

# Christmas is about...a brand new world

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Preacher: Brian King

[ 0 : 00 ] like at the shopping malls, everywhere. Well, that means Christmas tree in all its towering majesty and rugged beauty.

Again, let me just try this to see if it works. Okay, Isaac, just next slide, please. And you can see there, that's a shopping malls full of Christmas trees and Christmas decorations in all its towering majesty and rugged beauty.

Next slide. If you just look at this particular tree that one of my friends had put up this year on his little table, it looks gorgeous, doesn't it? And of course, that means Christmas carols.

We've just heard them. It means singing familiar lyrics like this. Next slide. Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong? What the gladsome tidings be which inspire your heavenly song?

That, of course, is from angels we have heard on high. And if you come to our Christmas service tomorrow, you will be able to sing that. Or, next slide, here's some very familiar lyrics.

[ 1 : 09 ] Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king. That, of course, is from joy to the world, and we'll sing that as our final song this morning.

So it's a season of festivity and joy. But I wonder if you've ever thought, why?

Why should Christmas be such a happy and joyous occasion? After all, as the video that we've just watched before I started this talk showed, We don't live in a happy and joyful world.

It's quite the opposite, actually, isn't it? We live in a very sad and tragic world. There's no way to deny it. Just this year alone, there are so many examples that we could pinpoint.

We could look at Hollywood and Harvey Weinstein and all those women who had to endure sexual harassment and oppression by powerful men who thought that they could get away with it.

[ 2 : 23 ] We look at any number of terrorist attacks or mass shootings in places like the USA or the UK or Egypt.

Think of that recent shooting in America just a month or two ago in a church just like ours where more than half the people who attended died, including young children.

We think about wars in far-off places like Yemen and rumours of wars in places like the Korean Peninsula. Closer to home, we could spend hours talking about political corruption and racial tensions and financial mismanagement.

And of course, there's the personal tragedies that some of us this morning may have faced in the past 12 months. As we know, one of our church members just had their mother and mother-in-law passed away just in the last 24 hours.

I can think of a friend who is facing divorce unexpectedly, another friend whose mother died of cancer, and yet another friend who is younger than me, and already she's losing much of her eyesight, and it looks like it's irreversible.

[ 3 : 47 ] And so I wonder if deep down in our hearts, we echo what the American poet Henry Longfellow once wrote in his poem Christmas Bells.

Next slide. He starts off by saying, Well, that's our typical experience of the Christmas season, isn't it?

We hear those old familiar carols. We sing peace on earth, goodwill to man. But then as the poet goes on to write, he wonders later on in the poem how that could indeed be true.

Next slide. And in despair I bowed my head, there is no peace on earth, I said, for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, goodwill to man.

He's got a point, hasn't he? No amount of classy Christmas decorations, soothing jazz music, or beautiful floats passing by on a Christmas parade can hide the truth about the ugliness of our world.

[ 5 : 03 ] As one writer I wrote recently, we cannot hide all the evils and tragedies of this world by simply sweeping them under the rug or drown out the sounds of suffering by turning up Nat King Cole on the radio.

And indeed, if this is what Christmas is all about, then it isn't really a joyous occasion. It's simply a sentimental one where we try for a few days or a few weeks to hide from the real world and live in denial of its ugliness.

We'll simply be like a patient with terminal cancer who tries to drown his sorrows by drinking heavily and forgetting his condition for just a few hours.

And if that is what Christmas is about, then it has no real power to speak into our lives. It's just an exercise in sentimentality.

But the good news, of course, is that that is not what Christmas is about. The Bible never ever presents the birth of Jesus Christ as a sentimental event.

[ 6 : 22 ] No, no, no. Christmas is more than that. It's a historical drama. It's not simply a fairy tale. It's about a real person who came into this real world and has real power to change it.

And to see that, we're actually going to go back hundreds of years before Jesus was born to the words of the prophet Isaiah.

That was the Bible reading that Chloe so ably read to us just before this talk. And you can see what he says as well in the printed sheet you were given this morning. These are words written hundreds of years before the first Christmas.

But they tell us what Christmas is all about. It's actually about a brand new king who will bring in a brand new world.

