

Everybody comes to a crossroads regarding Jesus

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

- [0 : 01] When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said. Take the child and his mother to escape to Egypt.
- Stay then until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where they had stayed until the death of Herod.
- And so was fulfilled that the Lord had said to the prophet out of Egypt, I called my son.
- I feel slightly inadequate standing up here. I can neither sing, can't read that well. And I think the Joyful Noise Choir were exceptional, so a big round of applause to you.
- And also, without a doubt, to our young readers, they may do exceptionally well. Thank you. Thank you. You did really, really well, young men and young girls also.
- [1 : 32] Well, I have the opportunity, if I can, take it. Okay, I'm not going to be very long, which should make you really happy. But I'm not going to be as short as you might hope.
- I don't know if that makes any sense. It makes perfect sense to me, so you're going to have to cope with it. I guess I just want to say a few words about Advent. I guess what I want to say has really been reflected already in the readings.
- It's definitely been reflected in the songs that we've sung. I guess what I'm saying in short is, I just want to tell you about Jesus for a few moments. You know, why Jesus is so, not just central to Christmas, but why Jesus is central to the whole of life, for all of life.
- Okay? For the whole of life, for all of life. You know, Advent is something we normally think in terms of the past. We think back on an event that happened.
- And yet, when you read about Advent in the scriptures, what you read, especially the last passage that Jack read out for us, is that God wants us to think very much about the future, not about the past.
- [2 : 45] And God knows that when a person begins to think about the future, the decisions they make in the present begin to change. You know, we've all known people that we've loved and cared for, and suddenly something happens in their life, and it changes their future, and suddenly they have to make quite drastic decisions in the present that are different than they would have made.
- I guess the coming of Jesus is basically saying, it's time for us all to make a different decision. That when God gave his son into the world, he's asking us to respond to him.
- I know what it's like to not respond to God. I also know what it's like to respond to God in a very negative fashion. You know, not liking him, telling him that you don't like him.
- In many different ways, we can turn our back on God. And yet, what Advent shows us is that it doesn't matter how many times we do it to him, he'll never do it to us. I guess that's a demonstration of true love, isn't it?
- You know, to love someone means that you must still continue to love them, regardless of what they do back to you. There's a wonderful verse in the Old Testament when it speaks about God's love.

[4 : 03] He's effectively saying this, I love you because I love you, just because I love you. Now, that may not make sense to you, but women, it will definitely make sense to you. Let me just try and explain.

Men are a little bit slow. I'm picking this up. Okay? Imagine your husband came into the kitchen and says, Dear. Or came into the living room, or saw you walk through the front door and says, Dear.

Your hair looks beautiful today. Or the clothes that you're wearing just, just makes you look great. Okay?

You know, because women are way smarter than men, that when your hair doesn't look great, okay? And your clothes don't seem to fit. Not looking at anyone.

Okay? You know immediately that if your husband is based his love on you for the way you look, and then your looks change, then you're smart enough to figure out that his love for you must change.

[5 : 08] God, that's really sad, isn't it? That we live in a world where your love can change for someone when they change.

You know, not with God. You know, when God sent his son in the world as a demonstration to say that he loves you, you know, we couldn't have been any worse towards God. I certainly couldn't have been any worse.

I probably could have been, I guess, if I tried. But God's love towards us is that I love you because I love you just because I love you. In other words, the reason for loving you is not found in you.

It's not because you behave a certain way. It's not because you think the thoughts you do. It's not because you dress the way you do, or you have the haircut you do. It's not because you do certain things for charity, or don't do certain things for other people.

When God says that he loves you because he loves you just because he loves you, it totally originates with him and not with you. And the reason why that is so assuring is because whatever changes happen to me in the future, I'm always guaranteed that God's love towards me won't change.

[6 : 19] You know, that's the Christmas message, I think. At least in part. You know, when you fall in love, strange things happen. You go off your food. You know, you can't think about anything else.

And I know this is true because my wife told me when she met me. But that's exactly the way it happened for her. And I guess that when you experience the love of God, you know, there is this shift in your attention.

There is this shift towards, you know, suddenly my appetite for the things of the world is not like it used to be. And suddenly my interest in the world, they're just not like they used to be.

