

Jesus: The Word of Ultimate Restoration

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning everyone, and very happy Christmas to you all. Excuse my voice or what's left of it, but I hope that you can find seats.

There's plenty down at the front here, so don't feel that you have to stand at the back. Well, if you were here early this morning, you'd have heard the lovely music of Bach's Christmas Oratorio, and it begins like this, with the music for the first day of Christmas.

Rejoice, exult up, glorify the days, praise what the All-Highest this day has done, set aside fear, banish lamentation, strike up a song full of joy and mirth, serve the All-Highest with glorious choirs, let us worship the name of the Lord.

Well, let's begin, shall we, in song number 352 in our blue books, 352. Do Christians awake salute the happy morn on which the Saviour of the world was born?

Amen. Amen. And that's all I tell you, have heard the same name of the God. Amen. After your heart calling, since you have heard the star, you must remember how much the find of the year, you must remember how much the Paradis for the Academy of trêen for the Johnson and microbiology to your talent.

[1 : 19] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Well, do sit and let's pray together. Let's pray. Our hearts indeed do exult with joy this morning, our gracious God, for the joyous news of Christmas, that you, our God, has come and become one of us, Emmanuel, God with us and never to leave us again.

[5 : 28] We praise you, Lord, that all that the prophets longed for, that the poets sang of, that all of faith yearned for in their hearts, did at last come true in the babe of Bethlehem.

And that you have fulfilled all that you promised to be our Savior, the one who would save us from our sins.

So, Lord, we rejoice with glad joy in the beauty of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and in his glorious face in which you have made known to us the very depths of heaven, the very nature of your own self.

So, fill us, Lord, with gladness on this great day, we pray, for we ask it in Jesus Christ, our Savior's name. Amen. Amen. Well, I'm seeing lots of people bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning.

I wonder how early some of you were up this morning. Was anybody here up before nine o'clock this morning? Oh, quite a few of you. Oh, dear. Eight o'clock?

[6 : 38] Seven o'clock? Anybody up before six o'clock? Oh, goodness me. Five o'clock?

Oh, dear. Surely not four o'clock. Oh, dear, oh, dear. There was one. I'm not going to go any further. Some of us were hardly even going to bed by then. Well, it's great, isn't it, to get up early and to rejoice on Christmas Day and to enjoy all our presents, and I'm sure a lot of feasting that's to come. But it's good, too, isn't it, to put right at the very heart of this day the joy of what it's all about, the joy of our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to read to you just a few words from the letter to the Hebrews.

It's the little passage that we've been studying on Sunday night and then last night at our Christmas Eve service, and it's one of the most wonderful little passages in Scripture. Listen to these words.

Long ago, many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

[7 : 50] He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. marvelous words about our Lord Jesus Christ, what his coming means, what his great victory seals for the world. And we're going to sing again another carol that speaks about this brightest and best of the sons of the morning, number 387.

387. The wind.

Amen. Amen.

[9 : 55] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, there you have a seat.

I want to say a few words about these verses in Hebrews that we read. If you'd like to look at them in your Bibles, there's a Bible on your chair. But on Sunday evening and on Christmas Eve last night, we were looking at these amazing words.

And we were thinking about the inconsolable longing in all of our hearts. Because God has set eternity in our hearts. And therefore the inescapable questioning of our minds.

[11 : 45] Because as human beings at heart, we have rejected and tried to reject at least that truth. For which God has made us. And so the symptoms of that are seen in all the paradoxes of our human experience.

You see, we're made for God as human beings. But by and large, we've rejected God. We exist for fellowship with God. And yet, we have put ourselves outside the place where that fellowship with God is possible.

And that's what accounts for the huge amount of isolation and loneliness and confusion about our identity that we find in this, our world. But you see, the message of Christmas is the answer from God to all of that.

Because Jesus himself is the answer. He's the answer to the deepest yearning of our human hearts. He's God's word of ultimate revelation. He's the answer to the deepest questioning of our minds.

Because he's the word of God's ultimate reason for all things. He's the answer to the great questions of life we were thinking about last night. Who am I? Where have I come from?

[12 : 53] Where am I going? Why is the world as it is? What's it all about? All of these things that are the questions that make us human. But there's another question.

And that's the question, how? How can the better world that you and I long for, that we instinctively know must be there somewhere, how can it really ever be?

How can this world, the world as we know it, ever be transformed into the world that we long for?

Well, the answer to that question is also in these verses.

And to find that answer, first of all, we have to understand what the root problem is of why the world isn't as it should be and as we would love it to be. And that's what the second half of Hebrews 1 verse 3 tells us.

And again, after making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Now that verse tells us three simple things about what Christmas really means.