That's what Christmas is about. A brand new king who will bring in a brand new world. So let me explain just from these words of Isaiah.

[ 7 : 29 ] And to begin with, what you must understand is that the world Isaiah lived in, which was thousands of years ago, is actually the same as the world we live in. They might not have smartphones, they might not have cars and planes, they might not have our big shopping malls.

But like us, they suffered sickness and pain. They had to deal with economic uncertainties and had to figure out how to put food on the table, especially if there was famine.

And during the time that Isaiah wrote, his people were under threat. The superpower at that time was a country called Assyria and it looked like they were ready to go to war at any time with Isaiah's people.

So it was a sad and tragic world, an ugly world, just like ours. Not much has changed in thousands of years.

But through the prophet Isaiah, God sends a message of hope. And he does so in a very poetic way. He begins by saying, a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.

[ 8 : 44 ] From his roots, a branch will bear fruit. And so Isaiah, he's painting a picture of a land that is completely barren. But right there in the middle of the desert, suddenly you see a plant, a branch, beginning to emerge.

Well, clearly that's a powerful symbol of hope. But what kind of hope is this? Well, Isaiah says he has to do with a person, someone who's called the stump of Jesse.

Who is he? Jesse is the clue. Jesse is actually the father of King David, who is considered the greatest king in the history of Isaiah's people.

And so Isaiah is promising a king is coming. A brand new king. A king who will come from David's family line. And a king who will be just as great.

And in fact, we're going to see greater than King David. And so this promise is actually a royal birth announcement foretold hundreds of years in advance.

[ 9 : 57 ] And what kind of king will he be? Isaiah goes on to tell us. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of might, the spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

God's very own spirit, you see, will rest on this promised king. That means you can be sure that he's a king like no other. He's wise, he's understanding, he's mighty.

That's how Isaiah describes him. Exactly the kind of characteristics you want in somebody who is meant to be the hope of the world. And when Jesus walked on this earth hundreds of years later, he indeed showed that he was this king like no other.

He would go into the synagogues, into the open air markets, he would walk by the shore along the lake, and he would teach in such a way that people were so amazed, and they asked, who is this man?

He's wise. He would reach out to the widows, people who were demon possessed, people whom everyone else hated, like the tax collectors, and sit with them, eat with them, and heal them, such that people stop and ask, who is this man?

[ 11 : 30 ] He's filled with understanding and compassion. He would sleep peacefully on a boat in the middle of a fierce storm, only to get up when those who were with him woke him up in a panicked state.

And he stood up, and with a word, he calmed the raging seas. Who is this man? He's mighty. Who is he?

And hundreds of years, before he came, Isaiah has already given us the answer. He's the promised king. He's the stump of Jesse, the great hope, come down to fix our broken world.

But it's easy to miss that, isn't it? Five years ago, the Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, wanted to hear the views of Norwegian voters on various issues.

And so he went undercover and he disguised himself as a taxi driver. One of his passengers, after getting in, said to him, you know, from this angle, you really look like our Prime Minister.

[ 12 : 42 ] He didn't make the obvious connection, because of course, he wasn't expecting his taxi driver to actually be the Prime Minister. Well, we can make the same mistake.

We can see the baby and the manger, sing of a stable and a star, but we don't recognize him as this promised king.

We don't make the connection. And yet the clues are there. Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the town of David. He's from the family line of David.

and he comes into this world supernaturally via a virgin birth. This is no ordinary person. This is the brand new king.

But Isaiah has more to tell us about this king. He's a king who judges perfectly. When we look at human beings, we know that we all make mistakes, don't we?

[ 13 : 48 ] We make wrong judgments. Our bosses make wrong judgments. Our bosses sometimes reward the wrong people because that person is a very good sweet talker.

Our parents don't make the right judgments. They sometimes don't resolve sibling conflicts perfectly because they can't work out whose fault it is. Our judges and our political leaders sometimes fail to execute justice and make foolish decisions.

that's why our world is so broken because broken people keep breaking it with our many mistakes. But not this king.

He doesn't judge merely by outward appearances, not just by what he sees with his eyes or what he hears with his ears. He will be perfectly fair because he alone can see the absolute truth in each and every situation.

He's full of integrity, completely reliable, he never puts a foot wrong. He's someone you can trust, someone who genuinely does what he says.