Suddenly my whole attention is being taken away and being directed towards God because suddenly I've been shown love. You know, love does strange things, I think, to an individual.

And no more so than when you experience God's love. Well, okay. Okay, but how do we get to know it? Do you know, one of my favorite authors is a lady by the name of Dorothy Sayers.

[7 : 26] She read a few educational books. She got sort of sidelined because she was teaching English at a time when it was mainly male, you know, populated.

But she was right and they were wrong and she was proven to be right many, many years later, almost too late to make any changes, which is a real shame. But she actually began to write these novels called the Peter Whimsy novels.

I don't know if any of you remember them. Some of you are too young even to remember Dorothy Sayers. But she began to write these novels and Peter Whimsy was like this handsome detective.

And she fell in love with her character. But Peter Whimsy was a single man. And he would go out and he would solve these crimes.

He was everything that, I guess, a woman wanted. And she fell in love with him so much that she wrote a character in her stories to marry him. And the character's name was Harriet Vane.

[8 : 25] And Harriet Vane fell in love with Peter Whimsy. And of course, you know what happened. They got married. Do you know who Harriet Vane was? It was Dorothy Sayers.

Dorothy Sayers. She wrote herself into the story so as to marry her character. Or in other words, to enter into a relationship with them. Do you know what is Christmas?

Well, Christmas is the author of the world writing himself into our story so that he might enter into a relationship with us. That's Christmas.

You know, how on earth do you get to know the author unless the author writes himself into the story? Imagine reading Sherlock Holmes. You know what Sherlock's like. You know what Dr. Watson's like.

But nobody would ever tell, would ever be able to figure out what Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was like by reading Sherlock Holmes. No. You'd have to read a biography. In other words, he would have to reveal himself either in the story or in a different story, namely a biography or an autobiography.

[9 : 31] I guess what we have in the word of God is that God is writing himself into the story, revealing what he is like to us. But he does it in a magnificent way by sending his son into the world and revealing himself so that we might know him.

I guess that's the only way we could know him. The only way we could know the author of our story, the only way we could know the author of all of creation is if the author wrote himself into the story.

And the only way we could come into relationship with the author is if the author wrote himself into the story in such a way that brings us into relationship with him. Do you know what? That's what Jesus has done.

Jesus came to seek and to save men and women, boys and girls, to bring us into relationship with him. And he does it in a very simple and a very special way.

He simply comes just like us. He lives the life that we could never live. And then, of course, Easter always follows Christmas. And he dies the death that none of us could die so that we may live a life that none of us could ever live without him.

[10 : 47] In other words, Jesus is absolutely central not just to the Christmas story. But to the whole meaning of life. To the very definition of love.

To the very definition of relationship. Jesus is at the very center of it all. And one of the ways that you know that you've entered into relationship with God, excuse me, is that he begins to interfere with your life.

He begins to sort of, you know, get involved. And suddenly you feel the power and sway of his will and his intentions over your own. But I guess that's the definition of relationship as well.

Do you know what? One of my favorite films is *The Stepford Wives*. I don't know if you've ever watched it. I don't like the new version, but I love the old version. And a man would take his wife to this farm that's called in America, which isn't really a farm.

It's sort of a health club. And the wives would be taken off and something would be done to them that when they come back, they could only ever say, yes, dear. Do you know what?

[12 : 01] There's something about that film that warms my heart. Yes, dear. Can I do this? Yes, dear. Can I have that? Yes, dear. Would you be willing to make me another coffee at this time of night?

Yes, dear. Do you know what? And every time I watch that film, it sort of takes me to another world and I dread waking up. I mean, it's just... But it takes me a long time, just like it takes the men in the story to realize that they no longer have a relationship, they have a robot.

That I guess if you only have someone that can say to you, yes, and never no, that can only give you what you want and never challenge you in any way, that's not a relationship.

That's just a very yes person. That's more of a servant. That's more of, you will do exactly what I say when I want you to say it and do it. Now, I think the very definition of relationship, as we all know, only exists in the sort of the to-and-fro-ing, the hassle of having to compromise, the hassle of having to perhaps deal with somebody else's will in their life.

And here's the thing, I guess, what I'm saying, is that in a relationship, especially with God, who knows what's best for us? I think God knows what's best for all of us.

