

JESUS James Shepherd

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] It's fantastic to be here this morning. Let me add my welcome to Steve's. It is so glad that you are here. This is a big day for us as a church. We've got the extravaganza afterwards. It's very exciting to hear that we have over 200 people going to be on this site throughout 4.30 to 7.30, hopefully to hear the gospel spoken to their life, maybe for the first time.

Isn't that wonderful and fantastic? We're going to pray now before we hear God's word, so please join me in prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the news that this afternoon that you're going to have all these people here on site to hear your word, maybe for the first time. And Lord, that's so exciting that your word is so powerful and it can change lives forever. And so Lord, as we sit here this morning, let us be excited that we get to hear from your word, a word that might be quite familiar to us, but nonetheless, that is just as exciting, just as powerful because it's you who speaks to us.

It's a word that whilst what might have been written thousands of years ago, it is still speaking to us today. It is living and active. And we pray, Lord, as we hear you this morning, would you change our hearts and our minds to love and to serve you, to be excited about Christmas and what it truly is all about.

We pray these things in your son's precious name. Amen. Amen. It's less than a week till Christmas. Are you all excited? Yes.

[1 : 26] Ah, yes. The kids are excited. Christmas is generally an exciting time. I don't know about you, but I've always felt pretty excited around Christmas and I've always felt an anticipation about the day that comes.

Everyone is in a very good mood. People are throwing Christmas parties all over the place. Everyone's winding down for the year. People are just more relaxed and happy. Carols are playing in shopping centres, if you like carols.

People are cheerful and joyful. It is the season, right? There's so much expectation at Christmas time. Everyone looks forward to this one day.

But why? What exactly is it about this day that everyone looks forward to? Is it because work shuts down for a whole week or so and everyone gets a holiday? Is it because we have an excuse to eat as much as we possibly can without any kind of regret or self or shame?

Is it because of all the carol events we can go to? The main, last night. Is it because of actually not Christmas Day, but the Boxing Day test the next day? And we're all looking forward to watching that.

[2 : 32] Is it because of all the presents we're hoping to receive on the day? I imagine your kids, and if our kids are still here, that is probably what's most exciting about Christmas Day.

I'm still hoping one Christmas that Stance will bring me my new surfboard that I've been asking for for quite some time now. I've sent into the dimensions to him in the North Pole, but I'm still waiting on a reply.

There's so much to look forward to at Christmas time. But does the hype and the expectation last? No. As soon as Christmas rolls through, we're no longer excited about it, no longer thinking about it or talking about it or singing carols anymore.

I know for myself that after the hype dies down, I feel a bit drained and a bit empty, totally drained by the expectation I put on the day itself. So much energy and time, preparation goes into this one day, and it comes and goes like that.

The thing is, we know that. We're actually quite aware of that. We are not unaware of the hype and how it fizzles out very quickly once it's all over.

[3 : 47] So how do we in the Western world deal with this issue when the hype is all over? We make another event to look forward to. Boxing Day sales. A day where those of us who are a little let down by our Christmas presents can have a second chance at redeeming the excitement we lost or didn't get on Christmas Day with a good gift for ourselves.

But again, Boxing Day hype doesn't last very long. It only lasts one day. And so how do we try and keep the hype going and the excitement coming? Another event.

New Year's Eve. A night out on the town where we celebrate and try to forget, either try to forget the year that happened or we celebrate the year that happened and we look forward to the year that is to come.

But again, New Year's Eve comes and goes and the excitement dies down as many people wake up the next day maybe not remembering the excitement of the night but certainly its consequences. And so once the excitement passes away and the new year rolls in, how do we continue to make life exciting? How do we continue the hype to keep going? Another event.

[4 : 55] Australia Day eventually comes along. Do you see where I'm going here? Our world is aware enough to realise that hype doesn't last.

They know that the excitement generated at Christmas time by presents and food and holidays and family hangouts dies down eventually. And so we deal with that by constantly having events after events after events to look forward to, to fill out our lives with stuff to do, to keep us happy and distracted, to keep the hype going, to keep our lives exciting.

We keep looking forward to the next thing, the next adventure, the next purchase, the next holiday. But is that enough? As we get older, there is less and less we can do until eventually one day we pass from this world and we can no longer do anything.

As a 25-year-old, the world tells me that the solution to this problem is to not waste your life now, to live life full, full of venture and excitement, to give it my best shot and hopefully it will be fulfilling enough.

As I reflect back on my 20s and 30s, I'll be able to say in my late 70s and 80s, I lived a good life and I'm satisfied and content. But therein lies the issue and the irony.

[6 : 17] It's not going to be fulfilling enough because as the world is aware, hype and excitement about anything doesn't last. I can live the most exciting, fulfilling life in my 20s and 30s, but the moment that it begins to slow down, I'll be longing for more.

The past excitement won't be there to comfort me and keep me content and fulfilled. No, what will happen is that I will end up in a vicious, depressing cycle of trying to seek fulfillment in my 20s and when I'm let down by that outcome, I'll be left unfulfilled, unsatisfied.