[ 15 : 05 ] As Isaiah says, righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his ways. But that also means he knows the truth about me.

He knows the truth about you. No one else can perfectly peer into our souls but he can. And what does he see at the heart of each of us?

He sees that we are not full of integrity. We don't always say what we mean and mean what we say. He sees that we are not completely 100% reliable.

We've all let people down at some point in our lives. He sees that we have committed wrongs of all sorts. He sees the reason why this world is so ugly and broken and filled with tragedy.

The reason is you. The reason is me. It's all of us. You see, the reason the world is broken is because every single human heart has been corrupted.

[ 16 : 17 ] The proper function of the human heart, you see, is to love the creator of this universe and to honour his world. That's what we were made for. But we chose to subvert that function to love ourselves first.

And in so doing, we corrupted our very core. Well, that's why we end up doing all sorts of things that we shouldn't. We get angry over little things and throw untrue remarks at the other person, even during Christmas time.

We twist the truth just a little bit so that it's a bit more favourable to us. We try to cover up our shame and get defensive when someone else points out our error. We don't always do what we say we will. And because every single human being in this world has acted in this way, well, that's why the world has gone so ugly. It's like every component in the entire ecosystem of the world has stopped working properly. And that's what the Bible means by sin.

[ 17 : 28 ] And those are its effects. things. And Jesus knows the truth about you and me. That's who we are. We are people who suffer, yes, but we are also people who sin.

And as the king who brings in perfect justice, it's perfectly within Jesus' right to give us what we deserve. if there is perfect justice, we deserve the broken, messed up world we live in. We can't complain. But that's not what the king has come to do. Christmas happened because this brand new king has an amazing purpose.

This brand new king has come to bring in a brand new world. Did you notice how Isaiah suddenly describes this amazing picture of a world that's filled with peace and harmony?

It's a place where wolves can lie down with lambs. It's a place where a cow and a bear can eat together. And it's a place where babies can play near cobras and stick their hand into the nest of vipers.

[ 18 : 45 ] We all know that in our current world, there is no way that we would allow that. Yet this king has come in to bring in this brand new world, a world where that would be possible, a perfect world.

That's his mission. That's why he has come to earth. In fact, it's made very clear in the name that this king has taken for himself, Jesus, which simply means God saves.

that's what he has come to do. He has come to fix this world, to renew it, to replenish it, so that it will be a glorious place once more where peace and good will reign.

He's come to clean up our mess, and he does so primarily by coming to fix our hearts. And he does so not from the outside, but from the inside.

Jesus is God entering our world as a human being, a king who comes in lowly form. He's a stump, a little baby born in a small town.

[ 19 : 57 ] He became one of us. And he comes to fix this world, not just by living on earth, but by dying in our place. He came to save by taking the judgment upon himself.

on Christmas Day, he comes to break the forces of corruption that makes this world such a horrible place that rules this world that lives in us.

But that's not all. Remember the poem Christmas Bells, which I quoted at the beginning? Well, this is how it ends. Next slide, please, Isaac. Then pealed the bells more loud and deep.

God is not dead, nor does he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, good will to man. Jesus is born, Jesus dies, but Jesus has also risen again.

And because he has risen, we can have a certain hope that this brand new world is definitely coming. There will come a day where there will be no more violence and oppression against women, where there are no more terrorist attacks, where there is no more war or rumors of wars, where there is no more suffering of any and every kind.

[ 21 : 24 ] That's going to be a brand new world. Because on Christmas Day, King Jesus entered our world to fix it. That's what Christmas is about.

But to be part of this new world, we must know him. Did you notice how Isaiah ends his words? He says that this brand new world will be a place where the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

this brand new world will only include people who know him personally. And so today, this Christmas Eve, do you know him?

Do you know this king? Do you know this king in a personal way? To know him, you need to acknowledge first of all that your heart is broken and corrupted.

[ 22 : 30 ] It's gone all wrong. You need to acknowledge that you and I are the problem, not the solution. And to know him, you need to acknowledge Jesus as the solution, as your king who has come to fix your heart.

And if you do so, well, you can be part of this brand new world. and that will make your Christmas a truly joyous occasion.