[13 : 57] And I want to share them with you this morning as we continue our service. And I hope it will fill your heart with joy for the rest of the day and for the rest of the season. Here's the first.

A real curse. This world is far from being the world that we would love it to be and want it to be and long for it to be because of the real curse caused by human sin.

That's implicit in these words, isn't it? That Jesus came to make purification for sins. And that's the root problem of this world.

Paul puts it very succinctly in his letter to the Romans in chapter 5. Listen. Sin, he said, came into the world through one man and death through sin. So death spread to all men because all sinned. And death reigned. That's the curse. Mankind separated from God by sin and therefore left in a world of his own rule.

[14 : 59] And what we see around us in our world is what happens when man is left to be in charge of this world. When human beings are in the driving seat. That explains our world.

Do you remember how Genesis chapter 3 ends? God pronounces a curse, doesn't he, upon the whole world after man's rebellion. And he casts man out of the perfect environment, the place where God himself dwells.

And he puts angels with great flaming swords to guard the way so that there's no way back to God from the dark paths of sin. No merely human way at any rate.

And that's the real curse. That's what explains our world. Man says to God, God we will not have you as our ruler to dictate to us our way.

Go away. And so God says in reply, so be it. You're on your own then. If you read on to Genesis chapter 4, the very next chapter of the Bible, you'll find the personal effects of that curse.

[16:04] Do you remember the story of Cain and Abel? Cain is an individual example of what happens when we reject God. He rejected God. He started hating his brother too.

So he kills his brother out of jealousy. And Cain personally separates himself from God by his sin. He brought the curse right down on his own personal head. But did it give him the liberty he was looking for?

The freedom? The joy? Not at all. Listen to what Cain said. My punishment is greater than I can bear. Why? Well, he explains he's lost all sense of identity.

You have driven me away from the ground and from your face, said Cain. In other words, he's lost all sense of who he's created for, for God, and what he's created for.

For fulfilling work for God. He's lost all his sense of identity. He also lost all his sense of society.

Cain said, I'll be a fugitive, a wanderer in the earth.

[17:08] In other words, his relationships are a disappointment. He's restless. He can't find peace. And as a result, he says, he's lost all his sense of security. Whoever finds me, said Cain, will kill me.

In other words, his life is governed by fear of the future. By fear of people that they want to hurt him. And so, because of that, he's not really able to trust anybody, is he? He can't trust himself to people or to relationships.

Either personally or in business. There's a world full of people like Cain out there, isn't there? No sense of identity. The lost sense of society.

A lost sense of security. Doesn't that describe our world very accurately this Christmas? There's a huge amount of fear around, isn't there? A huge loss of trust in our society.

That's the root of this whole economic crisis, isn't it? No one can trust anybody to do business.

Banks can't trust one another. Workers can't trust their bosses. Nobody knows what's going to happen.

[18:07] On and on it goes, you see. But all of those things are just symptoms of something far deeper. The C word. The real curse.

Just like that other dreaded C word, isn't it? Cancer. Very often the signs, the telltale signs and symptoms, are apparently quite unrelated to the primary problem, the pathology.

Strange that a cancer can come to light just by little signs in somebody's fingers or in their eyes or something totally innocent seeming. But they're harbingers of something deep down.

Something malicious and malevolent right at the very heart of the life of the body. And that's the root cause of all of our problems and symptoms in society too.

It's the fact of human sin. And it's the guilt of human sin in every one of our lives. And that's why the world is as it is. And the telltale symptoms appear all over the place in our lives in all sorts of different ways.

[19:12] In the restlessness. In the anxiety of our spirits. In the fear for the future. The unsettledness. The longing for something more. The frustration that we have that we don't see the world as we want it to be.

The despair that we so often feel at the world as it is. But the root cause. The cancer at the heart of it all. Is the curse.

But you see the message of Christmas is the answer to that curse. And it's the only answer.

Because Jesus answers the deepest problems of our human lives.

He came to make purification for sin. And that's why Christmas is a message of joy to the world. He came, says the hymn, to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.

He came to make an end to sin. I want to say something more about that in a minute. But let's stop and sing. Number 363. Joy to the world, the Lord has come.

[20:17] Let the heart of the Lord be the King. He makes his blessings flow far as the curse is found. Number 363. Fix the speech. Fix me now. available before the Lord be the King.

If you shall principle. In that name, of the Lord be the King. Give me love, the Lord be the King. Let His brothers Christ. And any man pray to them. Give me love now.

so um The Savior of the Lord, the Savior of the Lord, Of the earth and peace, and the earth and grace, With Jesus' coming joy, with Jesus' coming joy, With Jesus' coming joy.