Our world, particularly in the West, is trapped in this unending cycle of trying to seek fulfillment, of pursuing the exciting life, yet our expectation is never satisfied.

Our anticipation or what we hope for is never fully realized. It's not that we don't do enough or don't have enough or the opportunity to enjoy life.

It's just that the hype and excitement of material things, of experiences, don't last. We are always left longing, longing for more.

[7 : 40] So what's the answer then? Do we resign ourselves to nihilism? Do we try and disconnect from the world not to get too attached to anything, otherwise we're disappointed in the end?

No. Whilst the direction our modern world wants us to head in is destructive, a destructive cycle, it does get one small thing right.

Christmas is exciting. Very exciting. However, the excitement the world focuses on is shallow and cheap compared to the real reason why Christmas is exciting.

Christmas is not exciting because of food and presents and holidays and family, although they're great things. Christmas is exciting because the creator of the universe, the all-powerful God, holy and magnificent, gives us something that is more valuable than all else.

He gives us something that will last, something that is eternal. Not something that loses excitement, not something that will rust or fade away, but something that will continue to fill our hearts with joy and keep us excited to love and follow him.

[8 : 54] The world was on the right track, but this morning as we continue in Matthew's gospel looking at the story of Christmas, we're going to see why Christmas is actually truly exciting.

As Sam spoke about last week, Matthew starts with a genealogy in order to testify to who Jesus is, that he is a real person who comes from a line of people going back to Abraham.

There are many people in the family tree that you might not expect to be in there if you wanted to impress or show your significance in the world. But Matthew does include these people because he wants to show that our God works differently to the way we might expect, that God uses broken people, people with rough edges, people with skeletons in their closets in order to achieve his perfect and glorious plan.

This big generational picture view that proves Jesus' historicity is there because he did not appear out of nowhere.

That's what Matthew wants to intend to do and now Matthew will go on looking, going from that big picture to a narrow scope. Still trying to do the same thing though. He says in verse 18, this is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, came about.

[10:15] So whilst the scope has been narrowed down from this big generational view to now looking at the account of Jesus, Matthew wants to show that the Christmas story is historical.

That everything that we read here is true. It happened. It happened for a reason and every detail is important. Sam mentioned last week a woman who commented on an online article saying that the Christmas story didn't really happen.

It's just a story to show how much God loves us. But that does not do justice to Matthew's strong opening here.

This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, came about. Came about. Matthew intends to talk about the historicity, the story, the historical account of Jesus' birth.

He did not just waste time going through every single or most names in his generational line to then talk about an allegory of God's love.

[11:16] An abstract, undefined, substance-less allegory of God's love. No, he has that lineage there because he wants to show us that the birth of Jesus is real.

And when we look at the historical account of Jesus' birth, we see there God's love, truly. So let's look at the first bit of it. Verse 18.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph. But before they came together, she was found to be a child through the Holy Spirit because Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to a public disgrace. He had a mind to divorce her quietly. But after that, he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. This story can't simply be about God's love in a general, abstract, undefined sense.

[12:29] No, this story whilst is characterized by the love of God is one about redemption. Is it about salvation? The length required for God to save his people.

Indeed, it's the historical nature of this account that gives substance and definition to God's love for us. The account of Jesus' birth teaches us something about humanity.

Matthew records the angel saying Jesus was sent here to save us from our sins. We learn that we are a lost and broken people. We need to be saved from our sins but the only way for our sin to be dealt with was by sacrificial death.

Someone had to die in our place in order to stop the eternally devastating effects of sin. the expectation would be that this baby wouldn't just remain as a baby.

He would grow up to become a man who would eventually take our place and face the punishment of sin by dying for us.

[13:39] So much more is going on here than a simple allegory of God's love. In fact, the allegory means nothing and has nothing to stand on without its historical accounts.

God's love for us is the reason he must send his son to die in order that our sins will be paid for. He cannot love us without dealing with the issue of sin first.

But this death would be like no other. In order for Jesus to be a sufficient sacrifice for the whole world, he had to be more than just a man.

He had to be God. The historical account puts it like this, that he was born of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise saying that he, unlike any other man who was born, this man was born as a divine person.

Jesus is the God-man. Fully God and fully man. And it's this mystery and the glory of the incarnation, God taking on flesh, that really shows us how desperate we are and how much God

loves us.

[14:52] That he would take on the likeness of sinful flesh, make himself nothing, humble himself, and be obedient to death. What we begin to see by looking at the historical account of Jesus is more than just an allegory of God's love.

Indeed, turning the historical account into an allegory of God's love only serves to weaken and cheapen the love of God, which is clearly seen in the account itself.

Let me clarify, though, the Christmas story is a story of God's love, but it's not a story told to make sense of a love, of God's love, that is otherwise abstract, abstract, or in general, or can't be defined. No, God's love is not abstract. It is not undefined. It expresses itself in history through the birth of our Lord Jesus and in his death.

God's love is not explained and defined by the use of allegories or made-up stories. No, God's love is what is driving the narrative here. The narrative of Jesus' birth doesn't give us an idea of God's love.

