

Christmas Talk 1 – Jesus came to earth to reveal God.

Introduction

How good has it been to see people in the flesh again? It's been a month or so now since lockdown has ended and many of us have returned to church. I don't know about you but I'm still having those moments where I'm seeing people face to face for first time in ages.

And those moments have been great.

You see, while zoom has been a good provision, it's never really compared to in-the-flesh meet ups.

- Glitches and mute issues make the flow of conversation just that little bit annoying.
- Honest and open conversation can be hard through a screen, particularly if there were many other faces present.

Zoom is good but its limited.

Just this week I spoke face to face with someone from our online Christianity explored course, who I've never actually met in person before. And it was just lovely to sit beside them, to chat easily, and openly. I could read body language much more easily off line, and now without a mask too! I learnt more about that person from our short in-person conversation, than I did from 8 weeks meeting online.

It's good to see people in the flesh, because we get the whole picture, the whole person. And that helps us know them better.

Well, the same principle holds true with God. When Jesus came to Earth on that very first Christmas, the world, for the first time, got a glorious in-the-flesh meeting with God. No, heavenly barrier, no masks, no zoom, just God, in the flesh. We know how good it is to get the whole picture of someone in person. Tonight, we're going to think about how good it is to get the whole picture of God in the person of Jesus.

So what we're going to do is first look at how the Bible speaks about God revealing himself in Jesus. And then we'll think about three big aspects of God's revelation that actually help us to know Him better and respond to Him rightly. We'll consider the way Jesus reveals:

- Who God is [His good character].
- What God has done [His life-saving mission].
- How we should respond [His call to believe in Jesus].

Jesus Reveals God to us.

But before we jump straight into those three things, let's begin with the big claim of the Bible: That Jesus reveals God to us.

When you think of Jesus, what comes to mind? A good man? A great man? A myth? A revolutionary? A prophet? A holy man? One of the more popular views I believe many people have of Jesus is that he was a righteous and wise teacher – maybe a little like Ghandi – someone who taught others how to love one another. Someone who spoke truth to the power of His day. Now, at one level Jesus was a very wise teacher, He did teach us to love one another, and he did call out the corrupt ruling class of his day. But the gospel writers – those who knew him and had lived with Him – they actually tell us He was much more than this. They make the claim that when Jesus arrived in history, it wasn't simply another wise teacher coming on the scene, but God himself.

You see this in the apostle Matthew's gospel when he describes the beginning of the Christmas story. Angels appear to Joseph in dream and tell him that Mary will soon have a baby:

²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

*²³ See, the virgin will become pregnant
and give birth to a son,
and they will name him Immanuel,^[h]*

which is translated “God is with us.”

When Jesus shows up, it’s actually God showing up – in human form.

The apostle John likewise states that Jesus was God come to earth. Did you notice that as you listened to Helen read the passage? John 1:1:

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son^[u] from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father’s side^[u]— he has revealed him.

When Jesus comes into the world, God is revealed.

Now, while it is true that God had revealed himself in the OT through his saving acts with Israel, the words of His prophets, and other various ways, He had never revealed himself with the kind of clarity He does in Jesus. He had never before entered into our world, in a way that people could see him, hear him, touch Him, question him. That kind of full revelation only happens when Jesus arrives. As Paul says in Colossians 1:19:

*¹⁹ For God was pleased to have **all his fullness** dwell in him,*

This is why John writes in John 1:14 – “We have seen His glory” – “We’ve seen God at work in Jesus – controlling the weather, healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, forgiving sin. We’ve seen God the Son in all His glory!”

There is a line in Hark the Herald angels sing that captures the glory of God revealing himself to us in human form.

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate deity
Pleased as man with men to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel*

Every Christmas, many within our society sing these words at local Christmas carol events. But, most of the time, I think we just let those words wash over us and fail to see how remarkable they are. The almighty God veiled in flesh, was actually pleased to come and dwell with mankind... Doesn't that blow your mind? I'm waiting for the year, when the hosts of carols by candlelight get struck by the enormity of those words... You can imagine it, after the choir has sung Hark the herald angels sing, Allison Langdon turning to David Campbell: "Wait, did you just hear what those choir sung - God became a man!?... How did I miss this in rehearsal!?! That's huge!?"

