

The Truth About Christmas

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Preacher: Phillip Jensen

[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn to the scriptures now, and first of all to Isaiah chapter 59. And we're going to read then afterwards from John's Gospel. And that gives me the opportunity to welcome our guest preacher this morning, Philip Jensen, who is with us all the way from Sydney, Australia.

Philip's been with us with his wife Helen for a few days. He's been teaching some of our ministers in training and meeting with our staff. And Philip, it's a great joy to welcome you again, especially joyful to have Helen with you this time.

You've been such a friend of our congregation. We consider you one of us, and we're delighted to have you here in Glasgow and very much look forward to hearing you speaking to us this morning. So if you've turned up Isaiah chapter 59, page 617 in the Visitor's Bibles, I'm going to read a little from the end of chapter 59 at verse 14 and a few verses from the beginning of chapter 60.

And God looks at his world and indeed at his own nation. And this is what he sees.

Justice is turned back and righteousness stands afar off, for truth has stumbled in the public squares. And uprightness cannot enter.

[1 : 1 4] Truth is lacking. And he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. The Lord saw it and it displeased him that there was no justice.

And he saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no one to intercede. Then his own arm brought salvation. And his righteousness upheld him.

He put on righteousness as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head. Look down to chapter 60, verse 1.

Arise, shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples. But the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you.

And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. Amen.

[2 : 1 7] This is the word of the Lord. Well, do take up your Bibles and turn with me this time to the New Testament and to the Gospel of John.

And we're going to read together in John's Gospel, chapter 18, from verse 28 to the end. That's page 904. Page 904, if you have one of the church visitor's Bibles.

John, chapter 18, at verse 28. Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters.

It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters so that they would not be defiled but could eat the Passover. So Pilate went outside to them.

And he said, What accusation do you bring against this man? They answered him, If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you. Pilate said to them, Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.

[3 : 2 2] The Jews said to him, It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death. This was to fulfill the word that Jesus had spoken to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, Are you the king of the Jews? Jesus answered, Do you say this of your own accord or did others say it to you about me?

Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over 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 have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from this world. And Pilate said to him, So you are a king.

Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born. And for this purpose I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

[4 : 29] Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. Pilate said to him, What is truth? After he'd said this, he went back outside to the Jews and told them, I find no guilt in him.

But you've accustomed that I should release one man to you at the Passover. So do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? They cried out again, Not this man, but Barabbas. And Barabbas was a robber.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, thank you for the invitation to be here.

As you can hear, I'm an Australian. And as you can see, I'm an Australian because I don't wear suits. Australians can't wear suits. Because every time you see an Australian in a suit, you see the defendant.

And so, excuse my sartorial inelegance here. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, do help us to understand your word that we might live to your praise and glory.

[5 : 39] We do pray, Heavenly Father, to help us to understand your son and why he has come into this world. That we might rejoice in joy over his great victory for us.

And we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. There's a great difference between myth and truth.

Myths may try to contain and teach some truths about life, but they are fundamentally fiction. They are not true.

They're not the truth. A few years ago, in New York Times Square, the American Atheists Association put up a billboard with a picture of Santa Claus and of Jesus on the cross.

And the words in the billboard, I make clear for you, keep the merry, dump the myth. Myth. So this morning, let's ask the questions about truth and myth.

[6 : 43] What are the facts of history? What actually did or didn't happen in the past? Was there a Santa Claus? Or a St. Nicholas? Or is it all myth?

Was there a man called Jesus who died by crucifixion? And part of the question of the facts of history is what we can know about the facts of history.

That is, there's a slight difference between what actually happened and what we can tell happened. History means both what did happen and our recounting of what happened.

Let's start with the facts of Santa Claus. Leaving aside reindeers, chimneys, elves, Mrs. Claus and all the other stuff.

The history behind the myth is supposed to be that of St. Nicholas, a bishop of Mara in modern Turkey, who was said to have been born in 270 AD.

[7 : 45] However, the Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church says scarcely anything is historically certain about him. And the New International Dictionary of the Christian Church says very little is known about Nicholas.

Tradition has it that he was imprisoned and persecuted during the persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian. and after release, it was said that he attended the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD.

