

Christmas Day Service _ Whole

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 December 2015

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Welcome Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2 : 54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[5 : 24] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[7 : 54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[10 : 24] Thank you.

Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[12 : 54] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[15 : 24] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[17 : 54] And so, that's a of the world that God made as creator was that it was a world, a whole cosmos full of the riches of right relationships, rich and wonderful relationships in every sphere of being.

At the very end of Genesis chapter 1, the first chapter of the Bible, the whole world is summed up like this, and God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

That's because God is a relational God. God is in the very essence of his being. He is Trinity. He is three in one and one in three. He is in perfect, eternal relationship with himself, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, perfect in love, perfect in faithfulness to one another.

By the way, that's why the Bible can say that God is love in himself. There is existing perfect love relationship, even without any need for any other created beings or things. If God's not Trinity, if God is not in himself relational and able to love, then God couldn't possibly be called love, could he? In order to love, he would need others, so God would in some way be lacking in himself. That's why, by the way, the Islamic concept of God, Allah, cannot possibly be love in himself because he is only one. Therefore, in order to love another, he would have to create. He would be in need of something else in order to be perfect in love. But the God of the Bible is love in himself.

He is the relational God. And so naturally, of course, the world that he creates is a world that reflects his own nature. He is the covenant God. He's the Lord. That's what his name means. He's the God of covenant faithfulness, faithful in all relationships, utterly and perfectly. And the world that God creates is a world that was in perfect relationship with him and in perfect harmony with itself. Everything was very, very good. God's shalom, God's peace, God's well-being, God's perfect harmony rules in all the world that he made. Everything was characterized by right relationships, creatures in right relationship to their environment, creatures in right relationship to man, man in right relationship to other men and women. And of course, above all, all human beings in right relationship with God.

[21 : 21] That's what the first two chapters of the Bible tell us. That's the picture that they paint so vividly. A rich and wonderfully glorious universe. And if you think about it, we know that it is, isn't it? Rich and wonderfully perfect relationships with other people that are our greatest treasures in life. That's what we cherish the most in our whole human lives, isn't it? We recognize that if there are people who are cold, who are disinterested in having relationships with any other people, we recognize that they have psychopathology, don't they? There's something wrong with them. But for all normal people, it's not things that grieve us most when we lose them. It's people. It's relationships.

And we know that. It might be painful to lose money or jewels in a theft. It might be painful to lose your house even in a house fire. That's a terrible thing. But how much more painful to lose a loved one thing? Through the rupture of a friendship, through the rupture of a marriage, these are terribly, terribly painful things. And of course, the greatest robbery of all that any of us can ever experience in our lives is that awful theft of death itself.

Now, that's the greatest impoverishment for us in our world, isn't it? I don't think there'll be very many people shedding a tear at the Christmas table today because it's their first Christmas without their favorite car or without their favorite laptop or without their favorite bracelet or whatever it might be. But there'll be many tears this Christmas, won't there, when it's the first Christmas without a beloved husband or wife or father or mother or son or daughter.

That's true, isn't it? The poverty of relationship that so marks the world today is when we've lost something so wonderful like that. And there is so much estrangement in our world, so much loneliness, so much misery, so much real grief. And friends, that is the impoverishment, the great poverty that has come into our world because of sin. The world that was created full of rich and satisfying and wonderful relationships and lasting relationships has been marred.

Genesis chapter 3 tells us plainly that it was man's relationship against God that destroyed his relationship with God and therefore, as a result, all other relationships. We are made in God's very image, but we have defaced it and we've scorned him. And the result was total rupture. Genesis 3 verse 8 says that that man wanted to keep away from God altogether. They hid from God when he presents himself in the garden.

[24 : 32] And the result was that God cursed all our other rich relationships too, just to show human beings how disastrous it is to rupture that relationship with God, to freeze him out of his world.

We won't go into it now, but you'll remember the curse. A curse on the relationship between man and his environment. Cursed will be the ground because of you, says God. And cursed between humans and other creatures.