We need to let this wonderful truth of Christmas sink in. When Jesus came to us, God came to us. Jesus reveals God.

There's a lot of focus on the *baby* Jesus at this time of year. You see pictures of him on cards and in shop windows. And sometimes these cute little pictures of Jesus elicit what can be referred to as the awww factor. We see Him and go awww. Well, God's word reminds us that we should move from an awww factor to an Awe factor (AWE) – where we see Jesus as the revelation of the Almighty God himself.

So, that's the big point – Jesus came to reveal God to us. And the Bible tells us there are three big things God's wants to us to know about Him through this wonderful revelation:

1. Who He is.
2. What He's done.
3. How we should respond.

1. Jesus Reveals Who God is [His good character].

So first, Jesus reveals Who God is to us. He shows us what He's is actually like. And this is something most of us want to know right?

In Joan's Osborn's song *One of Us*, she kind of explores this question about knowing God. The chorus says:

*What if God was one of us?
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Tryin' to make his way home?*

If God was *one* of us, would He *be* like us? Would He be a bit of a slob too? Would He act like a stranger on a bus absorbed in His own world and affairs? What would God be like if He was one of us?

Well, because God *does* become one of us in Jesus, we can look at Jesus' life to get the answer to that question. Jesus, is as Paul says to the Colossians, "the image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15). And when we look at the image of God in Jesus, we get the picture that God is exceptionally good.

All you have to do is read one of the gospels (or biographies) of Jesus to find this out:

The life of Jesus was marked by *compassion* for the poor, vulnerable and marginalised. Jesus had the kind of compassion that would reach out a leper, when everyone would have fled from him. Jesus was marked by the sort of *kindness* that helps a newly married couple when they're about to run out of wine at their wedding, the kindness that gives a widow back her dead son. Jesus was marked by the kind of genuine *empathy* that would stand by the grave side of a friend and grieve with those who are grieving. Jesus was marked by the kind of *loving honesty* that doesn't just say what we want to hear, but what we need to hear – stuff about the danger of sin, and our need to repent. Jesus **called out hypocrisy, stuck by His mates, looked after His Mum, loved His enemies.** Because Jesus loved so deeply, He willingly laid down His own life for the sake of others.

But more on that in just a moment.

What do you see when you look at Jesus' life and His death? You see a man you cannot fault. You see someone who is incomparably good.

Colin Buchanan, a Christian singer/song writer wrote a song Called *You'd like Jesus*. Just one of the verses says this:

*Well if you like strangers, who'll stick up for the little guy.
If you hate make-believe religion that's all a big fat masquerade.
If you like courage, that can be as strong as thunder, and tender as a tear beside a brother's grave.
You'd like Jesus*

The truth is, that most people, when they actually get to know Jesus, really like Him. I mentioned a couple of weeks ago the comment from a person in Christianity Explored last year. After the course, I asked her where she felt she was at with God. And she replied: "I'm still not sure where I'm at with God, but I love what I see in Jesus."

But you see, the good news for this person - the good news for us – is that what we see in Jesus, is what we can know about God... He is God with us. He is the revelation of who God is. As the author of Hebrews says:

³ *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being,*

Maybe you're still trying to figure out where you're at with God. Or maybe you're a Christian who just feels like God seems a little cold and distant these days. I'd encourage you to get to know your God, by getting to know Jesus. Make this Christmas season, a time to just read through a gospel. Print out the passages, and just make little notes on the side commenting on what you see Jesus doing and how you see Him acting. Highlight things like His care, His love, His understanding. That will help you better know Him and better relate to Him.

2. What God has done [His life-giving mission].

Second, Jesus reveals what God has done. You see, Jesus doesn't just reveal God's good character, He reveals God's life-giving mission to save people from spiritual darkness through His arrival in Jesus.