The Savior of the Lord, the Savior of the Lord, The Lord, the Savior of the Lord, He comes to make His mercy fall, Where He is mercy fall, where He is mercy fall, Where He is mercy fall, where He is mercy fall, Who He is mercy fall, where He is mercy fall, The glory of the Lord is the Lord of the Rings The glory of the Lord is the Lord The glory of the Lord is the Lord The glory of the Lord is the Lord of the Rings

Jesus came because there is a real curse. And that's the reality that explains our world.

[22 : 46] Nothing else does explain the state of our world but that. But there's more. Jesus brings real cleansing.

He made purification for sins. That word means a washing, a cleansing from pollution, from something that sticks and stains so badly that it causes you to be separated, to be cut off from all the places and all the people that you want to be near.

The term used, for example, when Jesus cleansed lepers. Leprosy, you see, in the ancient world was a pollution. It wasn't just a disease.

It separated you. It excluded you from all human society. It condemned people, not just to disease and misery, but to a total isolation, to a subhuman existence.

In a world marked by loneliness, by exclusion, by separation. And no human action could possibly ever bring cleansing. No human action could bring the restoration to real human life that a leper so desperately wanted.

[24 : 00] Everybody knew that only God could do something like that. Of course, that's when you read the Gospels. That's why people were so astounded that Jesus could cleanse lepers. It was a sign that clearly he was God.

But you see, so it is for sin. Sin is a stench. It's a terrible, indelible stain that keeps humanity separated and away from God.

Keeps us outsiders in the world that actually we were made for. Keeps us on the wrong side of the door of the real world. The real place of fellowship with God.

It keeps us, as C.S. Lewis would say, in the shadowlands. In a kind of monochrome world. But separated off from the glorious technicolor of the world that God really wanted us to inhabit.

The world that's full of the beauty and the joy and the wonder of all his creation, but without any of the pollution of sin. But the message of Christmas is that Jesus came to bring real cleansing.

[25 : 06] He made purification for sins. Something that no human being could do, he did. Because he was no mere human being. He was God.

He was Emmanuel, God with us. That's why the Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 8, that God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.

By sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and forced sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.

That is, he came and took our place and took our punishment and became himself the punishment for sin.

As the hymn says, he took the blame and bore the wrath, and therefore we stand forgiven at the cross. He dealt with the root cause of all of our problems, with all of our human lives.

[26 : 04] The root cause that is the guilt of human sin. And there is real cleansing. And as a result, we do have a way back to God from the dark paths of sin.

The stench, the stain is gone. It's purified. He has made purification for sins. And therefore, that means that the gate to the place of God's real dwelling, his home, has been opened to us.

The flaming angels with their swords have opened the way. A few years ago, some of the young folk in the congregation here organized a trip to go paintballing.

And I had the great folly of agreeing to go with them. This was before Edward Lobb informed me that I was now an old man and shouldn't be doing things like that. But anyway, we went out to this place near the airport, and I had a day of paintballing.

I nearly killed myself. I nearly broke my leg in one place. But the whole field that we were in was like one great almighty bog, a stinking bog.

[27 : 08] And we were running around up to our waists in the most disgusting, foul-smelling mud. Well, I arrived back home and was greeted with no great joy at the front door.

I wasn't allowed to pass over the front door. I was sent round the back door. I wasn't even allowed to come in the back door. I had to strip down to my underwear out in the garden. I was hosed down outside by my wife.

And even then, I was only allowed in to go straight to the downstairs shower to get fully and completely scrubbed and my clothes immediately thrown in the bin. And only after that extreme cleansing was I allowed back into the place where I normally live.

And that's what this is about. Real cleansing. Getting rid of the stench and the stain. Getting rid of it enough to satisfy a holy God who will not sully his home with even the slightest trace of that which is sinful, that which is wrong and out of place and degrades humanity.

But what Christmas means is that Jesus brings real cleansing. He made purification for sins.

[28 : 34] One more thing. But again, another carol. This time about the child in the manger who inherits all our demerits, all our transgressions that we might find cleansing.

It's number 370. Number 370. Child in the manger. CUMBLIC MARCH CUMBLIC MARCH cosmos suc "-so- Ryan ascension Water Scruption Radio Amen.

Amen. Amen.

There is a real curse in the state of our world and the needs of our lives can only be adequately explained by that sad truth. But there is real cleansing.

He made purification for sins. And that means that the joyful message of Christmas is that there is also real certainty. Real certainty in the future of this world.

[31 : 11] And real certainty about the future of all of our lives and our own personal world if we also know and love Jesus Christ. Because in Jesus, God has not only spoken his ultimate word to man, but Jesus has completed God's ultimate work for man.

It is finished. That was the last cry Jesus made on the cross, wasn't it? Because his great redeeming work, his cleansing work was achieved.

