

What if everyday was Christmas?

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[0 : 0 0] And I'm allowed to be grumpy. I'm married. I'm over 40. I've got kids. So I truly qualify as a grumpy old man. I just don't think it would work if it was Christmas every day.

And the second thing I want to say this evening is that if it were, well, in a sense, it is Christmas every day. So, you know, what if it was Christmas every day? Well, actually, in a sense, it is Christmas every day.

And that's what I really want to make clear tonight, what it means for Christ to have come, to be born at Christmastime. So first of all, what if it was Christmas? I just don't think it would work.

I think as positive as that vox pop was, those responses were, I get that I'm very positive about Christmas. I love Christmas. I've got lots of positive memories about Christmas.

I just think it would be naive, wouldn't it, to think if we made Christmas every day that life would get better. I don't think it would elevate life. I don't think it would elevate the world.

[1 : 0 1] I think it would just lower Christmas Day. It would just make it like any other day. I think it's a bit naive. You know, the classic beauty pageant contestant response, what's the most pressing need? World peace.

Well, just imagine if the interviewer didn't let her off that light. He drilled down a bit. Yes, but how would we get world peace? We'd make Christmas every day.

It's that kind of naivety, isn't it? It wouldn't work, surely. And I think a good illustration as to why it wouldn't work is a Christmas Day I once experienced when I was a very young child.

I must have been four or five or something in the whole family, the whole extended family, was gathered around my cousin's farmhouse kitchen table.

It was a beautiful farm. We spent many a summer up there, and we were all gathered together there, the extended family, for a Christmas lunch. And my nan had put on a real feast, a beautiful roast turkey.

[2 : 0 5] There was ham. There was even chicken for good measure. There was a cranberry sauce and the mustard. There was dessert coming, you know, with a brandy sauce, a great spread.

She made beautiful lamingtons. They were chucked in there as well. A great feast before us. And we prayed. We gave thanks, and we got ready to tuck in. And my uncle, who's a bit of a scallywag, a bit of a joker, shook the champagne bottle and aimed it at the light above the kitchen table, just for a joke, just for kicks.

I pretended to be aiming for it, but it was just off to the side and popped the cork, and sure enough, it hit the light. But it wasn't just a light bulb. It was a fluorescent tube that sort of hung low over the table and exploded into a million pieces.

Yeah, thanks for the laughter. It wasn't that funny at the time. So, you know, there was shards of tube through everything, and the whole dinner was ruined. I mean, us kids thought it was spectacular, the best Christmas ever.

You know, but for the adults, they were bitterly disappointed. And that's an illustration, if you like, as to what is wrong with the world or about what's wrong with the world, according to the Bible, according to Christianity.

[3 : 21] It says in the Bible that the first man, Adam, was God's image bearer, made to rule over this world under God. But he, you know, thumbed his nose at God.

He rebelled against God, rejected him as his loving ruler, creator, and chaos ensued. And it says that we have all been infected with these shards of sin because of that first man's fall, that first man's rejection.

And there are many, many consequences because of that first act of rebellion. But three really obvious ones are, first of all, that even though God is, in fact, a self-evident reality, a self-evident truth, we really wonder a lot of the time if he even exists.

That's one clear consequence. Another consequence is we just fail to love. As God himself loves and designed us to love one another, we don't love.

It's a dog-eat-dog world. And thirdly and finally, one of the most obvious consequences is just that the world generally has been given over to rust and to decay, to corrode.

[4 : 39] God gave it over to natural disasters. Things like floods and hurricanes and things like that. So the problem with the world is a lot more serious, isn't it, than just making Christmas every day could possibly fix.

And that's why I'm bar humbug-ish about it. I just don't think it would work to make Christmas every day. But the second thing I want to say, and now looking at these passages we've already had read out to us this evening, the second thing I want to say, though, is that the Bible asserts, and as a Christian I truly believe, that in fact, if we understand Christmas, it is Christmas every day.

And to explain this, I want to go back to that Isaiah passage and read it again. And I just noticed this figure we see there. We're going to spend a little bit of time here to try and understand this character called Emmanuel, then spend a short, brief time in that New Testament passage where it applies that title, Emmanuel, to Jesus.

So here we have Emmanuel. Centuries before Jesus came along was called Emmanuel. And we're probably quite familiar, aren't we, with this title, Emmanuel. We're going to sing the famous carol hymn after this talk, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

And here we have the first time this name is mentioned in the Bible. And to understand it, let me give you a bit of context here. Come with me. Think about the situation here.

[6 : 12] God is ruling over his people. He's chosen his people, the Jews, but they are in turmoil. They are in chaos. They're facing civil war.

The northern kingdom is split away from the southern kingdom. God is with the southern kingdom. And there's a massive, powerful, you know, world power type nation right next door to God's people, the Jews, threatening to invade.

