

Christmas Promise - You can become a Child of God!

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[0 : 00] There's a wonderful film called Amazing Grace, which is about the life of William Wilberforce. And there's a scene toward the end where John Newton, who was the old Church of England minister who inspired Wilberforce, as an old man, is asked about his life and what he thinks about it.

And he says that his memory is nearly gone, but there are two things that he remembers. He said that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.

And it's a fabulous thing just to watch. It's a very moving thing to watch. I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior. It's beautiful singing that hymn.

When I was preparing this week, I thought, oh, we need to sing that. I haven't sung it for a while.

And I just love it so much. I just think, I think for me, it'll be the first song I hear in heaven, Amazing Grace.

Somehow it feels that way. And if I die, and well, I will die at some point, unless the Lord comes.

When I die, just remember, I need that in my funeral. Okay.

[1 : 11] Just in case Lisa forgets. Yeah. Yeah. John chapter 1, verses 1 to 18. We're looking at the theme of Christmas promise.

And the promise is this. It's a wonderful promise. You can become a child of God. You can become a child of God. Just let that sink in if you're not already rejoicing in it.

You may be a child of God this morning. You are God's creation. But it's not enough to be just God's creation.

You need to be part of God's adoption. Adopted into the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ. And you can become, even today, a child of God.

John chapter 1, verses 1 to 18. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

[2 : 14] He was with God in the beginning. Trouble is, I memorized the scripture and I'm doing it wrong, so I'll stick to this one. Through him all things were made.

Without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him all men might believe.

He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. To all who received him, sorry, yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

[3 : 19] Children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, nor of a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him.

He cries out, saying, Amen. This was he of whom I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me, because he was before me. From the fullness of his grace, we have all received one blessing after another.

For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God, the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his Word. So, you can become a child of God. We've been getting ready for Christmas, and especially last week, of course, as you've already heard, we were getting ready for reenacting Bethlehem, and it was a very busy time, and a lot of us are very tired today.

[4 : 37] But, otherwise, getting ready for Christmas is a relatively easy job for me. Amazon has been a wonderful invention, or anything online has been a wonderful invention.

I steadfastly avoid city centers and even big towns, the joys of living in Whitby. I love the fact that when I go downtown, I can get around the town center in about five minutes and be out again, and that's fantastic.

But, undoubtedly, if you visit a city center or a town center, then it's still very busy, and there's lots of attractions. I saw a picture of York yesterday. I'm really glad I haven't been.

It looked really, really packed full. My wife was talking about going, and I've not been talking about it in the hope that she's too tired. She's not.

But Christmas still captures the imagination, at least the consumerist version of it, although, as we discovered this week, when over 400 attended our event, actually over 500 with the children, it still captures lots of people's attention as well.

[5 : 44] And the joy is when people say, isn't this wonderful? Isn't this what it's all about? When you hear that from people who are not Christians themselves, you begin to think, yes, there is still hope.

We have hope. We have a promise of eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ. The promise that you can become a child of God.

that the Son of God became man so that men of this world can become sons and daughters of the living God.

How remarkable is that? That's what Christmas is all about. So, when you're thinking about Christmas, you think, well, where should we start?

Well, let's start at the very beginning. I think that would be a good song for somebody to sing. Yes, you have to be musical to get that, and I'm not musical, but there we go. I know that song.

[6 : 47] Start at the very beginning. Imagine you're John and you're sitting down one day and you're deciding that you're going to write a gospel. You're going to write the good news of Jesus and you're going to tell his story.

Where do you begin? Well, you might begin with the genealogy. You might tell the story of his parentage because that was important to Jews.

So, tell the story about who his mom was, who his dad was, who his ancestors were, how he links to the most famous of all kings, David, and even, perhaps, go further back than that.

You might start there. But then he thought, no, no, I think that's where Matthew started. All right, well, let's just get straight into the story.

Let's miss out all that stuff at the beginning because we don't know very much anyway. Let's just start with his ministry. Let's get him out there preaching among the Galileans, preaching among the Jews, doing miracles.

[7 : 48] Tell the story from that perspective. Ah, yes, he said, but I think Mark started there. Peter helped him with that, but Mark's got that sorted. All right, let's kind of get the woman's perspective on it.

Let's speak to Mary. Let's find out. He could speak to Mary because he took her into his own home, didn't he? She became his adopted mother. So he had all of the insight. He could have started there, but Luke did that.

