of those parts of the Christmas fullness.

He's already given us. And secondly, rejoice now that there's even more to come. Even if your Christmas day is not all it could be today.

Even if it's spoiled by the proverbial burnt turkey. That's why I'm having lamb, you see. Don't have to worry about burnt turkey. Even if it's spoiled by whatever it is. We can still rejoice because we know we have more to come.

And that will last forever. Jesus said, I have come that they may have life. And have it to the full. Let's pray. Dear God, we thank you that Christmas is not only a time to enjoy fullness.

[18:10] But also to remember Jesus. Who came to give us life to the full. Life eternal. That we can begin to enjoy in part now.

And fully later. And so help us, we pray, that as we sit back and are full from food today. And presents and company and the like.

Help us to believe. To enjoy the things he's already given us. And to rejoice in Jesus. We ask it in his name. Amen.

Amen.