However, this is most improbable as he's not in any of the early lists of bishops present at the Council nor referred to in the writings of Athanasius.

The earliest reference we have to him is a church built in his honour in 565 AD, that is about 300 years after he's reputed to have been born.

His popularity rose when some people in Bari in South Italy claimed to have found his remains in 1087, that is 800 years after his birth.

[8 : 55] I'm not sure we should call St Nicholas a myth, more likely a legend, an exaggerated story on the basis of some events about which we know very little.

There's some events. It's likely that he existed, but it has been built and built and built and built and built. It's a legend. But Santa Claus, no, that's a myth.

It's a fixious story trying to cover up some, trying to express some deeper meaning, although the present Santa Claus is not too deep. But compare, or rather contrast, this with Jesus, the one portrayed by the atheists as the crucified myth.

What are the facts about Jesus? We're informed in the first century non-Christian sources, both Roman and Jewish, as well as in the Christian resources, that Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem by the Roman procurator of Judea at the time, Pontius Pilate.

This isn't a matter of legend that grew and grew over time, but is consistently reported from within the very generation in which it happened.

[10 : 17] As indeed is the reporting of the more extraordinary events of his resurrection, which is not only reported within that generation, but consistently reported as the reason for the massive cultural change amongst the Jews who embraced Christianity, giving up Saturday, Sabbath, receiving man, a man as God, accepting God in three persons.

That is huge changes for a group of Jews to undertake. And their reason, they say, the resurrection of the man Jesus, crucified unto Pontius Pilate.

It's also reported the reason why there were enough Christians in Rome just 30 years after Jesus' death for Nero the emperor to blame the Christians for the burning of Rome.

What is it that led to that many people in a completely new religion be so numerous to be known by the emperor and so disliked as to be able to be blamed for the cause of this fire?

See, I agree with the atheists. We should dump the myth and we should keep the merry. But if you want to dump the myth, then get rid of Santa Claus.

[11 : 51] And if you want to keep the merry, then discover Jesus who takes happiness and merriment to a new level. Joy to the world, the Lord is come.

Let the earth receive her king. Joy to the world, the saviour reigns. Let men, their songs employ. No more let sins and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground.

He comes to make his blessings flow. He rules the world with truth and grace. We've got a lot to sing about. Joyful singing, great singing about the wonderful thing that has happened in the coming of Jesus.

For he creates the merriment of Christmas. For the claim of Christmas is that God, in the person of Jesus, came into the world overcoming our problems and our issues and bringing life, life to the full.

Jesus brought a whole new relationship with God based not on our merit and our morality, which would be a disaster if it was based on mine, but based on forgiveness and rebirth, which is worth rejoicing about.

[13 : 12] A new way of life that has transformed millions of people around the world down the centuries, transformed whole societies and brings joy and happiness that finds its expression in the marvellous music that we can sing, the marvellous singing of the carols at Christmas time.

We are the people of song because we have the joy of life in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Joy to the world indeed.

So I'm with the atheists. Dump the myth, keep the merry. Dump the Santa Claus and keep the Lord Jesus, the merriment he brings.

Jesus. But the Jesus, the atheist's image was not the happy baby in the crib with the animals all around and all the rest of our carols, but the crucified one, dying, tortured Messiah.

So let's go back again to the history. This time let's go back to the history of Pontius Pilate. Just in this, in the last month or so, the Israeli scholars have announced that they've been able to decipher an inscription on a ring.

[14 : 36] They found the ring back in the 1960s in a place, Herodium, Herod's palace, but they've never been able to decipher the inscription that's inside.

However, with new photographic technology, they're able to find out what actually was written on the inside of this ring. And surprise, surprise, it says, of Pilate.

Extraordinary. It's only the second time we've found an artifact referring to the Emperor Pilate himself. But we've always known about him from both outside the Bible and inside the Bible.

Outside the New Testament, Pilate is known as the Roman procurator of Judea. He was appointed by Emperor Tiberius in 21 AD as procurator, governor.

He had enormous powers. He had a small army at his disposal. Yet, he's hardly remembered in history except for his contact with this prisoner of Jesus.

