

The Reason for Christmas

Jesus came to seek and save the lost

1. Intro

- Good morning > Merry Christmas!
- Why do we say 'Merry' Christmas?
 - Have you ever stopped to think about why we describe Christmas as 'merry'?

- If you asked people on the street ...
 - "What do you think makes Christmas merry?"
 - I'm sure you would get lots of different reasons

- Let me ask the children
 - "What do you think makes Christmas merry?"
 - "Why is Christmas so special?"
- Take ideas
 - Presents
 - Food
 - Family
 - Some even say about the birth of Jesus

- There are many good reasons that make Christmas special and merry
 - But of course, Christmas is about first and foremost about the birth of Jesus

- Even if you say Christmas is about the birth of Jesus ... won't understand the reason for Christmas if you only focus on his birth
 - You won't get the most significant event in human history ... if you think Christmas is just about shepherds, angels, wise men and a baby in a manger

- This morning we're going to look at a passage of scripture that you wouldn't normally associate with Christmas
 - I'm sorry if you came this morning expecting to hear about shepherds, angels, wise men and a baby in a manger
 - But oddly enough, this encounter Jesus has with a man called Zacchaeus helps us get an understanding of the reason for Christmas that is arguably clearer and more pointed than the traditional infancy narratives we're so used to hearing at Christmas time

- This morning I want us to see
 - Who is he?
 - Why did he come?
 - Who did he come for?
 - How do you receive him?

2. Who is he?

- You won't understand the reason for Christmas unless you understand who Jesus is?
- We get a clue to that in v10 where Jesus says
 - *The Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost*

- The Son of Man was Jesus way of referring to himself
- But to understand what that tells us about him ... we need to understand the significance of that name

• Illustration – Baby Names

- These days when people are about to have a baby, they will inevitably consult one of these – a baby name book
 - These books have thousands and thousands of different names to help prospective mums and dads to choose a name for their baby
 - So for example ...
 - Harvey > born this week > battle worthy
 - Liam / William > Helmet
 - Chloe > blooming
 - Hamish > Friendly / God protects
 - Bronte > Thunder
 - Cooper > Barrel maker
 - Macie > Weapon / Gift of God

- What about Son of Man
 - Not there
- Need to go to another book
 - Book of Daniel in the OT in the Bible
 - Have a listen to this
 - **Daniel 7:13-14** ¹³ *"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a **son of man**, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days (God) and was led into his presence.*
¹⁴ *He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an*

everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

- Clearly it's the image of a king
 - And its no ordinary king ... it's a describing a king who's reign is eternal ... a king who rules over all people, everywhere
- Son of Man is a great, eternal king
 - And Jesus says its him
- You see Jesus is no ordinary man of history
 - The baby born in a stable 2000 years ago is no ordinary baby
 - He is the great eternal king
- Clearly Zacchaeus and the people of Jericho realised that Jesus was a big deal
 - They lined the street to catch a glimpse of him
 - Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see who Jesus was
- But it was only when Zacchaeus got up close and personal with Jesus was he able to understand that Jesus was much more than a great teacher and healer

Application

- Friends, if you hear the Christmas story and you fail to recognise that Jesus is
 - God's promised king ...
 - The one who reigns eternal
 - The one to whom God the father has given all authority and power
- Then the baby in the manger will just be a cute story for us to get all sentimental about
 - You completely miss the significance of Christmas and what God was doing in sending his son to earth
- For he is the king who has all authority and power
 - Whether you realise that now ... or when he comes again

3. Why did he come?

- If we're to understand the reason for Christmas, we need to understand who Jesus is
- Secondly, we need to understand why he came

- Again, the clue is there in v10

- The Son of Man came to seek and save
- Jesus the great eternal king came to seek and to save
- This is where the gospel is different to religion
 - Religion is all about you searching for God
 - The gospel is that Jesus has come searching for you
- Religion is about you seeking God
 - If I keep the 10 commandments I will find God
 - If I follow this lifestyle I will find enlightenment
 - If I obey these five pillars I'll find favour with God
- That's religion ...
 - I'm searching for God
 - I'm seeking him
 - I'm looking for him

- But Jesus says it's the other way around
 - Jesus came into this world to seek and save us
 - That why Jesus came at Christmas – to come looking for us
- You see this with Zacchaeus
 - Notice Zacchaeus didn't say "Lord' I'd like to invite you into my life"
 - Rather, Jesus stopped, looked at him and said "Zacchaeus, open up, I'm coming in"

- The Christmas story is ... I've come to look for you
 - You weren't even thinking about me
 - You weren't even interested in finding me ... until I came to you