And that is also what is signified in these words in Hebrews 1 verse 3. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. He sat down.

Why? Because his work is accomplished forever. There is nothing else needed for man's restoration to God. The cleansing is accomplished. The door is opened now.

That's why later on in Hebrews 10 verse 14 it says this. For by a single offering, Jesus perfected for all time those who are being sanctified, who are being purified, made holy, made clean.

[32 : 26] Do you see? For all time. So there's certainty. There's no fear at all that somehow something extra, something else has to be done to secure our future, to ensure that everything will be alright on the day when God calls us before his throne of judgment.

No, the future is certain because Jesus has done everything necessary already. Having made purification for sins, he sat down in the place of glory and honor.

Every year, at least up to now anyway, our family has been given annual membership of the National Trust by my in-laws.

And we're very thankful for it. We enjoy it greatly. We love going to visit some of these places, especially Clayne Castle. It's one of our favorites. But it needs renewal every year. I don't know if we'll get it this year.

I hope we will. We'll find out later today, I suspect. But if not, well, we can't be certain, can we, of entry, not without paying something more next time we go to Clayne Castle. But you know, my in-laws, years ago, they took out life membership of the National Trust.

[33 : 36] I wonder if some of you did. Very, very expensive now. They got on a special offer. But that just means that they don't have to think any more ever about renewing it. Not ever.

It's done. Forever. For life. They can turn up at any National Trust property for the rest of their lives anywhere in the country. And there's never anything more to do. And that's the message of Christmas, friends.

Jesus has made purification for sins forever. There is certainty. That word forever is one of the favorite words all through this letter to the Hebrews.

Seven times we're told Jesus is a priest forever. That is because of his once and for all and forever cleansing. He has secured the right forever to entry into the royal palace of heaven.

And he's secured the right forever to bring all of those who are his true family into that place. That puts lifetime family membership of the National Trust into perspective, doesn't it?

[34 : 46] Good though it is. That's why Hebrews 6 verse 19 says this. We have this. We have this good news of the gospel as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.

A hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain. That's the imagery from the temple. The place behind the curtain is the holy place where God himself dwells.

We can enter there because Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever.

The high priest, the only one who can have entry and take you into the presence of God. And in chapter 7 it goes on to say this. He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Forever. See, there's real certainty. Real and abundant hope for the future. Because in Jesus God has spoken his ultimate word to man and in Jesus God has accomplished his ultimate work for our salvation.

[36 : 01] Jesus is God's word of ultimate restoration. He answers the deepest problems of our human lives. He brings real certainty for the future because he has brought real cleansing from all of our past.

And as he's driven away forever the specter of the real curse that has overshadowed this world since the very first days of man's rebellion, he brings restoration.

And that's the joyous message of Christmas. The real answer, the only answer to the solitude, to the angst, to the estrangement in our world, the only answer is the cleansing that brings forgiveness and real fellowship with God through Jesus Christ.

And Christmas, of course, is just the beginning. It's true that the best is yet to be. And it won't be until Jesus returns forever to make everything that he has already made certain, to make it real in our experience.

But it's real nonetheless because of Christmas. And just as the snowdrops in the depths of winter will soon be poking up in our lawns to remind us, however hard it is to believe, to remind us that spring is just around the corner and that summer will certainly follow spring as night follows day.

[37 : 22] Well, so Christmas is the harbinger of a future, of a real summer of glory that's certain, that shall come because Jesus came first at Christmas.

There is real certainty in the message of this joyous day. I do hope that's something that you rejoice in this Christmas day. If not, if not, it's a gift that can be yours this Christmas freely from God.

And there's no greater gift that he wants you to have and to enjoy and to rejoice in forever. No greater gift than the certainty that comes in the cleansing of Jesus Christ from the terrible curse of our human sin.

You will make sure, won't you? You will make sure that Jesus answers that deepest need of your life this Christmas. Let's pray.

Lord our God, you sent your Son to show us the brightness of your glorious face and to show us the wonder of your love in saving lost mankind.

[38 : 33] How we thank you that on this day of all days we rejoice in the certainty of the cleansing that is in Jesus and therefore have hope and joy for the future.

So fill our hearts with song and with gladness this day we pray. For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Well, let's end our service by singing number 359.

359. Hark! The herald angels sing Glory to the newborn King. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Oh Our war I set our board Like we ever loved the Lord It is the holy blood of each other Yeah.

[41 : 00] Yeah. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Now may the blessing of God Almighty and the wonderful smile which streams from his face in the message of Christmas. May he be your strength and your joy this great day and forever. Amen.

[43 : 03] Amen. And a very happy Christmas to you all. Thank you.