So where does John start? Now, of course, I'm speculating. I don't know if John ever read those Gospels. I guess he would have known about them because his was the last one to be written. And it was written when he was an older man. But John doesn't start there. John starts right back at the beginning. Before the world began, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. Through him, all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

[9 : 00] The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. Now, that has echoes of Genesis chapter 1. It has echoes of the creation itself.

When the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, when the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the earth, and the Spirit of God said, or sorry, God said, let there be light, and there was light.

Into that amorphous mass of energy and matter, God spoke. Let there be, and there was.

God spoke, and things came into being. In the beginning was what? God, the Word, the One who speaks, the One who voices a command that the universe must obey.

He speaks something into beginning, into being, out of nothing. For He is God. Things came to be.

[10:14] In the beginning was the Word, God, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Son of God is distinct, a distinct person in the triune God, and He distinctly works as Creator.

And so, John tells us a number of things, and this is why I have to be careful not to steal from Richard for next week. So, I'm going to quickly go through this. He tells us that Jesus was in the beginning with God as the Creator, that He is eternal, and He is before all time.

Colossians 1, 15 to 18, listen to these words. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

All things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things and in Him all things hold together and He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything He might have supremacy.

Jesus is our God. He is our Creator. Like Thomas, we can fall at His knees and say, My Lord and my God and not commit blasphemy.

[11:41] Isn't that amazing that a Jewish person who was raised on the principles of the Shema in Deuteronomy 6, verse 4, Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, falls at the feet of Jesus and says, You are my Lord and my God.

And Jesus does not rebuke him or accuse him of any heresy. He accepts His worship. We see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

For He was in the beginning and everything that exists owes its existence to Him. Secondly, Jesus is the Word, the very expression, the very mind of God being expressed in words to us.

Now here, the word He uses is logos and you'll have come across it in words like psychology and theology and all of that.

Any ology has the word logos in and logos just simply mean words about. Jesus is the one who tells us words about God.

[12:52] He brings us the truth of God, which is why He can say, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me. You need to know the mind of God.

You see and hear the mind and will of God in the person of Jesus Christ. That's why He could say to Philip, if you've seen me, you have seen the Father.

There is nothing to see of God that Jesus does not reveal to us. We can trust Him for He is the Word of God. He is also, as we've already said, God.

He reveals God to us in flesh. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. Not a lesser demigod, but true God, very God of very God.

And in chapter 1 in verse 18, John reminds us that no man has seen God at any time but the only begotten, and this is where the NIV doesn't really help us, the only begotten, God has revealed Him to us.

[13:58] That is a better text of the Greek than to use the word Son. Jesus has revealed the Father to us.

There is nothing more to see. Hebrews 1, verses 1 and 2 says, In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe.

A wonderful scripture. John tells us that Jesus is the life giver. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men, which is why He could say, John 14, verse 6, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And incidentally, if you want to read a wonderful book of scripture, read the Gospel of John. It is so masterly put together. The opening prologue, as it's called, John 1, verse 18, is exegeted and explained throughout the rest of the Gospel.

John says, These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in His name. So everything He says here is going to be explained in His Gospel.

[15 : 19] In Him was life, and the life is the light of men. Ah yes, John says, He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Him.

He is the light of men. The true light that gives light to every man was coming to the world, says John. And what does Jesus say? I am the light of the world.

John chapter 8 and verse 12. I am the light of the world. If you're walking in darkness and you want to find your way in life, you must look to me. If you want to find a way through the darkness of this world, you must look to me.

If you want to understand things and have illumination and be certain of anything in this world, you have to listen to me. you have to look to me.

You have to follow me. And you will not walk in darkness but have the light of life. Wonderful. Jesus brings certainty into our world of darkness and confusion.

[16 : 24] He gives us that eureka moment. Have you had that eureka moment where everything you thought you knew was turned on its head when you encountered Jesus? and you found in him the truth and a light that gave you certainty.

He is the light of men. So John wants us to know this Jesus who first came to earth over 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem is not simply a very clever man, not a great, not only a great philosopher or a great peacemaker or a wonderful healer or a wonderful friend.

He wants us to understand that this Jesus is God. He is God manifest in the flesh. He is God who came to save us from our sins.