- Not only did Jesus come to seek after us ... he came to save
- Jesus came into this world with a purpose ... with a mission
- Unless you understand that Jesus was born at Christmas for the purpose of saving ... then Christmas will be totally lost on you ... you just won't get it
- We see this perfectly demonstrated with Zacchaeus

- Jesus didn't say ...
 - Here's a whole bunch of things I want you to do, and if you do them, maybe I'll show up
 - He says ... I'm coming to you

- And what does Zacchaeus do
 - He gets down and welcomes him gladly

- And as a result Jesus says ...
 - You are saved ... "*salvation has come this house*"
- You are a true son of Abraham ... not matter what the rest of the country say about you ... you are a son of Abraham ... you are saved

- If we're to understand the reason for Christmas,
 - we need to understand who Jesus > he's the great eternal king
 - we need to understand why he came > he came to seek and save
- Lastly, we need to see who he came for

4. Who did he come for?

- This passage shows us that the people Jesus came into the world for ... are the lost
- One thing that's clear in these verses is that Zacchaeus was lost
- What do we know about Zacchaeus
- In v2 we're told two things about him
 - He was a chief tax collector
 - He was wealthy

- Many of you know this already ... but in case you don't it's important to understand that a tax collector in Jesus time was universally despised
 - Tax collectors were employees of the oppressive, conquering, imperial Roman government which had conquered Israel and made the Jews subject to them ... which included imposing heavy taxes on the Jews
 - Which means, in effect, the Jewish people were paying to finance the very armies that were occupying their land and oppressing them
 - And the men who were responsible for collecting those taxes and passing them on to the Romans were the tax collectors like Zacchaeus
 - In addition, the tax collectors were known to be corrupt and would often over tax the people and pocket the profit ... and so they were all very rich
 - Which explains why Zacchaeus was so wealthy ... it's because he was a crook

- And so understandably, men like Zacchaeus were seen as co-conspirators with the Romans and therefore traitors of the Jewish ppl
 - And as a result they were universally hated
- You can see that in v7
 - *All the people saw this and they muttered*

- "Look - what in the world is this man doing talking to a man like Zacchaeus?"
- The moral majority, hated Zacchaeus
 - The main stream / the majority absolutely despised him
 - He was a total outcast
- And yet Jesus deliberately comes to Zacchaeus
 - A man who was corrupt ... a man who was a moral failure ... a man who was far away from God ... an outcast in all respects
 - And he brings salvation to Zacchaeus life
- You've got this who crowd of religious and moral people who all look down their nose at Zacchaeus ... and yet Jesus says I've come to bring salvation to you
- When you read through the gospels ... we see this pattern repeated, over, and over again
 - It's the outcasts of this world that Jesus welcomes and connects with
 - And it's the religious people and moral do-gooders who reject Jesus
- What do I mean by outcasts
 - Social outcasts – the poor, foreigners / refugees, tax collectors
 - Moral outcasts – prostitutes
 - Physical outcasts – lepers, blind and lame
- The outcasts, the lost ... all the people who were rejected by the moral majority were attracted to Jesus
 - And it's the religious people and the moralist turn their backs on Jesus
- **Application**
- Why?
- Because
 - unless you realise you are lost ...
 - unless you realise you are a moral failure like Zacchaeus
 - You will never see any need for Jesus
- Which means
 - unless you realise you are lost ...
 - unless you realise you are a moral failure
 - You will never understand the reason for Christmas

- Jesus Christ came into the world to seek and save the lost
 - And unless you realise you are lost ... you will never get to share in the salvation he offers

- You see Christianity is not about being religious or moral
 - It's about realising you're lost and you need Jesus
- Religious people reject Jesus because they think
 - It's about following the rules, keeping the commandments, searching for God
- Moral people reject Jesus because they think
 - It's about being good, being better than others
- Both the religious person and the moral person therefore think they're okay ... they're not lost
 - "How dare you tell me I'm lost!"
 - "How dare you say I'm a moral failure!"

- But friends ... it doesn't matter how religious or how moral you are ... you're still lost
 - You know why?
 - Because it's impossible for you to do it!
- Even the most religious person is unable to perfectly love God with all their heart or love their neighbour as themselves
- Even the most morally upright person is unable to live up to even their own standards of morality, let alone God's
 - How many times have you and I judged someone for their behaviour ... yet at some point do the exact same thing?
 - Other day > guy talking on phone while driving
 - Said to myself "Get off your phone you idiot"
 - And yet my kids will tell you (and me) that I'm guilty of doing the exact same thing
 - We can't even live up to our **own** standards of morality, let alone God's
- Even our own standards of morality condemn us as moral failures

- The difference between the true Christianity and religion or moralism
- Christianity says
 - I'm lost
 - I'm a moral failure
 - I'm an outcast
 - I need Jesus to seek me out and save me
- Religion and moralism says

- I'm okay
- I'm better than others
- I can do it on my own
- I don't need Jesus

- If you and I continue to think that Christmas is good news for the religious and the moral ... then sadly
 - Not only have you completely misunderstood the reason Jesus came into the world at Christmas
 - You'll be like those people in the crowd at Jericho that Jesus walks straight past
 - Because you don't realise you're lost!
 - Because you haven't realised why Jesus Christ came into the world in the first place!