[15 : 39] Because, frankly, Judea was not the best posting to get if you're a Roman official on the make. I don't know how to describe it in Scotland, but, you know, from an Australian point of view, he was the governor of Tasmania.

Appointed from the Queen in England, Tasmania is a long way. I mean, the next stop is Antarctica. I'm sorry if there's Tasmanians amongst you.

We love you. You're all part of it. You know, do forgive me. Pardon me, but Judea was not where you want to be, really. But he is recorded.

And, of course, he's recorded by the Jews because Judea was homeland for them. So Josephus, the first century Jewish writer, he wrote of how Pilate antagonised the Jews from his arrival.

And Philo, another Jewish writer of the time, recounts how he continued to annoy the Jews. He was violently oppressive in the way in which he ruled over Judea.

[16 : 43] Philo described him as, by nature, rigid and stubbornly harsh. and of spiteful disposition and exceeding wrathful man.

Philo also speaks of the bribes, the acts of pride, the acts of violence, the outrages, the causes, the cases of spiteful treatment, the constant murders without trial, ceaseless and most grievous brutality.

this picture that the Jews paint of Pilate actually is in complete agreement with what you see inside the New Testament.

It's not like, you know, they describe Pilate one way and then when you open up the pages of your Bible it seems to be a completely different person. It's the same man we're talking about. Come with our Bibles to that passage we read earlier if you've got a church Bible it's page 904 in John 18.

There's only a couple of verses we're going to be looking at it but we may as well see it that it's there. See, in John's Gospel for example we see a man famed for his miscarriage of justice seeking in political cunning to run a court where an innocent man can be executed without qualm and more than executed crucified that cruel Roman way of stamping their authority on the conquered peoples that they were oppressing in their empire.

[18 : 18] It was against Roman law to crucify a Roman citizen to put him up on a stake making a public spectacle of him in shameful nudity slowly dying in terrible agony as the birds gathered around to gorge themselves on the flesh that was there.

No Roman could ever suffer such ignominy. This was Pilate's choice for Jews and for this Jewish man in particular this Jesus of Nazareth.

But our Bible reading describes a trial a trial that really is Pilate's trial as he faces his little 15 minutes of fame we don't know anything really much about him except for this and as he fails so comprehensively.

The question of the trial really turned on who is king. Jesus is accused of claiming to be the king of the Jews. The Jews understood that that's what Jesus claimed to be the Christ the Messiah the long awaited king of the Jews the king of the kingdom of God that's what Jesus was claiming and the Jews didn't want any part of it.

They didn't believe these claims they didn't want to him they rejected this traveling Galilean teacher. So they accused Jesus before the Roman officials of being treacherous of being a revolutionary of challenge Romans authority and sovereignty.

[19 : 53] Passover was a high time of political unrest in Palestine.

There were lots of Jewish revolutionary movements at the time. A group of terrorists called the Sakari which in English you translated as the dagger men because they had these little daggers that they kept in their cloaks and they kept assassinating people with them.

They were terrorists in our parlance today. They were there back in Palestine in the first century in Jerusalem and of course the city was filled to overflowing with pilgrims.

It generally at Passover time trebled in population and remember we're talking about a little city with narrow streets and alleys and people crowded in upon each other and the place was full of nationalistic revolutionary sentiment.

It's not surprising that Pilate was a bit paranoid. I mean he was concerned whether Jesus was the king of the Jews. Look at verse 33 there.

[21 : 07] So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him are you the king of the Jews? That's the question. But Jesus doesn't respond as Pilate expects.

For Jesus spoke in verse 36 of a different kingdom. Jesus answered my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world my servants would have been fighting that I might not be delivered over to the Jews but my kingdom is not of this world.

And when Pilate challenged him directly in verse 37 saying so you are a king I've caught you you are saying you're a king. Jesus replied you say that I'm a king for this purpose I was born for this purpose I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to me. There verse 37. Poor Pilate he found the province of Judea hard to handle but it was nothing compared to this prisoner in front of him.

He was really difficult. The way he kept on turning the conversation on him, turning the tables on him. And throughout this account of the trial it's almost humorous at points, Pilate demonstrates the immoral hypocrisy of political government.

[22 : 36] While at the same time the Jewish leaders they demonstrate the immoral hypocrisy of organised religion. You see both of those immoral hypocrisies in this little passage.