And between humans themselves, male and female, vying with one another for the mastery. And of course, above all, the great curse of death itself. Removal from the presence of God. Removal from the tree of life.

The life that can only be found in the presence of God. And so man was condemned to mortality. From dust you were made and to dust you'll return.

Listen to how Genesis chapter 3 ends. You'll know these words and will have heard them many times, I'm sure. Therefore, the Lord God sent man from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.

[25 : 46] He drove out the man. And at the east of the Garden of Eden, he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

God curses man who has been the crown of his glorious creation. His own image, his ruler for the world. The one who has everything.

God makes to have nothing. From being a ruler, he's left as a serf, as a slave. God sent him out of the garden to slavishly work the ground.

And God consigns his existence to that of mortal flesh, which will go back to the dust from which it came. And God puts the fiery angelic beings with their flaming swords to guard the way to the tree of life.

In other words, he shuts him out of the realm of life and condemns him to the place of death.

Remember those three things.

[26 : 51] God deposing man from his throne of glory as he ruled the world and demoting him to a servant bondage on earth and to mere mortal flesh.

And condemning him from death to death. Shut out from life eternal. Because that's highly significant. When we begin to think about the second thing that Paul says.

You see, not only does Paul say that we humans were once rich, but were made poor against our will because of our sin. Paul tells us that Jesus also was rich, do you see?

And yet he became poor too, but not, notice, because of his sin, but because of our sin. And not, notice, against his will, but out of his free choice for our sakes.

Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. What does that mean?

[27 : 57] Well, we'll think about it after we've sung again a carol that picks up these wonderful words. Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake became so poor.

Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about.

Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about.

Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about.

Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about. Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about.

[29 : 24] Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about.

Lord, you were rich beyond all splendor, and yet for love's sake he was all about.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Because of our sins. Perhaps the best commentary on Paul's words there are words that he wrote elsewhere to the church in Philippi.

[31 : 03] Just listen to what he says to them in these words in Philippians chapter 2. Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. See, Paul is speaking about the existence of the Son of God before all worlds in the glory of heaven.

He was rich in splendor. Not so much rich in the accompaniments of royalty, gold and silver and jewels and power and all of these things, but rather rich in the wonderful and intimate joy of relationship with the Father in the oneness of the everlasting Godhead.

And though he had all of this by right, Paul says he chose for our sake to become poor. And that's the mystery, isn't it, that's expressed so poignantly in some of the most wonderful Christmas carols that we love to sing.

[32 : 50] He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all. Mild, he laid his glory by.

Our God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man. He became poor, the reigning Lord of heaven and earth became poor.

That's the mystery that Paul is speaking about in these words. But listen carefully to the way he describes this poverty. Being in the form of God, he says, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, to be held on to, but made himself nothing.

Man, remember, is created as the image of God, the glory of God, but was cursed because of his sinful rebellion.

God made him nothing for his sin. But Christ, the true glory and image of God in his very essence and being, made himself nothing.

[34 : 04] For our sake, he became poor. And what does Paul say that that meant for the eternal Son of God? He says he took the form of a servant, became a bond slave on earth.

And he says he was born in the likeness of man, in human form. That is, he took on a body of this earth, a body of dust, mortal flesh like ours.

And he humbled himself, we're told, further still, even to death itself, even death on a cross under God's curse. You see, isn't that striking?

The curse of slavery and mortality and the condemnation of death. The very curse that man brought upon himself for his sin.

Christ, the Lord of heaven, took upon himself voluntarily for our sin. We were made nothing because of our terrible rejection of God.

[35 : 09] And yet he made himself nothing. Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. With the infinite depth of poverty that took him away from the riches and the glory of fellowship with his Father in heaven.

As the beloved, as the only begotten Son. And it took him to earth, this earth, under a curse. And to a death where he plumbed the depths of eternal poverty.

For our sake, says the apostle. And as someone has said, the measure of how poor he became is seen not in the lowly manger of Bethlehem.

Although, yes, it is reflected there. It's foreshadowed there. But in the desolate cry from the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

He became poor in the depths of the poverty of sin's terrible separation from God for our sake, says the gospel.