- Until you say ...
 - I'm lost ... and I desperately needed Jesus to come into world to seek me out and save **me** ... Christmas will be lost on you
 - You'll have fun, presents, food and family
 - But you'll completely miss the significance of it all

- Some of you are probably saying ...
 - "this is all pretty depressing"
 - "I thought Christmas is meant to be 'merry'"
 - "Where's the Joy to the World and all that"
 - "Where's all the harking the herald?"

- Well friends ... when you realise you're lost
 - When you realise you're a moral failure ... Christmas gives you hope > Christmas brings you joy > Christmas is good news
- Why?
 - Because this passage and the message of Christmas shows that
 - Not only does Jesus Christ show he wants to be in your life
 - Not only does he enjoy coming into the lives of broken and lost people like you and I
 - When he does ... he brings **salvation!**
- As the angel said to Joseph about Mary
 - Matthew 1:21 – *"She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*

5. How do you receive him?

- How do you get Jesus into your life?
- What Zacchaeus does is 'he wanted to see who Jesus was'
- That's not the same as saying
 - He just wanted to get a look
 - He just wanted to see what Jesus looked like
- He didn't just want to see what Jesus looked like ... he wanted to see who Jesus **was**

- Then Jesus in v6 "I am coming to your house"
- Later in v9 he says "Salvation has come to this house"
- Which shows that Jesus **is** salvation

- In fact Jesus has the audacity to say to Zacchaeus
 - not that salvation WILL come to your house
 - Nor that salvation IS come to your house ...
 - But that salvation HAS come to your house > past tense!
- Why?
 - Because I'm here > in your house > in your life ... and you welcomed me in

- And therefore being saved ... is not a matter of being good or following rules or ticking boxes ... you have to know who Jesus is
- Because salvation is coming to rest in what he has done for you
- Salvation is not because
 - Of what I have done ... but because of what he has done
 - Of who I am ... but because of who he is
 - Of my works ... but because of his works
 - Of my life ... but because of his life
 - Of my payment ... but because of his payment

- **Application**
- That's what Christianity is
- Therefore ... if you want share in the salvation he offers ... then you've got to see who Jesus is
- You've got to get into position to see who he is
- How do you do that
 - Zacchaeus climbed a tree
 - You and I have got to read the Bible

- If you're here this morning and you're still trying to work out who Jesus is and if it's worth following him ... then I want to encourage you to take home the Essential Jesus we read from this morning and read this Christmas ... so like Zacchaeus you can see who Jesus is for yourself
- Some of you might be saying
 - "Yeah, but is it all worth it?"
 - "I mean look at Zacchaeus ... he had to give up his money
 - "If I take following Jesus seriously ... I'm going to have to lose my life!"
- Yeah ... you're right
 - Following Jesus will change your life
- But you know what ... it will be totally worth it
 - Look at Zacchaeus ... he had money and wealth and financial security
 - But he was more joyful and secure and content with Jesus
- You say ... how can I know?
 - How can I be sure losing my life to Jesus is worth it?
- Because of what it cost Jesus to save lost people like you and I
 - Jesus Christ was willing to come to this earth and get lost for you!
 - The Bible tells us when Jesus went to the cross and paid the price for sin, darkness covered the land
 - On the cross, Jesus Christ was willing to be lost in the darkness for you
- When Jesus cried out "My God my God, why have you forsaken me" ...
 - In that moment, Jesus was separated from the Father
 - He was lost to him
- The reason you know it is worth putting your trust in Jesus is because he was willing go into the darkness for you and get lost from the Father
- Why would he do that?
 - Because he is wonderfully good and loves you more than you imagine
 - And he was willing to do all that in order to seek and save lost people like you and I
- If Jesus lost his life for you ... then we can know it will be worth losing your life to Jesus

6. Conclusion

- The reason for Christmas, ... the reason we celebrate ...
 - is not because of food, family, holidays or presents

- It's because we were lost
 - And yet Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost
- And that friends is the reason we celebrate today
- And my prayer is that you will celebrate today as a person who knows they were lost, but in Jesus Christ, you are found.
- Merry Christmas

PRAY