

# Christmas Day 2013

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. My name's Steve from the ministry team here at St. Paul's. And I just want to add my welcome to Christmas here on this Christmas Day 2013. Who's excited?

Maybe you were unprepared. Who's excited? Who's got presents that they were really hoping for today? There's not a lot of hands going up.

Okay, so who got ties and socks and one of those dodgy sweaters and stuff like that? Any few of those floating around as well? No, not really? Who hasn't even opened a present yet? Oh, wow, there's a few of them.

So you're pretty much happy for this to be a really short service, as Chris said. Okay, well, I'm unfortunately going to go on a little bit longer. Who would love to celebrate Christmas every day? As kids, I see. A few kids' hands up. I mean, seriously, anyone here really want to celebrate? Who's glad it comes once a year?

[ 1 : 07 ] There's a whole lot of people just unsure about even... Am I even in the right building? I was on my way to someone's lunch. For me, I'm pretty glad it comes once a year.

And it's not just because I've got to do this sort of thing on a Christmas day. It's a delight to be able to do this. But, you know, after three services and less than five hours sleep, you kind of get a little bit weary.

Kids waking you up all excited first thing in the morning. Merry Christmas! And it's like, oh, really? It's that hour? Presents aren't even under the...

Go back to bed. You know, it's tomorrow. Celebrating Christmas every day would be hard work. And yet Andy Park, he's an electrician who lives in England, does just that.

His other name is Mr. Christmas. He claims to have celebrated Christmas every day since July 1993. That's, you know, 20 years of celebrating Christmas every day.

[ 2 : 14 ] In 2001, it was estimated that since he started celebrating every day, he had gotten through 30 artificial Christmas trees, 10 kilometers of tinsel, and 10,000 balloons at an estimated cost of 100,000 pounds.

That's commitment. Each day, he claims that he eats a turkey sandwich and mince pies for breakfast.

He then goes off to work until he returns home for lunch to eat a full roast turkey dinner before watching a recording of the Queen's speech with a glass of sherry in his hand.

In an interview which was published in 2006, Mr. Park was quoted as saying that in the previous 13 years, he had consumed 4,380 turkeys, 87,600 mince pies, 1,200 liters of gravy, 26,280 roast potatoes, 30,660 stuffing balls, 219,000, give or take a little here or there, of peas, 4,300 bottles of champagne, 4,300 bottles of sherry, and 5,000 bottles of wine.

He's on the record as recently as Christmas Day last year, saying that he still celebrates Christmas every day. And so I'm working on the assumption that he's a few mince pies short of a Christmas lunch.

[ 4 : 00 ] Mind you, there is a possible other explanation. There have been suggestions in the media that much of the information that he has shared is in fact false.

It's a publicity stunt to gain some sort of fame, which he's been obviously working on for 20 years. Especially, they reckon, it's a publicity stunt because in 2005, he released a Christmas single entitled, It's Christmas Every Day.

Reviewers said it was as bad as one of those really bad Christmas sweaters. Local media have in fact given up sending photographers around his house day by day, unannounced, hoping to catch him in the middle of his celebration.

He won't even let them in the door. So maybe it is all a hoax. Now, although celebrating Christmas every day, with turkeys and mince pies and tinsels and queen speeches and sherry, and strikes me as slightly odd, or probably even a bit more than slightly odd, he actually has got a point, although I think he's missed the point entirely.

Christmas is worth celebrating daily, and I don't mean all the trappings of Christmas, I don't mean all the tinsels and the presents and all that sort of stuff. I mean the meaning of Christmas is something that ought to be celebrated every day.

[ 5 : 23 ] The impact of Christmas, as we have even sung about this morning, is something that is more than just a once a year event to get excited about. I say that because of verse 15 of that Bible passage that Wendy read out to us, and hopefully we'll get it up on the screen real soon.

It says this, Here is a trustworthy saying, and worthy of full acceptance, Christ Jesus came into the world. That's the Christmas event there.

Christ Jesus came into the world, and the coming of the eternal Son into the world, Jesus Christ, is a fact of history. And that's what we're here to gather to remember today.

It's a fact of history. Jesus came into the world. We're celebrating it now. We're remembering it. But the coming of the Son of God into the world is so much more than a fact of history, which is why it should not just be sort of pushed to one side and pulled out once a year.

The historical event we're remembering is a message of hope. And when you keep reading the rest of verse 15, you see it. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

[ 6 : 30 ] The message of Christmas for you from Jesus Christ this Christmas is hope. It's a message that says that whatever is failed, undesirable, wrong, sinful in your life can be changed.

And what is precious, most precious, doesn't ever need to be lost. It's a message of hope sent by the God of this universe to confuse children into cynical teenagers, into single parents, into cranky husbands, and tired mums, and weird neighbours, and aged, and the lonely, and preachers, and lovers, and haters, and you, and me, and all of Chatswood, and the world.

Since the Son of God lived and died and rose and reigns and is coming again, God's message through him is more than just mere historical fact.

It is day by day impact. It's about lives and destinies being changed by a historical event that happened 2,000 years ago. And so what we are talking about here today is so much more than remembering history and a retelling of cute stories about babies and mangers.

Now while there might be some question over the authenticity of Andy Park's daily celebration of Christmas, there is no mistake about the impact of Jesus coming into the world in the life of the Apostle Paul.