[13 : 21] I think he really does. I think he demonstrates that by giving his son into the world, but I think he also demonstrates that by explaining why he's given you his son.

So I'm going to say four points really, really quickly of why he gave you his son. Number one, do you know what? God doesn't need anything. God needs absolutely nothing.

Do you know what? And that's the best news in the world. God. Because if God needs nothing, then what does he want with me? And if God needs absolutely nothing, what does he want with you? Well, there must be another reason.

And that is that he must want you. And I think all of you here this evening would much rather be wanted than needed. I think deep in your heart, you yearn to be wanted rather than needed.

I think you would climb over mountain and distant land to be wanted, to be needed, to be wanted rather than needed.

[14 : 26] You know, when we know that God is in need of nothing and then we know the extent that he has gone to to get us, it must be because he wants us, not because he needs us. That's so important that you're able to leave here this evening and go, okay, I may not want God, but God wants me.

I may need God, but I may not want the God I need. Okay. But God who needs nothing wants you. You know, that's so important. That's so important for you to appreciate and realize.

Here's the second thing. God wants you to come and share in him. If God is in need of nothing, then that means he has everything. And God who has everything would like you very much to come and share in what God has.

And the way you come to share in what God has is in the same way Harriet Vane comes to share in what Peter Whimsey had by entering into relationship. It's the same way we come to share in what somebody else has within our family by entering into relationship with him.

Do you know, if you want to share in what God has, there's only one way. You have to enter into relationship with him. And there's only one person to do that in. By faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

[15 : 48] That's two things. Here's the third. God wants you to live a life of assurance that your relationship with him can never be broken.

You know, we live in a world of broken relationships, not with God. No, no. God gives you his Son so that he can secure a relationship.

He calls it forgiveness. And he calls it forgiveness simply because most of us try and be good people. Most of us, I guess, try and have a good life. But the reason for forgiveness and the reason of assurance is simply this.

Because none of us are quite good enough. In fact, none of us really are all that good enough when it comes to the standards of God. But that's not a barrier that cannot be overcome.

In fact, we don't even have to overcome it. It's overcome in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, as I stand before here, before you this evening, most of you probably have no idea who I am.

[16 : 52] Most of you have no idea the type of background I've come from. I guarantee that most of you have no idea the kind of things that I've done, said, or even believed.

And do you know what? None of that even matters anymore. It's not as if I even need to share it. Why? Because who I am now is not who I was.

And who I am now is because of a person that I've entered into relationship with, namely Jesus. Okay, here's the fourth and final thing. In everybody's life, at some point, they will come to the crossroads of Jesus.

The very first pastor in this church, a man by the name of Alec Hardy, said, everybody, at some point in their life, with any exception, will come to the crossroads where they'll come face to face with Jesus.

Whether it's in a message like this, whether it's through songs, but they'll come face to face with the reality that God has declared to you a way of being right with him. That God has declared to you a way that you can get right with him through Jesus Christ by having faith in him and the life that he lived for you and the death that he died.

[18 : 12] Alec Hardy said that everybody at some point will come face to face with that. The question is, is what you do with it. The question is, is what you do with it.

I'm not here to put you on the spot. I'm simply saying that this message that God gives to the world demands a response from all of us, me included, you included.

So the response, if you're looking to respond to God, is a very simple one. It's called repentance and belief. Do you know, repentance is simply this. It is to turn away from your own way and to turn to God.

It is to turn away from sin and going in your own direction and to turn to God. In fact, if you want to know what sin is, sin is this. It's saying no to God. Okay, well perhaps you can think of a load of other things that sin are.

Well, maybe. But sin very basically is this. I'm saying no to God. I guess what I'm trying to say this evening is look, God has sent his son into the world so that you wouldn't make that decision.

[19 : 19] God has sent his son into the world for you so that you wouldn't say no but that you would turn and say yes. Remember the words of Alec Hardy. At some point, everybody comes to the crossroads of Jesus and tonight just may be that very night for you.

Don't say no but turn to Jesus. Amen. Thank you for listening. We're going to finish. We're going to stand and we're going to finish with one more song and then of course refreshments afterwards.

Thank you. William J laughter