

Not So Perfect Christmas

Ps John Strelan

John: Ah, Christmas. Peace on earth and goodwill to all. They're not very high expectations, are they? But we try so hard to get it right. We try so hard to meet our expectations of what Christmas is about. We try to create perfect Christmas.

Tania: Don't we all wish that Christmas could be that one perfect day of the year where everyone gets along and all the hard work leading up pays off? But that's not very often the case. Today Pastor John shares a message with us that maybe Christmas doesn't need to be perfect.

John: Think of the time and effort that goes into the few weeks leading up to Christmas trying to make sure that this day of all days is just right. Houses have to be cleaned and tidied to avoid the critical eye of the in laws. Credit cards have to be stretched to purchase just the right present. Pantries are stocked to overflowing. And we've all given ourselves a good talking to: 'Right, this year, I'm not going to let Uncle Albert get under my skin!'

Because Christmas is about peace and goodwill, right? Christmas is about putting aside our differences and getting along. Christmas is about forgetting for a while the problems of life. It's about being happy, not irritable. It's about being generous, not stingy. And so, we work so hard to get it right. To rise above the ordinary everyday life annoyances. To escape the drudgery.

And maybe this year, maybe this year, we'll experience some of that heavenly peace. You know, like the idyllic nativity scenes you find scattered around houses. Mary, without a hair out of place, a well-groomed cow or two, and of course, the baby Jesus. No crying he makes, as the carol says.

There's an irony there though. Oh no, not the irony that it never works out like we hope it will. Someone always will end up arguing with Uncle Albert. The roast gets burnt. The alcohol starts talking. Not that irony. No, the irony that we spend so much time and effort to make this day extraordinary. Special. On this day, it's like we're hoping for a taste of heaven, a chance for just one perfect day where we don't have to think about the problems of the world.

And yet, for Christians, this day is the day God did the exact opposite. At Christmas, God didn't try to forget about the problems of the world. God didn't mix himself a G&T and take the day off. No, at Christmas, God came down to be amongst the problems of the world, to be amongst the chaos, the hurt, the brokenness, the heartache, the struggles, the sin, the doubt, the death. At Christmas, God became a human being, a human being we call Jesus.

The Christmas story, as it's told in the Bible, doesn't paint a picture of a perfect night or a perfect birth. It simply tells the amazing story of how God made his home in this world. How God came to be with us in person. Which is of course, how God always intended it to be. It's how God created the world to be.

God intended the world to be his home just as much as our home. But ever since the world began, human beings have been trying to keep God out of the world. We think we can manage. We've got this. We don't need God, so we say. And yet, the darkness just gets darker in our world. There is no end to the violence on our TV screens, no end to the wars, no end to the fighting.

But here's the thing, the Christmas thing. We might want to keep God out of the world, but God can't be kept from the world, because God doesn't want to be kept from the world. And the Bible tells us 'the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' The light that the Bible is talking about is Jesus. Jesus who is born as a baby in a manger. In the midst of the chaos of a census, there's no room in the local hotel, and a baby who I'm almost certain, some crying he did make. That's what babies do after all.

At Christmas we celebrate that God came to us, and he came to us not as a demanding judge or a cranky old man with a white beard as we perhaps expect. He came to us as a baby, so that we might feel close to him. So that we might be able to love him as he loves us.

And as Jesus grew to be an adult, he didn't discriminate against anyone. He didn't just hang out with people like himself. He didn't just mix with the so-called good people. No, he wanted to be around anyone who needed to be loved. Anyone who needed forgiveness. Anyone who needed healing. And he gave them love. He gave them forgiveness. He gave them healing. He was committed to be fully engaged in the world, no matter how messy, no matter how messed up, no matter how bad, Jesus would not give up on people, even if it killed him.

And it did. He died like he lived, for us, for our sake. And when I say 'us', I mean every single person who has ever lived, and who will ever live. That means you too.

We don't have to always be trying to live the perfect life, trying to impress God with how good we are, trying to create heaven here on earth. We don't have to try to be little gods, because God has become one of us. God is one of us. And this wasn't just a passing fancy for God, like a quick guerrilla raid to zap the baddies and nip on back into heaven before anyone noticed, or before things got too messy. No, God is in the world. And God is in the world in all of God's amazing glory. And we can see that glory.

You see, God became a human being. That's God's glory. That's God's down to earth glory, if you like. And the Bible says it's full of grace and truth for us. That God would choose to be among us. That God would choose to become like us, even with all our flaws and faults.

Isn't that amazing? Isn't that glorious?

You see, Christmas is not heaven on earth. It's just God in the world, it's just God reclaiming his world, it's just God loving his world through the finite things and the flawed people of the world.

We don't need to be stressed or anxious about trying to recreate the perfect Christmas. Christmas will be what it will be, but whatever happens, Christmas is our assurance that God is here with us, and God is working to make things better in our world. Even when everything is such a mess. God comes to us to love us, even when we feel unlovable. God comes to us to care for us, even when we couldn't care less. God comes to us to forgive us, even when we feel we are beyond forgiveness. And God does this not so that we have to be perfect, but so that we can be human. Not trying to escape from the world, not expecting a perfect world, but forgiving as we have been forgiven, and giving as we have been given, and loving as we have been loved.

Merry Christmas.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the father, full of grace and truth...And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

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