They demand to remain ceremonially pure. They can't go into the Roman house because it's Passover time. If they go in there they'll be defiled, they won't be able to enjoy the Passover meal.

So they don't want to have anything that would defile them religiously while they organised the murder of an innocent man. religiously pure, totally corrupt.

The Jewish leaders keep pressuring Pilate. They don't come into the court lest they'll be defiled. And so Pilate, the ruler of Judea, keeps on having to do shuffled diplomacy.

Running inside to talk to the Jews to find out what they want. Then he comes back and talks to Jesus about it. And then Jesus gives answers he's not expecting. So back he goes out to talk to the Jews and gets further information.

[23 : 42] Then he comes reading back here. Who's in charge? The little bloke who's running back and forward between them? Or Jesus who's giving answers that he can't work out what they mean?

Or the Jews who are raising questions that he doesn't understand? Who's in charge? Pilate never looks like he's in charge. He looks like he's losing control of the situation.

Poor Pilate actually looks like he's on trial. for he finds the man has no guilt. He's innocent. There's nothing wrong with him. There's nothing wrong with the accused.

He knows it's a Jewish plot. He can't work out what they're plotting. They gave him over to me. So what are they plotting against him?

Or against me? That they want me to crucify him? He doesn't understand what it's about. after all this harmless looking man is hardly a political threat.

[24 : 40] How can it be a political threat if the Jews have delivered him into my hands? I mean he hasn't got the Jews behind him to lead a revolt.

They gave him up. He has no army. He has no militaristic pretensions. I mean to see this man as a king it's just laughable frankly.

Pilate's only satisfaction he gets. He gets it in the next chapter actually. We didn't read it. He put over the sign of Jesus when he crucified him. He put the sign declaring this is the king of the Jews.

Which was what the Jews accused him of and what the Romans do to opposition kings. And anyway it's the kind of pathetic king that the Jews would come up with.

You can see Pilate wriggling to appease everybody. Politician you see through and through. He tries it by pardoning Jesus as a Passover goodwill to the Jewish people.

[25 : 51] But all that came out of it was it meant he was forced to release Barabbas. The robber. Who according to Luke's gospel was more than a robber he was a murderer and an insurrectionist.

In order to do this deal which failed he wound up releasing a revolutionary who was likely to kill him. I mean that is really smart politics.

You could get that out of Canberra, out of Sydney, out of Westminster, out of all kinds of places couldn't you? That kind of clever politics. Now you know I'm an Australian you've got that now.

And we celebrate Christmas in mid-summer. Bright sunshine, great heat, lighting candles while the sun's still up to sing carols because we can't find our way.

Whatever silly reason people like candles. And so as you hear me as Australian you say yeah he's lost the plot completely hasn't he? He's giving an Easter talk and it's Christmas.

[26 : 58] He really is out of sync in the wrong hemisphere at this time. He doesn't understand. But look again. This passage has the claim of Christmas written into it.

It's the claim of Christmas that Jesus made in his response to Pilate verse 37. Then Pilate said to him so you are a king?

Jesus answered you say that I'm a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who's of the truth listens to my voice. Did you see the Christmas claim that is there? For this purpose I was born.

he was born. He was a man. It's critical to the whole claim of Christianity that Jesus was an historical figure. Jesus was a man. He wasn't a mythical character but a real man of flesh and blood that like any other man could be killed by crucifixion.

[28 : 06] he was celebrating his birth. It wasn't necessarily the 25th of December. We have a 1 in 365 chance of being right about the birthday.

We don't know the exact date. It was sometime before 4 BC he was born. That is Jesus Christ was born before Christ. That's because we know he was born in the time of King Herod the Great who died in 4 BC and that the medieval dating system got it wrong.

It was done by the venerable Bede who was an Englishman so what would you expect? There you go. But we know he was born in Bethlehem raised in Nazareth and fully human.

A man. Yet the claim of Christmas is more than he was born. It's also that he was born with a purpose. For this purpose I was born.

And more he says to Pilate in verse 37 for this purpose I have come into the world. This was the repeated claim of Jesus and this is why his birth is celebrated around the world 2000 years later.