[ 8 : 11 ] Paul was one of the leaders of the Christian church in the first century, and his testimony of what Jesus did in his life is what was just read out to us. And it's up there on the screen. I'm going to kick us off in verse 12.

It says, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. And so Paul describes himself here as a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man before he met Jesus.

This guy used to go around and hunt down Christians in an attempt to devastate the church. His biographer, a guy named Luke, described him as a religious predator who breathed out murderous threats against Christians.

He was callous. He was pious. He was self-righteous. He was bigoted. He was a murderer. And he was hell-bent on full-scale extermination of the Christian church.

[ 9 : 23 ] He was one of the main enemies of Jesus and the early church in the first century. He lived day by day with God to his back.

And yet that, in fact, was a surprise to him. He says he acted in ignorance and unbelief. He was totally oblivious to that fact that God was to his back in his day-by-day existence.

The weird thing is that he was actually under the assumption that he and God were okay. He had a religious pedigree and a piety that set him apart from most people.

He was zealous to do what was right and to obey God's law. When he persecuted Jesus and the people who followed Jesus, he thought he was actually doing God a favor. He was ignorant of the

fact that when he stood opposed to Jesus, he stood opposed to the God of the universe. And all his religious zeal actually made him an enemy of God. And then something happened. Halfway down there through verse 15, it says, I was shown mercy.

[10:43] And then in verse 14, it says, The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly. Another part of the New Testament talks about it. Paul was on his way to Damascus.

He got some orders from the hierarchy to say, Go down to Damascus and devastate the church down there. So he's got his cronies with him heading on down to Damascus. And God met him on the way. God met him in his sinful, miserable, self-righteous ignorance. And God mercied him.

Paul calls the great power that brought change in his life, The mercy and the grace of our Lord. Undeserved favor. God did not give Paul what he deserved or what was coming to him. He was shown mercy instead. That is Paul's first-hand account of the message of Christmas and the impact of Christmas, of Jesus coming into this world to save sinners.

[11:47] And so why does he tell us his first-hand account of the radical change that Jesus brought in his life? The answer to that question is given clearly to us in verse 16, which says, For that very reason I was shown mercy, so that in me the worst of sinners Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

What Paul's saying there is, Jesus changed me, the chief of sinners, and I'm telling you about it, so that today, this Christmas day, in Chatswood 2013, that you and I would be able to grasp the significance of Christmas.

Jesus Christ picked the chief of sinners to demonstrate to us today, sitting in this building, what his mercy and power can do in your life.

There is no sinner that the grace of God in Christ cannot overflow to and deal with. And so we ought not belittle the mercy of God just by saying, Well, I just can't change.

This is just the way I am. What happened to Paul can happen to anyone. Notice it there in verse 15 again.

[13:13] Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Paul's personal reason to give thanks to God is now widened to praise for the universal significance of Christmas.

Jesus came into the world for the world. For everyone. The purpose of Jesus coming into this world to save sinners has been welcomed by 2,000 years of human beings who, conscious of their guilt before God, have gratefully accepted what the saving death of the Lord Jesus accomplished for them in bringing them back to their creator God.

The message in these verses for us now is that if God can show mercy, who in his ignorance put Christians to prison and cast his vote against them so they'd be put to death, a master of religious thuggery, he can forgive anyone.

And so Paul calls to us across the centuries as we celebrate Christmas in 2013 and he says, don't despair you people sitting here at St. Paul's Jatswood.

He saved me, the worst of sinners, and he can save you. There is hope in Jesus. Did you notice how massive this hope is?

[14:49] The hope of Christmas is that because Jesus came into the world to save sinners, what is most precious doesn't ever have to be lost. Do you see there in verse 16 right at the end? I will show mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

That is the hope of Christmas because life is good. Life is good and it is precious and you don't want to ever lose it.

We can talk all we like about the good things in life, but if you don't have life, you don't have the good things. How precious is our life and if you don't feel it right now, wait till you are really sick. There are today those who, because of age or because of sickness, will inevitably be thinking or asking themselves the question, is this my last Christmas?

And the message of Christmas to you from verse 16 is that you don't ever have to lose your life. It is good to live.

[16:04] Your life is precious and Jesus came to save it. Jesus came into this world to save us and to change us forever.

The hope of Christmas is that Jesus came into this world to change our eternal status and so that's one of the biggest motives to allow him to change us right now.

And that is why I think Christmas should be celebrated every day. Not with the turkeys and mince pies, but truly celebrated each day as we look in gratitude to Jesus.

What God did on the first Christmas and what he did in forgiving and changing Paul's life and what he does in forgiving and changing people today is utterly free mercy.

It is a gift from God that impacts everything in your life. And so it's not surprising that at this point in the text, in recalling God's mercy and his grace to him, that Paul just breaks out in thanksgiving and worship in verse 17.

[17:15] When he considers what God has done for him in saving him through Jesus and giving him an eternal life, he can only speak of God in the most stupendous of terms.

He could find no other words to express his thanksgiving to God and his gratitude except to say, now to the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. That is God's gift to the world. It is his gift to you this morning, this Christmas, and it is worthy of full acceptance.

acceptance. Accept it as we sang earlier and live forevermore because of Christmas Day.

Fall on your knees and worship the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever.

[18:22] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.