John says in 1:4:

⁴ *In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ That light shines in the darkness,...*

⁹ *The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.*

It's a horrible thing to be trapped in darkness. You might recall the story of the 12 Thai boys and their soccer coach, who were rescued from being stuck in an underground cave system back in 2018. They had gone into explore an elaborate Thai cave system, but a heavy deluge of rain flooded part of the network, leaving them stranded on an elevated rock 4.2 kms from the mouth of the cave. For 10 days this soccer team was trapped in the depths of the earth – no light, no real hope of survival. It wasn't until their plight went global, that the world rallied its emergency resources together to pull off an incredibly difficult underwater rescue.

Imagine being stuck on a cold rock, in darkness, for 10 days? How horrible right? But imagine the joy of these boys when they saw that first little glimmer of light bubbling up from the water below them. Imagine their elation, as the torchlight from the two rescue divers finally breaks through their darkness. Suddenly they have light, suddenly they have the hope of life.

John reveals God's big plan kind of like a rescue mission to bring light and life to a *world* trapped in spiritual darkness.

In the Bible, God is describe as being light (1 John 1:5) – which is often connected to the idea of Him giving life. That's why Jesus, who reveals God to us, speaks of himself as being the Light of the world (John 8:12):

"I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

The reason our world is described as a place of darkness is because we have cut ourselves off from God – the only source of light and life. Instead of loving our creator, we've ignored Him and lived lived life on our terms. We've acted in ways that displease Him and have hurt others. We might not think all this is such a big deal, but the Holy and Just God finds our thanklessness, apathy and heart rebellion against him offensive and worthy of judgment.

Like the soccer team in the cave – we have all wandered into dangerous territory. We've become stuck in spiritual darkness – cut off from the true source of light and life. Hopelessly waiting a grim outcome of God's just judgment.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem it was as though our world saw the first glimmer of light bubbling up out of the darkness. As Jesus grew and became a man, it was like God the rescuer was stepping into *our* dark cave to save us.

In the mission of Jesus, God reveals to us His big plan to save us and give us light and life. And Jesus does this, through his death on our behalf for the forgiveness of our sins. He reconciles us to God by taking away the sin that separates us. Jesus came into our world, to save us by dying for us. Mark 10:45:

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

In the Christmas story Jesus is worshipped by the wise men because they rightly see him as a new born king. But notice this king was not served by the world, but served the world. He lived the life we should have lived. He died the death we should have died. He rose again showing His power to give eternal life in the face of death.

We often like to share our Christmas plans with each other about this time of year.... Where we are planning on going? What we will be doing over the break? Jesus shows us that God also has a Christmas plan that He wants share. And it's his plan to save the world through this baby Jesus – who was born to die.

In Jesus, God reveals his life-giving mission to save a world trapped in the darkness of sin.

3. Jesus reveals how God wants us to respond.

We've seen how Jesus reveals God's good character. We've seen how He reveals God's mission to bring salvation to our dark world. Finally, Jesus reveals how God wants us to respond to all this. Jesus didn't just go around showing people what God was like. Nor did He simply reveal the way God was going to save the world. He appealed to people to respond in the right way so that they didn't miss out on the life this good God has to give them.

God wants us to receive the life *of* Jesus by believing *in* Jesus.

This is why Jesus says in John 6: 40:

⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

What is God’s will for us? What does He want us to do? To believe in Jesus... To receive Him (and all His saving benefits) like you would a present at Christmas – something that is not earned or deserved, but given freely as a wonderful gift by a gracious God.

John could not be clearer that God’s gift of life in Jesus comes by grace. Look at verse 16-17:

¹⁶ Indeed, we have all received grace upon^u grace from his fullness, ¹⁷ for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

God gives His gracious gift of Jesus to the world – And he appeals to us to receive it. To believe in Jesus as the One who can save us. The one we must follow.