[29 : 21] This is not just another baby born. There are millions and billions of babies born. Well you were babies born at one time weren't you? We all are. And the whole world doesn't come to a stop when you were born did it?

And when your children are born or when your grandchildren are born you come to a stop but the rest of the world goes rolling on. We don't celebrate the birth all over the world.

This isn't just the commencement of a new life. The birth of a human from within the world. This is somebody from outside the world coming into the world to be born as a man, as a human, as a baby.

So Jesus said in John chapter six, I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. Or again in chapter 12 he says, I have come into the world as a light so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

See this is the claim of Christmas. this is why we sing the carols, God from God, light from light, lo he abhors not to the virgin's womb, very God, begotten not created, oh come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

[30 : 42] Or that other one, Christ by highest heavens adored, Christ the everlasting Lord, late in time behold him come, offspring of a virgin's womb, veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel, our God with us.

Oh Pilate, Pilate, Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world, for this reason I have come, for this reason I was born. But the claim of Christmas is not just that God became man, but also the purpose for which he became man.

It's expressed in different ways at different parts of the gospel, and in different parts of the New Testament. He came to do his father's will, he came to save sinners, he came to redeem us from the law, but here confronted with Pilate, I have come to bear witness to the truth.

This is a very telling attack on Pilate, who is being politically forced by the Jewish leadership to believe the lies and false witnesses.

What an attack on a man who lived his life on the basis of lies and deceits and trickery, and in a kingdom based on brute force and power, not truth, not justice.

[32 : 26] Jesus is a king like no other, in a kingdom like no other. This is the kingdom not of this world, you see, this is the kingdom of heaven.

This is the kingdom based and founded and lived in truth, when was the last time we had a politician of truth?

I have come to bear witness to the truth. And then the real barb, the real sting in the tail, everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

Pilate, like any of us, knows the truth when he hears it, as we do when we hear it. But our problem is we prefer lies to truth. We want other people to tell us the truth, but at the same time we excuse our own lies that we tell other people.

We only really want the truth when it confirms what we already believe, when it tells us positive things about ourselves, when it suits our opinion. In this new age of media, we read the newspapers that confirm our prejudices.

[33 : 48] We go to the websites that will tell us the things that we already agree upon. And the ones that we don't like, well, we don't listen to those ones. And so caught in the headlights like a paralysed animal, we read Pilate's response.

And in Pilate's response, we read one of the greatest statements of political expediency that has ever been uttered by a human. One that speaks with real cogency to the post-modern mind.

One that proves Jesus' point precisely. Let's read it in context. Go back to verse 37 again. Pilate said to him, so you're a king. Jesus answered, you say that I'm a king.

For this purpose I was born, for this purpose I've come into the world, to bear witness to the truth everyone who's on the truth listens to my voice. Pilate said to him, what is truth?

What a pathetic answer. What is truth? I mean, it sounds so profound, so above intellectual squabbles of those who pursue truth.

[34 : 58] It sounds so superior, a question, not an answer. What is truth? But it's the coward's castle, placing yourself outside the possibility of contradiction or error.

Just asking. Shooting down lesser mortals who believe something, well, it's just a matter of opinion. As long as it's a matter of opinion, it can't be wrong or right, can it?

It can't be challenged, it's just my opinion. There's no truth, there's just, well, what is truth? truth. You avoid having to confess ignorance or ever conceding an error.

You avoid the hard work necessary of making a discovery, of searching the facts, of looking for the details. It's just all a matter of opinion. What's truth? There's no truth. What are you talking about?

It avoids the inconvenient, the uncomfortable truth that will possibly call us to account. It's intellectually cowardice not to commit yourself to any answer but to the question.

[36 : 05] And it's typical of political expediency avoiding the hard questions when you're about to make life changing decisions for the community or for the person. In this case, you're about to send the man to the gallows.

But you don't know that there is any truth? There is no truth. What is truth? Ask the cowardly pilot. the patron saint of all postmoderns.

Look, look, Jesus, frankly, man, there is no truth. We're going to execute you. Your crucifixion, it's not truth.

