

Rejecting Jesus

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[0:00] Christmas is the only Christmas holy day that is also a major secular holiday.

! In fact, Christmas is the largest holiday in the entire world.! More people gather and celebrate Christmas than anything else.! Of course, what happens then is you end up, the result of all of that, particularly in Western civilization, is two different celebrations.

And it can bring a certain level of discomfort on both sides of the fence. For instance, many Christians can't help but notice that more and more of the public festivities surrounding Christmas avoids any reference to its Christian origins.

Things like Merry Christmas has been replaced with Happy Holidays. And the holiday, the Christmas time is promoted. I heard it on the radio multiple times in this past week.

It's a time promoted as for family, for giving and for peace in the world. On the other hand, non-religious people can't help but find the old meaning of Christmas keeps intruding, uninvited into their world.

[1:18] It can be irritating to answer a child's question. What does it mean when it's said, born to give them second birth? What does that mean? And as a Christian, I've got to say, I've shifted my thinking on this over time.

I actually now, in a position where I think it's great sharing Christmas with the entirety of society. Well, the most of society. The secular Christmas is a festivity of lights.

It's a time of family gathering. It's a time, it's a season to be generous, to give. And particularly around those who are not just closest to us but also those in need in our society.

And those are practices, in my view, which are ultimately good and enriching for society, for everyone. And they are genuinely consistent with the Christian origins of the celebration of Christmas.

The emphasis on light in darkness comes from the Christian belief that the world's hope comes from outside of it, into it. And so remember that as you pass through houses lit up and Christmas trees and so on.

[2:31] The giving of gifts is a natural response to Jesus' stupendous act of self-giving. And when he laid aside his glory and was born into the human race.

Concerned for the needy recalls that the Son of God was born not into, you know, aristocratic, powerful family, but into a poor family. The Lord of the universe, identified with the least and the most excluded of the human race.

All of those are very powerful things. But every one of them, if you like, is a double-edged sword. Jesus comes as the light because we are so spiritually blinded and our souls are plunged into such deep darkness that we cannot find our own way.

Jesus became mortal and died because we are too morally ruined to be pardoned in any way. We cannot help ourselves.

Jesus gave himself to us so that we might give ourselves wholly to him. Christmas, like God himself, is both more wondrous and also more threatening than we'd ever imagined at all.

[3:56] To understand Christmas is in fact to understand the very basics of Christianity, which is why I am delighted when I hear Christmas carols come in the supermarket as people about worshipping other things.

Every year, our increasingly secular Western society becomes more and more unaware of its historical roots, many of which are grounded in the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

Our society wants Christmas without the Christ at the centre of it. That's not new. That's not new at all. Jesus was being pushed away and rejected from the very beginning, from the moment of his birth, as we saw last week.

Luke chapter 2, familiar manger scene. She wrapped him in clothes and placed him in a manger because there was no guest room available for him. At the very beginning, Jesus is shut out and pushed out into the shed, away from all of the action.

And when Jesus' parents brought him to the temple on the eighth day, there was this old man present, Simeon, he'd been waiting for the long promised Jewish saviour and ruler, and he said something that was quite troubling when he saw Jesus.

[5:31] This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel Now, unlike the manger scene, it's pretty rare to have those verses read out at Christmas services around the world.

They seem rather depressing, even though they get, in fact, to the very heart of the meaning of Christmas.

The words of Simeon tells us that Jesus Christ came to be rejected, and he had already experienced it by eight days since his birth.

He came to reveal people's hearts and ultimately to have them speak against him. They're the words of Simeon.

Jesus didn't come seeking rejection, but knowing that he would face it. He embraced the rejection because it is at the very centre of the reason why he came.

[6:53] And so if we don't understand the rejection he faced, why he faced it, and the implications for us as a result of it, then in the end we don't understand Christmas at all.

It means that Christmas can't be good news. It can't be a moment of celebration unless we understand the rejection of Jesus. And so there's three things I want to get to today.

You see it on the board, that's where we're going to head. First of all, he was rejected for being ordinary. That is, he was rejected first up because he didn't meet humanity's expectation of what a saviour would be.

He wasn't the right kind of person. He didn't act or look like a saviour or a ruler. He was, in fact, too ordinary. When Jesus is presented at the temple, we are told in verse 24 that Mary and Joseph brought along a couple of doves or pigeons for the sacrifice.

What that tells us, in their context, Mary and Joseph were extremely poor people. It was the offering of poverty.

[8:11] And therefore, Jesus was not born into an aristocratic family, a wealthy family. He was brought into the low of the world in society.

He was born into poverty. He came from the wrong side of town, if you like. He didn't have the credentials of leadership. In Mark 6, we are told that his own hometown and his closest circle of friends rejected him.

They were offended by him. They were scandalised by him. And as William Lane says in his commentary on Mark 6, that the reason was their discernment could not penetrate the veil of ordinariness that surrounded him.

He was a carpenter. His father died young. He was raised by his mother. He had no connections. He was on the margins of society. He wasn't leadership material. He didn't get a high mark in his HSC. We even told in Isaiah 53 that he was not good looking.

[9:27] He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind.

A man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised. And we held him in low esteem. He was not a celebrity.

A celebrity has always been someone who has it all together and on the outside. A celebrity is someone who we want to be like, even if inside and their private life is an entire train wreck.