Over the course of this year, I’ve been given one or two of those Coles/Myer gift cards... But, if I’m honest with you, I haven’t actually done anything with them yet. They are still sitting on my desk at home. I know it sounds like a lame excuse, but I feel like I’ve just been too busy to use them yet. Though someone thoughtful has given me a gift card, there’s a sense in which I’ve not really received this gift in the truest sense yet... I’ve not taken it and enjoyed it’s benefits. It’s just been sitting there. It’s been given but not received.

And it can be a little bit like that with God sometimes. It’s possible to treat God’s infinitely greater gift of Jesus in a similar way. Jesus has been given by God to the world, but the world is more than capable of failing to receive Him and enjoy His benefits of forgiveness and life. John tells us this in John 1:10-11:

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

When God gave the world His gift of Jesus – many people let *him* sit on the shelf like my gift card. They did not recognise who He was or what He had to offer them. Even many of His own people – the Jews – failed to receive Him.

Some thought he was an imposter and failed to receive Him.

Some thought they were pretty good with God already and didn’t need Jesus to forgive them, and they failed to receive Him.

I suspect, like many today, some were simply too busy, and just didn’t not stop to really think their decision through.

Because these people left God’s gift sitting on the shelf, they missed out. We don’t want to be like that. But says John:

¹² But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be^u children of God, to those who believe in his name,

To those who said thank you God! What a great gift! I will receive Jesus, I’m not just going to let him sit on the shelf in my life, I do believe that He died for *my* sins and has the right to rule my life as my risen saviour – to those people God gives the right to become children of God – people who belong to God, who are forgiven of their dark sin and filled with His light and eternal life.

God wants you to receive Jesus, by believing in Jesus.

Is God’s gift of Jesus still sitting on your shelf, or have you truly received Him?

Christmas is often the time where we make a lot of decisions right.

- When should I take holidays?
- Who are we going to invite to Christmas day lunch?
- What am I going to get for my Kris Kingle?

They're all good things to think about. But in God's eyes there is only one decision that matters this Christmas. Have I received Jesus? Am I walking in God's light, or am I still in darkness? There will come a time on my Coles/myre gift cards when the expiry will kick in and I'll miss out entirely. Don't let that be you with Jesus. Don't find yourself having run out of time, standing at the judgment seat of God, devastated that you left God's gracious gift on the shelf.

This Christmas, God is holding out life and light to you in His gift of Jesus – receive Him now with thankfulness. If you want to talk more about that with me, feel free to do so after the service, or make a time to chat.

But to those of you who have received Jesus, I think it's worth reflecting on that glorious privilege of being counted one of God's children. John writes in another letter about this wonderful new identity:

3 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!...² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears,⁴ we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

To be counted as one of God's children is a glorious truth that changes everything. It says to you that are not a child of the world anymore, but of God Himself. You don't walk in darkness but in light! So be who you are this Christmas season.

- When your work colleagues or uni mates start encouraging you to join them drinking heavily at the Christmas party, ask yourself: "Who am I? A child of the world, or a child of God?" I'm a child of God! And God's children don't get drunk but remain self-controlled.
- When you start squabbling and getting angry with your spouse about Christmas plans – "am I a child of the world or a child of God? I'm a child of God! "And God's children say no to selfishness, and yes to humility?"
- When the world start panicking about the next covid strain – "Am I a child of the world or a child of God – I'm a child of God! My life and eternity is secure in Him, so I'm not going to fear this moment, but trust my Father?"
- When you fail at all these things and fall into sin – "Am I a child of the world or a child of God?" I'm a child of God! And God's children don't have to earn their way back into his good books, they simply need to confess their sin, rest in God's forgiveness that Jesus has won for me, and ask for his help to change, so that's what I'll do."

It is a glorious thing to receive Jesus and be given the right to become one of God's children. This Christmas season is a great opportunity to practice being who you are.

Conclusion

It has been wonderful to see people in the flesh again over the past month. It will be wonderful to see other friends and family at Christmas celebrations coming up. But we've heard about a greater in-the-flesh encounter tonight. God made known through Jesus Christ. An in-the-flesh revelation of who God is [His good character], what He has done [his life-giving mission] and how we should respond [His call to believe in Jesus for forgiveness and life]. Let's pray.