It's just a matter of my opinion, that's all. In 2,000 years on the other side of the world, they'll call you a myth and they'll choose to believe in Santa Claus rather than you.

that's so in answering Pilate, Pilate proves Jesus' point, that those who do not listen to the truth will not receive his witness, for he comes to establish God's kingdom, the kingdom that is God's, a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom of truth and of justice and of mercy and of righteousness.

[37 : 22] Professor Thomas Nagel, the famous atheist, professor of law and philosophy in New York University and he wrote a book called What Does It All Mean?

It's a book on basic philosophy. He wrote in it, but what's the point of being alive at all? And his answer is, there's no point.

Wouldn't matter if I didn't exist at all or if I didn't care about anything. But then there's a little problem he says, but I do. That's all there is to it.

Now there's a merry point of life. That is real merriment, that is, that will make you happy, isn't it? We could sing a few carols on this kind of view of life, isn't it? There's no reason to be alive, there's no point to life, everything's just meaningless, it doesn't matter if I care or not, I do, but that just shows I'm stupid because there's no reality actually.

You know, it'd be a wonderful song we could work up, couldn't we? You know, it matters not if I live or die, I don't care about anything, at least I'm not supposed to care, but I do, and that's all there is to it.

[38 : 37] I'm sure we could get a little tune that could flow, and we'd really, thousands would turn out in the parks, we'd light candles, we'd get trees, and we'd sing about the meaninglessness of our existence, and the total stupidity of believing there is one.

He continued, if we can't help taking ourselves so seriously, perhaps we just have to put up with being ridiculous. Well, he is a bit, isn't he?

You know, frankly. He concludes his book, his last sentence of his book is on the meaning of everything, life may not only be meaningless, but absurd.

If it's so meaningless and so absurd, why does he write a book to explain that to us? And why does the university pay him so much money to teach philosophy?

If his philosophy is, there's no meaning, there's no purpose, there's no rhyme, there's no reason, it doesn't matter if I'm here or you're here, I'll pass you anyway. What's the difference?

[39 : 38] You see, here is atheism, that really makes you happy. Oh, I'm H-A-P-P-Y, I'm an atheist, I can believe anything, everything, nothing and altogether doesn't matter, because how do you turn that into a merry tune, a carol to life's meaningless absurdity?

I mean, that's a surefire hit, that one, isn't it? What a sad, pitiful, miserable view of life that atheism has and any carols they write would contribute.

it's like the famous conclusion of Professor Dawkins, the great atheist. He writes, the universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.

all kinds of people love Professor Dawkins because he can show why you don't believe in God, but they don't follow Professor Dawkins because every now and then he lets his slip show and he shows what happens when you don't believe in God.

There's no good, there's no evil. Tell that to a Holocaust victim. There's no good, there's no evil, there's no meaning, there's no right, there's no wrong, there's just pitiless indifference.

[41 : 10] Shove some more Jews in the gas chamber. It's all good sport for a Nazi. There's no evil, there's no good, that's atheism, that's where it leads to, that's what it's about.

Oh, we can make good songs about that, let's be happy. I actually prefer Thomas Nagel because he has a certain truthfulness about him.

He wrote another book called *The Last Word*, which wasn't because he wrote several books afterwards. But in this one he wrote, I'm talking about the fear of religion itself.

I speak from experience being strongly subject to this fear myself. I want atheism to be true. And I'm made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent, well-informed people I know are religious believers.

And then he continues, it isn't just that I don't believe in God and naturally hope that I'm right in my belief, it's that I hope there is no God. I don't want there to be God.

[42 : 20] I don't want the universe to be like that. Here's the joy of atheism, fear, theophobia, phobia, religiophobia, christophobia, living phobia, whatever phobia, phobia is the word these days, isn't it?

But nobody has phobia as phobic as the atheist does. A professor of philosophy too fearful of God to face the truth, to even acknowledge the possibility of the truth, even though he knows there are lots of other intelligent people who do believe that.

I don't believe it because no reason, no rhyme, no argument. I don't believe it because I don't want to believe it. You know, if I shut my eyes, they're not there.

I can't see them, they don't exist. If I shove my head deep, deep in the sand, I don't have to sing carols about God, do I? I can just be silent.

As soon as I open my mouth, it's full of dirt. here is the modern pilot. What is truth? I don't want it to be true, it's the same.