On the outside, they're beautiful. If not beautiful, then they're either rich, and if not rich, they're talented. Or they've just got a social media account that others just want to buy into.

It matters not if their relationships are a wreck and they struggle with addictions. In a celebrity culture like ours, it's the externals.

[10:27] It's the superficial. The outside that matters more than anything else. And Jesus destroys all of that.

Christmas destroys all of that. He says your status, your look, your beauty, your achievements, your position, your connections is absolutely nothing. It matters nothing.

God is not pressed by it at all. What matters is your heart and your soul. And Christmas means, at the very least, that Christians reject snobbery.

And we care about character. We care about humility. We care about compassion and love and wisdom and integrity and standing with those who are rejected.

What we love reveals who we are. Jesus is rejected because he is too ordinary to be the saviour and the ruler of the world.

[11:29] But secondly, he's rejected because he reveals the ordinariness of our inner lives, of our hearts.

See what Simeon says in verse 35? The thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. That is, Jesus shows people who they really were and they really did not like it at all.

The book of Romans in the New Testament tells us that deep down, every human heart is a need for God. We all know, sinners, that we are all flawed, we are all failures, and we dress up the external to try and distract ourselves and everyone else from that.

We constantly, deep inside of ourselves, have what you might call the engine of self-justification, constantly revving. And it's not EV.

We're talking V12 engine in overdrive of self-justification. And it desperately, that engine wants to so desperately to think that we are okay in such a way that it suppresses the truth about God.

[12:59] It does not want to know about God or what he would require. He doesn't want to hear that, in fact, we need God or that there is anything wrong with humanity at all.

Anything that makes it hard to suppress that truth gets us mad. So when Jesus Christ came along, he was hated.

Everywhere Jesus went, crowds gathered. He both, in those moments, he both mesmerised people and he alienated them.

He attracted and he infuriated. He evokes rejection and hostility. In the Christmas narrative, King Herod hears that Jesus is born the king.

He's threatened and he attempts to kill, to have him killed. And instead goes on a murderous rampage and kills boys, everyone in the vicinity of Jesus, around the age of Jesus.

[14:06] When Jesus Christ comes to anybody and reveals himself as the true ruler of our lives, our first instinct is to get angry with him.

And people will get upset with any Christian who lives and loves like Jesus because it reminds them of their own heart and their own priorities and their own actions. The self-justification engine kicks into gear.

And yet the reality is you don't have to be perfect to get rejected. Living a life like Jesus exposes corruption, immorality, gossip, greed, vilification, hatred.

No one likes the depths of immoral hearts being revealed or those who reveal it. Christmas means in our growing secular society, there's often not room in the inn for those who follow Jesus.

But thirdly, Jesus was rejected for our acceptance. Jesus Christ came into this world knowing that he would violate the world's standards and its priorities.

[15:34] And that he would intimidate people with his life and his message. But he became, because, he still came, because of the substitutionary work, nature of his work.

That is, him being rejected is his work for us. Have a look back at Isaiah 53. Right after it says, Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised.

And we held him in low esteem. We read these words. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was laid on him.

And by his wounds we have been healed. All, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[16:49] You see, in a nutshell, what that's saying is, Jesus' rejection is our acceptance. He didn't come to be rejected simply as an example for us to follow.

He came to be rejected as our substitute, as our saviour. He came to be rejected for us. He was rejected for our transgressions, for our sin, for our rejection of our created God.

God. Simeon says in Luke 2, verse 34, that Jesus is to be a sign that will be spoken against. What that means is that because Jesus is spoken against, God speaks for us. Because there is no room for him, we can dwell through Jesus, through his substitutionary work, we can dwell in the presence of God forever.

Jesus knew that his acceptance would ultimately mean our rejection by God. But his rejection would be for our eternal acceptance.

[18:05] And he chose that rejection for us. And so Christmas is so beautiful. It is so glorious. It is so filled of light and hope for humanity, broken, broken, and yet it is so dangerous at the same time.

Because the news of Christmas, the message of Christmas is so hard to hear. That is the very nature of some gifts that you receive.

You know, a few days from now, you pull out a present that's been given to you, gifted to you, you unwrap it and it's a book said, how not to be arrogant.

You know, or how to grow in humility and defeat pride. You know, what on earth? Who bought me this book?

Your sensibilities are damaged, but it's most likely needed. The message of Christmas is hard, but it's also healing and soothing.

[19:14] In the same way, a surgeon brings healing to our body by cutting out the stuff that's wrecking it and spilling our blood.

Ultimately, that is a wound that brings healing, brings health. And the reason Jesus makes us uncomfortable is because he challenges our worldview.

He forces us to expand our view of life and its purpose and its goal. The magnificent, perfect, flawless God comes down into our ordinariness, into our brokenness and our darkness.

He immerses himself in our pain and our vulnerability and our suffering. The ordinary suffering of human life, let alone the extraordinary suffering of human life, like we saw last week.

He came to be rejected, to be murdered by humanity. And it took God such drastic steps to save us.

[20:21] It is offensive to our sensibilities to think that we are so dark, that we are so broken, that we are so sinful.

And yet, we cannot know the blessing of his forgiveness, the blessing of hope and life and light forever if we have never felt the offence of Christmas.

We should feel the offence of Christmas, but don't take offence. It's hard to believe in Christmas, but there is light and life and healing and hope and joy when we do.

Amen. Amen.