[36 : 24] And so that we, do you see, by his poverty might become rich. Let's pause for a moment again as we sing a hymn of the great poverty that met the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ in his birth, even in Bethlehem.

Where there was no room for him who left his throne at infinite cost to seek us out. There was no room in Bethlehem. There was no room in Bethlehem.

There was no room in Bethlehem.

There was no room for Him purposes. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

[39 : 14] Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Jesus Christ came into the world at the first Christmas to be a savior from sin's dire poverty that we might know the riches that are beyond telling.

The riches of a deep and intimate and everlasting relationship. The God of God, our father in heaven, God, the creator of this world, God, the Lord of time and eternity.

The God that we have abandoned. The God that we have scorned and spat at. The God that he came to bring us home to, to know and to cherish and to love.

For in Christ, God was reconciling this world to himself, not counting man's trespasses against them is what Paul says in another place.

[40 : 47] For our sake, he became poor so that you, by his poverty, might become rich. Or as Paul put it yet another way in another letter also to the Corinthian church.

For our sake, for our sake, for our sake, for our sake, he made him who knew no sin to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That is restored in rich, right relationship with God himself. That we might have reconciliation. That's what the Bible calls it.

Reconciliation now in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have become rich in him. And then one day when Jesus returns, at last, we will join in the right relationships of a wholly renewed cosmos forever and ever.

In new bodies, in new life, in restoration of everything that was impoverished by the rebellion of man. The richness of a new creation at last, complete in Christ.

[42 : 00] When no longer shall thorns infest the ground. When no longer shall sins and sorrows grow. Where fields and floods and rocks and hills and plains.

When all nature will repeat the sounding joy of at last his blessings flowing far as the curse had been found. Across the whole world.

And the glories of his righteousness and the wonders of his love will fill this world as the waters cover the sea. That is the promise of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's all because for your sake he became poor. The first Adam grasped at life.

He grasped at the riches that belong to God. He grasped at the tree in the heart of the garden. But what he laid hold of was death.

[42 : 58] Condemnation. Supreme poverty. But the last Adam. Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven. He grasped hold of death.

He grasped hold of supreme poverty for our sake. In order that we might at last grasp hold of everlasting life.

Friends, that is the message of Christmas. That is the gospel of Christ. We have in him a savior from sin's dire poverty.

A savior who has once again opened the gates of paradise. Opened the gates of heaven itself for everyone who will heed his call. So well might we sing.

Lord, you are God beyond all praising. Yet for love's sake became a man. Stooping so low. But sinners raising heavenwards by your eternal plan.

[44 : 01] Lord, you are God beyond all praising. Yet for love's sake became a man. Friends, if you've understood that.

If you've got a hold of that. This Christmas. Then the Christmas gospel has got a hold on you. And there is joy to the world. There's joy to your world.

Because God has come. The one who will make you rich. The one who will make you rich beyond all splendor. In receiving the great gift of the joy of everlasting life.

And the joy of everlasting love. In the presence of a God who made you. And who so loved you that he came.

And embraced poverty itself. That you might be made rich. I hope he is yours this Christmas. If he's not yours this Christmas.

[45 : 00] You can make him yours. This very day. That is what he wants. That is why he came. It is the great desire in the heart of God himself. That people like you and me.

Should find the riches that he came to bring. He longs to share his rich life with you. He longs and the whole of heaven longs to rejoice.

In your homecoming. In your sharing. In the riches of the one who is beyond splendor. Jesus Christ. Came into this world to be a savior.

From sin's dire poverty. Don't let the savior pass you by this Christmas. Join him. And join his life.

Amen. Well we're going to sing. To close our time this morning. The great hymn of joy. Joy to the world. The Lord is come. Let earth receive her king.

[46 : 03] Let every heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing. Our truth.

The joy of the Lord is full, At one isowe's joy. The joy of the Lord, He has a joyque park, I have told him they shall take home, And I have told him, My children shall obtain Eddie responsible.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[48 : 25] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Well, let me wish you a very happy Christmas.

And so may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit be with you all now and always.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.