

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Christmas Series 2017: Christmas - The outcome

Good morning! One of the many things that I enjoy about Christmas Eve is listening to a lot of Christmas carols on the radio. I'm a great fan of Christmas carols - I have been known to listen to them in summer, although with my headphones on so no-one knows what I am doing! Christmas is a wonderful time of the year because it is one of the few, perhaps the only, occasion when so many songs about the Lord Jesus can be heard in so many places. What's interesting about some Christmas carols is that they are not only about the birth of the Lord Jesus, but also about His life and work. Quite a few Christmas carols point to Easter and beyond. For example, let's think about Charles Wesley's well-loved *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*. Some of the verses of Charles Wesley's original words are as follows:

*Come, Desire of Nations, come,
Fix in Us thy humble Home,
Rise, the Woman's Conqu'ring Seed,
Bruise in Us the Serpent's Head.*

*Now display thy saving Pow'r,
Ruin'd Nature now restore,
Now in Mystic Union join
Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine.*

*Adam's likeness, Lord, efface,
Stamp thy Image in its Place,
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in thy Love.*

We can see that these words go well beyond the nativity at Bethlehem. They point to what the Lord Jesus came to earth for - to deliver us from the devil's power, to redeem us, and to bring us into relationship with Himself.

One slightly unusual carol that you quite often hear played on the radio around Christmas time is *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*. Normally only the first three or four verses are sung, but if you look up this carol on *Wikipedia*, you will see that there are over ten verses, and that the hymn goes through Christ's life from incarnation right through to the ascension. Here are two verses that one doesn't normally hear sung:

*Then on the cross hanged I was,
Where a spear my heart did glance;
There issued forth both water and blood,
To call my true love to my dance.*

*Then up to heaven I did ascend,
Where now I dwell in sure substance
On the right hand of God, that man
May come unto the general dance.*

What these carols tell us is that the birth of Jesus Christ at Bethlehem was for a purpose. There was to be an outcome of Christmas. The nativity was only one stage of the wonderful story of redemption, and we need to consider it in the context of the overall purpose of Christ.

How then should we understand the **outcome** of Christmas? A good starting point is the comment made by the Lord Jesus Himself when speaking to Pontius Pilate about His birth. We find in John 18 the record of how Pilate questioned the Lord during His trial before His crucifixion. Let me read John 18:33-37 in the New King James Version: "*Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?'*" Jesus answered, 'My

kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'"

Notice what the Lord Jesus said: *"For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth"* (John 18:37). There was both a cause and a purpose for His birth, and the events of John 18 were heading fast towards one of the key moments of that purpose. Let's think a bit more about that purpose.

"That I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). The Lord Jesus is the only one who has been able to tell us the full truth about God, the truth about ourselves, about our sin, about God's judgement and about God's pardon. Without this revelation from Him, we would never have worked out the plan of salvation. He made this clear to Nicodemus when He spoke with him at night, as we can read from John 3:11-13: *"Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."*

No-one had been up to heaven and back down again, to bring us news about all the things we might have wanted to know. But the Lord Jesus came from heaven specifically to bring us knowledge of the truth. *"For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth"* (John 18:37). The reformer John Calvin wrote some wonderful words about these verses, in his commentary on John's Gospel. Calvin writes: "The words mean, that it is natural for Christ to speak *the truth*; and, next, that he was sent *for this purpose* by the Father; and, consequently, that this is his peculiar office. There is no danger, therefore, that we shall be deceived by trusting him, since it is impossible that he who has been commissioned by God, and whose natural disposition leads him to maintain *the truth*, shall teach any thing that is not *true*."

This is worth repeating: "There is no danger, therefore, that we shall be deceived by trusting him, since it is impossible that he who has been commissioned by God, and whose natural disposition leads him to maintain *the truth*, shall teach any thing that is not *true*." We can be absolutely certain that what Christ teaches us is indeed true, and we will be safe if we trust what He says.

So one of the **purposes** of Christmas was that Christ should come into this world to tell us the truth, and the **outcome** of Christmas is that the true things that Christ told us will certainly come to pass. This is a huge subject - pretty much the whole of the New Testament - so we can't fit it all into a *Truth for Today* programme! However, let's look at a few key points on the way.

Last week we considered the actual event of Christmas. After the birth and infancy of the Lord Jesus, the next recorded chronological incident in His life was when He was twelve years old, and He went up to Jerusalem with Mary and Joseph. Mary and Joseph had not realised that He was not with them when they returned home, and so they had to go back to Jerusalem to find Him. Let's read the rest of that story in Luke 2:46-50: *"Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. So when they saw Him, they were amazed; and His mother said to Him, 'Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously.' And He said to them, 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' But they did not understand the statement which He spoke to them."*

Already at the age of twelve, Jesus knew that He was to be about His Father's, that is, God's, business. He was already starting to fulfil the purpose for which He entered into this world. Mary and Joseph did not understand His statement. It would not surprise me if He was often misunderstood as a child.