[43 : 37] Jesus said, for this purpose I was born. For this purpose I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. And everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.

I pray, my friends, that each one of us here today may know him. To know him as our king, and so to have the wonderful Christmas of singing with joy and happiness and pleasure.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. he's come. What great news.

He's come. He can free us from our slavery to sin and to death. He's come to change the world and to change us all for the better. Joy. Joy to the world.

The Lord has come. As the atheist commanded, so I wish to fulfil their command. I want to keep the Mary that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ and I would have dumped the myth of Santa Claus who robs us of the joy of Christ.

[44 : 59] Let everyone receive the truth, the king who came to bear witness to the truth. Let every heart prepare him room.

How? How do you prepare him room? Well, by prayer. That's how. Here's a prayer that we'll put up on the screen for you. It's got a lot of wording in it and so it's hard to read.

So let me give you, it's got three paragraphs to it because I'm going to close in prayer in just a moment with this prayer. And I'm going to invite you to pray with me just in the quietness of your own hearts and minds. It's got three paragraphs.

The first paragraph is all about us. Every sentence starts I and every sentence is bad news. I know I'm not worthy to be accepted by you.

I don't deserve your gift of eternal life. I'm guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you and I need forgiveness. That's the truth. Let's face the truth. God is not the God of our lives as God who created us should be.

[46 : 06] We have done the things that we don't want to do and we haven't done the good things that we wanted to do. We need forgiveness. Face the truth.

And then the second paragraph is about thanking. You know being a very thankful person is dead easy when you've got someone to thank and it's hopeless when you haven't got anybody to thank isn't it?

Those poor Americans who celebrate Thanksgiving but don't know the God to thank. Who do you thank? We are thankful for God. What has he done? Thank you for sending your son to die for me that I may be forgiven.

I need forgiveness. He's died that I may be forgiven. Thank you that he raised him from death to new life in order to give me new life. I'm under the curse of death and this Jesus comes that I might be forgiven of the sins and given new life.

Thank you God for the Lord Jesus Christ. Joy to the world the Lord has come. So how do I prepare my heart for him? having acknowledged the truth having thanked God for what he's done the prayer of the prayer is in the last paragraph.

[47 : 18] Please forgive me. I need forgiveness. He died for me to be forgiven. Please forgive me. And please change me. I don't want to keep living the way I have been living.

Please change me that I may live with Jesus as king as ruler as my king. Because unlike the atheist I want the truth not the lie not the myth.

As I lead in this prayer would you like to pray in the quietness of your own mind to God as well. Let's pray. Dear God I know I'm not worthy to be accepted by you.

I don't deserve your gift of eternal life. I am guilty of rebelling against you and ignoring you and I need forgiveness.

Thank you for sending your son to die for me that I may be forgiven. Thank you that he rose from the dead to give me new life.

[48 : 33] Please forgive me. and change me that I may live with Jesus as king my ruler.

Amen. And my friends if this is your if this is your prayer I want you to know that you will have absolute you'll be forgiven.

This is your prayer. How do I know you will be forgiven? Because Jesus died to forgive you. Jesus came into the world to die to forgive you. That is the whole purpose. God's not going to not forgive someone when he sent his son to die that you'll be forgiven.

And you will be changed. How do I know? Because Jesus isn't dead. He's alive. He's risen from the dead. He rules the world and sends his spirit into this world to change people.

You'll be forgiven. You'll be changed. And if it's your prayer for the first time or the first time in many years, can I encourage you, talk to one of the staff here, talk to Willie, one of the others in this staff here, and say, I prayed that prayer.

[49 : 40] That's all you've got to say. I prayed that prayer. They'll take the conversation there from you to help you with that terrific change, that wonderful news. But whoever you are, you've got to join in the singing of the great news.

Because life is not meaningless. There is good. There is evil. And Jesus is good. And he died for our evil. And we've got every reason to sing joy to the world.

So we're going to sing. Musos, please find your fight. And we're going to sing. And I just like pointing out this point that when I say we're going to sing, I don't mean Willie and I are going to sing.

We want to get some good singing going here. Excuse me, saying so, brother. We want some good quality singing, namely yours, as we sing this great hymn.