He is God who came to make us children of God. And so we sing a wonderful carol which we'll sing a little bit later on, joy to the world.

Why? For the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing. Now it feels really old, doesn't it, that hymn now?

[17 : 44] But actually, do you know what? When Isaac Watts wrote that hymn, do you know why he wrote it? He wrote it because he said to his father, all the carols in church are dull.

They're dull. They're drudgery, you know. And so his father said to him very wisely, this is always the way you deal with critics. He said to him, why don't you write one?

So he did. Joy to the world, a marvelous hymn. But it's not just because the tune is good, it's because the message is good. The Lord has come.

That's why there is joy. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. But tragically, people don't, do they?

And perhaps your heart has no room for Jesus. Well, let me say to you, you're shutting out Almighty God.

[18 : 45] You're shutting out He who is the way, the truth, and the life. You're shutting out the one who can give you light and life, not only for now, but for all eternity.

Why would you do that? Has your heart prepared room for Jesus? The problem is, you see, John says, the light has shone in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world, he says. He was in the world and though the world was made through him, what? The world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

How wonderfully put together this prologue is. The light has come. Life is here. People say, I don't want to know it.

I don't want it. It's too threatening. It's not for me. That's a death wish. That's spiritual suicide.

[19 : 50] God offers us life, but we choose death. He offers us light, but we choose darkness. He offers us a way, but we choose our own way.

What a risk we take with our souls. Augustine of Hippo in a wonderful quote says, Man's maker was made man, that he, ruler of the stars, might nurse at his mother's breast, that the bread might hunger, the fountain thirst, the light sleep, the way be tired on its journey, that truth might be accused of false witness, the teacher be beaten with whips, the foundation be suspended on wood, that strength might grow weak, that the healer might be wounded, that life might die.

That's what the world did to its maker. Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

So that's the first thing, but let's consider this amazing promise in verse 12. Jesus came to this world that he made and the world rejected him.

But John says this, To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. And notice, he wants to make this very clear, that the reason they became children of God is not because they are cleverer than others, not because they are intellectually more savvy.

[21 : 30] He says, they became children of God because they were born not of natural descent, had nothing to do with their heritage, the fact that they were Jews, nor of human decision.

It had nothing to do with any decision they made or of a husband's will. It wasn't by birth. Well, I'm a Christian because my mom and dad were Christians.

No, no. They were born of God. And he will explain that in chapter 3, won't he, to Nicodemus. How can a man enter into the kingdom and be born a second time?

And Jesus said, do you not know the scriptures? Think back, think back to Ezekiel chapter 37.

Think to when Ezekiel, that old prophet, was taken into a valley of dry bones, and the bones were very dry, and the whole thing was a graveyard.

It wasn't just a graveyard. It was a boneyard. And the Spirit of God said to Ezekiel, can these bones live? And Ezekiel thinks, that's a daft question. Clearly, they can't.

[22 : 37] And so he says, well, sovereign Lord, you know. And so God said to Ezekiel, you speak, you speak to those bones, and say to the dry bones, hear the word of the Lord, and they will live.

You speak to those dry bones. Preachers speak to dry bones all of the time. But you know what? They live. They live.

It's wonderful to see people come alive in your very presence. It's wonderful to see, and that's what happened to some of you, didn't it? Quite recently, you came alive, spiritually speaking.

Ezekiel said, the problem with people is they have a dead heart, a heart that is like stone, and God says, I'm going to put a heart of flesh in you. You know, your heart was only for yourself.

It beat only for yourself. It was dead to God, but the Spirit blows upon your dry bones and puts a heart of flesh in you, and your heart beats for God.

[23 : 36] You begin to live for God. Who would have ever thought it? How did that happen? because you were born of God.

Aren't you glad that you have been born again of the Spirit of God? And what happens when you're born again of the Spirit of God? You become a child of God.

You have the right to become a child of God. You have a right to own His name. Wonderful thing. Wonderful thing. We had a lovely visit yesterday from little Alfie.

It's great to see him with his mom and dad. Their child. Beautiful. To be a child of somebody.

Not somebody in the outside of a family. Not somebody disowned. But to be loved, to be cherished, to be owned. That's our privilege.

[24 : 47] God says, you are my son. Do you remember when he said that to Jesus? This is my son whom I love. Put your name in there. You are my daughter.