[16:07] it itself occurs because God loves us. That's why it has to be historical. He sent his son to be born of a virgin and to die on a cross in order that we might have life.

This happened in history because God loves us and his love moves him to intervene and act in history. At Christmas time we are reminded of this saviour who came and died and rose again in order we might live.

At Christmas time we are reminded of the gift of salvation that Jesus has saved us from our sins that this happened in history because God loved us so much.

the question is however what are we saved for? What's the point of God saving us from our sins? What do we do now?

Is it just to simply avoid judgment? Or is there something else going on here? There is something more going on here. You see salvation is not the end goal of the Christmas story.

[17:18] And dare I say it salvation is not even the greatest gift that we have at Christmas time. The greatest gift at Christmas comes through salvation.

And that gift is that we get God. We get God. Look at verse 22. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel which means God with us. the great and wonderful gift at Christmas time is that the God of heaven the creator of all things comes down from heaven to earth with his mission and intention to dwell and to be with his people.

That God would be with us and that we would get to enjoy his presence and to be with him. Is that not incredible? There is no other religion in the entire world in history where God comes down and spends time with his people except ours.

The holy and most powerful and so and so other to us would come and dwell amongst sinners. The God whose love for us is unconditional.

[18:40] The God who pours out his love and mercy on us each day. The God who sustains us in this life and keeps us focused on him. He has come down in the form of a baby.

And that's what we get for Christmas himself. And this has always been the plan that God would dwell with his people since the very beginning where Adam and Eve enjoyed God's presence in the garden where he walked with them.

As such that presence was soon corrupted by sin and sin created a gulf between us and God. But then the whole Bible after that is a story that anticipates this Christmas story here in Matthew 1.

To the day Emmanuel would come into the world to save us from our sins in order that we might get to enjoy the presence of God. That we would get God the most valuable and precious gift that we can have.

He will never fade away. He will never leave us. He will never fail us. He is God and we get him.

This means that we get to enjoy the confidence that throughout our life God is always with us.

[20:01] In the good times and in the bad he is always with us sustaining us in his love and mercy and showing us the way forward by his word. He dwells with us right now by his spirit who has been sealed within us who believe and so therefore we know he can never forsake us.

Again, this is a historical reality as Matthew quotes from Isaiah the prophet. What was foretold has now come to pass. God has entered into history coming down from his royal throne to the dirt to the lowly to us who are unworthy of him and that he took himself lower by dying on a cross for us.

God with us Emmanuel is the end goal of our Christian life that we would glorify him and enjoy him forever.

To summarize, God is the gospel. Jesus' death and resurrection is the means of which we can connect to God and be in relationship with him.

Certainly we are amazed and we praise God for his works and acts in this world which include his death and his resurrection. But we don't worship the death and resurrection itself.

[21 : 29] We worship God and who he is and he has given himself to us. Matthew started his book with this great gift, telling us about Emmanuel, that he has come and he is with us.

And he also ends his book reminding us of the reality of this first Christmas that began to institute this presence when Jesus said to his disciples, Matthew 28, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.

God's presence with his people is here to stay. And this began the first Christmas and in this Christmas that is what we continue to celebrate, to remember, to be thankful for, that God did not choose to leave us on our own, but he came to be with us first as a man.

then by his spirit, and then once again, face to face. The question I want to leave you all with is how do you see Christmas?

What is it to you? Is it about presents, hanging out with family, holidays? If that's the case, is that really enough? is it possible that you've been brought into this cycle of excitement where you have to constantly be going to the next thing, to the next event, to be finding joy and exciting things, trying to sustain your joy and excitement by looking forward to each event?

[23 : 11] Such will only leave you disappointed, unsatisfied, in the end. And such a view of Christmas is profoundly shallow compared to what it really is all about.

Indeed, what we celebrate at Christmas time, what we celebrate at Christmas time is the end of this depressing cycle the world would have us existing.

At Christmas time, we don't constantly look forward to the next thing to give us any kind of hope.

We look back. to the hope that came into the world, Emmanuel, in the Son of Jesus.

And as we look back then, we look forward to the future when we'll get to dwell with God in perfect harmony forever and ever. At Christmas time, we are reminded of Emmanuel.

And that great joy it is to know that we have a Saviour who has dealt with our sin so that we can enjoy God with us right now. At Christmas time, we are reminded that the greatest gift we've ever received is God himself.

[24 : 20] And so in a world full of chaos and disruption, we get to enjoy peace with him in the midst of that chaos. In a world full of pain and suffering, we get to enjoy the comfort and security that God is sovereign and he is not far away, he hasn't abandoned us, but he is with us in the midst of that.

In a world full of hopelessness and fear, we get to enjoy hope, excitement and anticipation about our future that cannot be affected or changed by anything in this world.

Our hope is based upon the fact that Emmanuel is with us. In a world that is constantly running in this cycle of hype and pursuit of excitement and happiness, we get to enjoy great contentment, excitement, excitement and a joy that will never run dry because God is with us.

We get to enjoy all these things because of Emmanuel, God with us. That is the greatest gift of Christmas and that is what Christmas is all about.

Amen.