The next key event is recorded in Luke 3, where we read about the baptism of the Lord Jesus. Luke 3:21-23 tell us the story: *"When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.' Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli."*

So about eighteen years after the incident in Jerusalem, when Joseph and Mary had thought that they had lost Him, Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, and a voice from heaven announced that He was God's beloved Son. Luke tells us that it was at that point that Jesus began His public ministry.

His ministry only lasted around three years, and yet what a tremendous three years they were! We can say it no better than the apostle John when he concluded his gospel, as he wrote in John 21:25: *"And there are also many other*

things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." What we do have written, however, is a record of events and teachings that we need to know so that we can understand God's plan of salvation. In fact John writes about that in the previous chapter of his Gospel, John 20:30-31: *"And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."* Here is one of the wonderful outcomes of Christmas - that by believing in the One who came at Christmas, and who died and rose again at Easter, we can have life in His Name! That is what He promised to the dying thief who was crucified next to Him on Good Friday, as we read in Luke 23:43: *"And Jesus said to him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.'"* That man, in his desperate state at the end of his life, gained eternal life by believing in the Lord Jesus.

The outcome of Christmas was not properly understood by the Lord Jesus' disciples straight after the resurrection. Luke 24:13-49 recounts the tale of two sad disciples, making their way to a village called Emmaus, and how the risen Lord Jesus accompanied them in their journey and their conversation, although they did not at first know that it was Him. He explained God's great purposes to them, and opened up the Scriptures to them so that they could understand. Let's read Luke 24:25-27: *"Then He said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."*

The Lord Jesus unfolded God's wonderful plan to them by explaining the Old Testament Scriptures to them. He showed them how it was that the Christ came to suffer, and then to enter into His glory. You can be sure that they would have understood a lot more about the outcome of Christmas after that Bible study!

A bit further down in Luke chapter 24, we see that there is still more. I'll now read Luke 24:46-49: *"Then He said to them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.'"*

We can see from Luke 24:46-49 that one of the key points regarding the outcome of Christmas was that the **result** of Christ's death and resurrection, namely the preaching of the good news of the forgiveness of sins, was to take place, but that this would need the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who came at Pentecost shortly afterwards. We are still in this time today - the gospel, or good news, about the Lord Jesus is being spoken, and preached, and published, and broadcast, and there are still many who are hearing and receiving the message.

That is not the end of the story, however. If we think back to the words of the Lord Jesus to Pontius Pilate that I read at the beginning of this talk (John 18:33-37), we will remember that He told Pilate that His Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). However, His Kingdom will be **over** this world one day. We are told about this in the Epistles of the New Testament, and in the book of Revelation. The One who was born King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2), and who was crucified as King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37), will return one day as King. Revelation 19:16 tells us that one of His names is **"KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"** Right back in Luke 1, we read what the angel Gabriel came to tell Mary about the Son that she would bear: *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end"* (Luke 1:31-33).

The events outlined in Revelation are the fulfilment of Gabriel's words. Prior to the Lord taking up His glorious Kingdom, those who have trusted Him and believed His words will have been taken to be with Him, as we can read in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

This rapid journey through the New Testament has reminded us of the tremendous significance and importance of the what the Lord Jesus came to do, and what is still to happen. We have seen that the outcome of Christmas is eternal and of supreme importance in its scope. As we listen to Christmas carols celebrating the birth of the Lord at Bethlehem, we will remember the purpose and outcome of this event. What can we learn from all this? What can we take away with us? May I suggest a few points for our encouragement:

1. We can think about the great love of God in sending us His Son, so that we could be taught the truth. "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." If it had not been for God taking the initiative, and His great condescension and grace in visiting us in the Person of His Son, we would have remained in darkness and ignorance.

2. We can think about how our salvation was such a great cost to the Lord Jesus. The birth of a baby is so often a thing of great joy, but here was One who was born with the fixed purpose of dying for our sins. When He was twelve years old, He had stressed how important it was for Him to be about His Father's business, and He was no less sure and determined on Good Friday before the cross. If ever we want to be sure that He loves us, we can just think about that!

He was born a King and He will return a King. Now is our opportunity to show our allegiance to Him, by trusting in Him, in His Word, and in His work. Christmas carols remind us that the One we sing about will return one day. We will want to be with Him then! Now we can seek to please Him by trusting in Him. Let's read John 6:27-29: *"Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." Then they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.'*

Notice how the Lord Jesus said that God the Father had set His seal on Him. The outcome of Christmas is sure! The Lord Jesus is God's choice! We can please God by believing in Him - entrusting ourselves to Him.

Let me finish by quoting the words of a carol that I like very much, sometimes called *The Sussex Carol*, whose first line is *"On Christmas night all Christians sing."* One of the verses is as follows:

*Then why should men on earth be so sad
Since our Redeemer made us glad,
When from sin He set us free
All for to gain our liberty.*

That is why He came - to set us free! But why did He do this? Because of His love. Truly, our Redeemer has made us glad. Let us be sure to thank Him today.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas!

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