And God's people in this little southern kingdom, a remnant left over of God's people, are afraid and they're quaking in their boots. And God says to them, trust me.

Trust me. I am with you. I will bless you. And so what does this little southern kingdom of God's people do? They try to make deals with these nations they're afraid of.

They don't trust God. They turn against him. And into this context, we have this reading that we've heard before. Look at it with me again and try and see what's going on here.

[7 : 22] See if you can get the gist. In Isaiah chapter 7, verses 13, then Isaiah, the prophet, who speaks to God's people on God's behalf, says, Hear now, you house of David.

That's God's people. Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel. He'll be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.

For before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you'd read will be laid waste. Do you get the gist of what's happening there?

God says through his prophet to his people, You are really trying my patience. I've said, trust me, and you're not. Just like Adam. You're just like him. So what does God do?

[8 : 20] He promises Emmanuel. He says to them, Not only, even though you're rejecting me and not trusting me, not only will you not be laid waste by those kings, these great mighty nations that you fear, I'm going to lay them waste.

And here's the sign that it's me who's doing it. There's going to be a kid born among you. Now from a virgin, it could just be taken from a young woman. He'll be named Emmanuel.

And when you see this kid, you'll be reminded that I am the one who has destroyed this. Before this child even knows his left hand from his right, I'm going to destroy these kings that you fear within just one generation.

And so what is Emmanuel there in the story? It's God. God being with his people in the most unusual or unexpected of circumstances.

Just when God's own people think that he's not there, that he's not powerful, that he's abandoned them, he is with them, promising to bless them despite their faithlessness.

[9 : 30] Now with that background in mind, we'll very quickly look at Matthew again. Look at what it says here about Jesus and this title, Emmanuel. Read with me again that passage. This is how the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, came about.

His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. This is the Son of God. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, which means God saves, because he will save his people from their sins. All this took place to fulfill, listen here, what the Lord had said through the prophet that we've just read from.

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. Jesus will be called Emmanuel.

[10 : 46] Why will he be called Emmanuel? Because in Jesus, God is with us in a surprising, unexpected way.

Jesus saves us from our sins at the very time that we're rebelling against God, wondering if God even exists. God turns up in Christ and forgives us our sin.

Not simply some nations that might be threatening our freedom or our peace or our independence, but this deep, profound problem of rejecting God.

Jesus comes down and does the impossible. He picks out all those shards of fluorescent tube from the mule that's been utterly spoiled.

He fixes it up. He makes it clean. The impossible is accomplished in Christ. He heals us from our sins, fixes up our sins.

[11 : 49] And so God now in Jesus is with us in the most surprising of ways. As I've just said, just as we're doubting that God is even there, and certainly doubting if he cares, God shows up in Christ and says, I am here and I do care.

In that sense, he's like a mobile phone, I think. You know, being a grumpy old man, I'm also a bit of a Luddite. And when I pull out my mobile phone, I'll often sit there just amazed and, you know, full of wonder how my phone can just pluck information out of the air.

Don't you ever just think that that is amazing? How does it download videos from YouTube out of thin air? How does it, like, where is that video? Is it just sort of floating by?

I don't understand it. I get these, you know, photos from my wife of my kids playing at the park, throwing a rock at a passing car. Beautiful kids. All these things. You know, a phone call from her.

I can hear her voice. And the point is this, is that there's all these sort of, you know, communication networks around us, aren't there? Rich, deep, three-dimensional.

[12 : 56] You know, I can see, touch, hear. You know, that kind of interaction I have, that kind of information network is all around me, but I can't see it at all. It's invisible. Then my phone turns up and gives me this amazing access.

And Jesus is like that. You may wonder if God even exists, and you certainly may wonder if God cares about you. But Jesus turns up, and he says, here I am.

And I can tell you that God even knows how many hairs are on your head. I am with you. I hold everything together, says Jesus. And I hold you together.

I give you your next breath, even this very moment in this room. And do I care about you? I love you. That's why I've come, to forgive you of your sins. Even though you don't even believe in me, I've come to forgive you.

And I die on a cross for you. Jesus shows up, and gives us access, to the living, powerful, loving, forgiving God.

[13 : 57] When we feel too sinful, Christ is Emmanuel. He's with us. He's for us. When we think we owe God nothing, when we think there's no problem, Christ is Emmanuel.

God with us, to show us, we've got a problem. It's a divine intervention. It's an intervention. You need to wake up. You have got a problem. Why did I come to die on a cross, if you're not a sinner?

God is with us. Christ, Emmanuel. And so that's where I want to land this, and end tonight. In that sense, isn't it true, that it's Christmas every day?

When God came into the world in Christ, God came to save us, once for all, to be for us, once for all, to be with us, once for all.

We're about to sing, O come, O come, Emmanuel. And I think perhaps an even more important invitation is, won't you come, won't you come, this Christmas, to Emmanuel.

[15 : 04] Thanks. Thanks.