You are my son whom I love. With you I am well pleased. Beautiful. He gave you the right to become a child of God.

God is making his dwelling place in you. God lives in you by his Holy Spirit. So how can you become a child of God today?

Because that's what I started with, didn't it? You can become a child of God today. How? Well, do you notice what he said? First of all, to all who received him.

You need to receive him. You need to receive him. If the Spirit of God is whispering into your heart, if the Spirit of God is making this live in your mind, if you are beginning to feel the excitement and your pulse racing at this thought, the Spirit of God is speaking to you now.

[25 : 55] Oh, open your heart to receive him. To all who received him, to those he give the right to become children of God. If you feel that impulse within, open your heart and say, there is room, Lord Jesus, in my heart for you.

And it's in that carol, isn't it? What can I give him? Poor as I am. If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet, what can I give him?

I'll give my heart. You need to receive him. And not only do you need to receive him, you need to believe in his name. believe in his name.

Now, believing doesn't just mean that I assent mentally to the truth that Jesus once came to earth. It doesn't just mean I kind of believed there was once an important person called Jesus of Nazareth who was a great teacher.

To believe means to receive. it means that I will stake everything upon him. That's what amazing grace is.

[27 : 07] I am a great sinner but he is a great savior. I stake everything upon him and I receive from him amazing grace that saves a wretch like me.

I believe, I believe for all eternity in him I trust. I wanted to tell you as we close about Maya Angelou. I read this this week and I thought this just kind of summed it for me in a wonderful way. This amazing grace of God. Now if you know Maya Angelou you will probably know her from her account of her early life.

I know why the caged bird sings. She was born in the southern states of Margat. She was negro by race and of course she was discriminated against.

Born in 1928. When she was seven years old, seven and a half years old, she was raped by her mother's boyfriend.

[28 : 14] And she told on him. And when she told on him, a mob got hold of the man who did it and they hung him. and she said, my seven and a half year old logic deduced that my voice had killed him.

So I stopped speaking for almost six years. Imagine that. She blamed herself. And she didn't speak for another six years.

Who would have thought she'd become a marvelous poet and writer of memoirs. I stopped and thought about that and I thought, I need to know how she got to the point where she could forgive such an act.

And there's a wonderful short video on YouTube when she was interviewed by Oprah Winfrey as an old lady and she raises that question.

In the interview in 2013, she was asked what she would say to her younger self if she could kind of live her life again.

[29 : 25] And this is what she said, I would encourage her to forgive. We ask the creator to forgive our stupidest actions, cruelest, mean-hearted things. It relieves you.

You are relieved of carrying that burden of resentment, of that burden. You can forgive without loving. Sorry, you can't forgive without loving. And I don't mean sentimentality, I don't mean mush, I mean having enough courage to stand up and say, I forgive.

I'm finished with it. I had to get to a place where I could forgive the man who had raped me when I was seven years old. And then I had to think of what I had done to other people and see how I'd been forgiven.

I don't forget, but I understand. So how can somebody forgive and understand in the way that she did?

Well, she tells us, Christ, she says, was made a sacrifice for me, and for those reasons I am a Christian. In a poem that was often attributed to her but wasn't written by her, this is what the author says, putting the words into her mouth.

[30 : 44] When I say I am a Christian, I'm not shouting, I'm clean living. I'm whispering, I was lost. Now I'm found and forgiven.

And she talked about the immense privilege of being a child of God. I believe that there was a God, she says, because I was told it by my grandmother and later by other adults.

But when I found that I knew not only that there was a God, but that I was a child of God, when I understood that, when I comprehended that, more than that, when I internalized that, ingested that, I became courageous.

That's what it means to be a child of God. It changes everything about you. Christ becomes your very life.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, you will appear with him in glory. You know that, because you have life in Jesus Christ.

[31 : 57] God loves you, and has given you the greatest gift that it is possible to give. And to finish with Maya Angelou, God loves me, she said.

It still humbles me that this force that makes leaves and fleas and stars and rivers and you loves me. Me, Maya Angelou, it's amazing.

I can do anything and do it well. Any good thing, I can do it. That's why I am who I am. Yes, because God loves me, and I am amazed at it.
I am grateful for it. You can become a child of God today. For the Son of God loved you, and he gave himself for you.
What a Christmas present. Have you got room in your heart to receive it? Amen.