

CHRISTMAS DAY

Preached at:

BPC 25th December '05



CHRIST CENTRED • SPIRIT FILLED • BIBLE BASED

BELLVILLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Christmas Day

Joshua 24: 8-15

John 1:1-18

1 John 4

~ Brent Russell ~

25TH DECEMBER 2005

- Christmas sermons are the **hardest to preach**
- I know we normally make **preaching look easy** –we've been **taught well**
- And though we look very relaxed Rod and I at Christmas are more nervous than ever
- And so I preach apprehensively to you this morning!
- **I guess what makes us most nervous is your expectations of us**
- And the fact that at points to satisfy God we will fail to meet your expectations
- **Human life is full of choices**
- **Every moment** of our lives are filled with choices of all sorts
- From the **mundane** – "what **route** do I choose to drive to the office?"
- To the **frivolous** – "What **clothes** do I wear today?"
- To the **life changing** – "do I choose this person to be my **spouse**?"
- **Every moment of every day is filled with choices that we must make**
- We cannot switch that feature off – it's **not an optional extra** in our lives
- It is a **wonderful gift** that God gives us this continuous choice of how we will live our lives
- We cannot always decide what options we are presented with – but we get to choose out of them
- **The decisions of our lives are not made for us by others**

- And based upon the choices we make in our lives, **we determine our own future** and destiny
- The words of **Eleanor Roosevelt** ring true: One's philosophy is not best expressed in words. It is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our responsibility.
- I am sure you know the saying well: "**You made the bed you get to sleep in it**"
- **Even this morning you had a choice:**
 - Do we **wake up and go to worship**?
 - Do we **lie in and recover** from last nights eating? (and prepare for today's?)

Very well done!

- Give yourselves a **round of applause!**
- **You made the right choice – to choose to do something that has eternal value and that is to come worship Christ, God in the flesh**
- **Our faith life is filled with choices**
- You know this well at some point we must **choose to believe or not**
- And the choices **continue** to come at us
 - **Do I hide away the fact that I belong to Jesus or will my tongue tell of His righteous acts all day long**
 - **Do I allow my doubts to overwhelm me or do I stand firm trusting that God will provide all my needs according to His riches in Glory**
 - **Do I allow myself to sink slowly into worldliness or do I stand firm and hold onto the teachings passed on to me**
- Every day we are confronted with **issues and problems** that will compel us to **choose our faith** once again
- Things will make us **doubt**, **temptations** will draw us away and yet we **choose to remain in God's presence**
- Even when life is **acutely painful** or **deeply confusing** we continue to choose to take up our cross and **follow Christ**
- **Christmas is filled with so many choices I find it simply exhausting**
- What **gifts** to buy?
- What **wrapping** to use?
- What **food to cook?**
- Which **food to eat first?**
- What events to go to and which to pass up?
- **It is just draining – it sucks the energy out of me**

- What is the toughest choice you've had to make this Christmas?

- **Talk to those around you...**

- **I imagine that many of you think it is choosing what gifts to buy**
- **Some people are really hard to buy gifts for**
- I like **chocolate** – easy you can't go wrong really
- But man some people are hard to buy gifts for
- **And sure those are hard things to do but there are tougher choices**
- **Some may find it really hard to choose to be nice to your family**
- Around Christmas you tend to **see more of your family** than usual
- And also **more of those you tend to avoid**
- **You know how it goes you can choose your friends but you can't choose family**
- **And so it is hard to choose to be nice to them**
- **Sure it is hard to do but there are tougher choices**
- **I believe the toughest thing about this time of year is choosing to receive the gifts of Christmas**
- **Honestly the hardest thing is we have to do is to receive the gifts of Christmas**
- **Not the gifts from our friends and family**
- They're easy
- I mean you feed me **chocolate** I will take it as long as you offer it
- And I am sure that it is easy for all of you to do
- **Are there any children here this morning have a tough time opening your gifts?**
- Didn't think so...
- **But I honestly believe that it is choosing to receive gifts**
- **Of course I am not talking about the gifts we are offered by others**
- **But it is really the Gift of Christ at Christmas that we find hardest to receive**
- **The problem for many is that they are willing to accept at least part of the gift - If that where possible...**
- They want **something of Christ** – but not always all of who he is
- The fact that you have **come to worship** is proof that you are ready to **accept at least part of the gift of Christ**
- Many will come to this season **wanting some of what God offers**
- **However the gift of Christ is an all or nothing offer**
- **And it is a tough choice to make**
- **John writes to the people in his letter presenting them with these two options**

- A **choice** if you like a chance for them to look carefully at their own lives that they **might reflect on what is within them**
- **And so he writes either you believe that Jesus came in the flesh meaning that you belong to God**
- **Or you deny this truth and belong to evil**
- **The choice sounds so simple but it isn't always as obvious as it may seem**
- It seems almost **rhetorical** yet we struggle to actually do it
- **Because for us to believe that Christ came in the flesh asks us to take a serious leap of faith**
- In this obvious choice, John is asking his readers to believe that **Christ came in the flesh**
- **And in so doing he is asking us to believe in a bunch of things either implicitly or explicitly that we find hard to accept as the truth**
- **And God is again calling**
- **The hardest thing to do at Christmas is to take it all in**
- **To receive what is being offered in it's entirety**
- Because we have **questions**, we are filled with **doubt** and our **faith is often so weak**
- **But the choice is take it all, unsure about what all this gift entails**
- **Or leave it all**

Jesus came from heaven – He is God

- There are so many who really do find it hard to accept this truth
- But his is what John is revealing here is that Christ came from the Father
- **John 1** *The word was God - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
- **There is no place for us to believe that Jesus was nothing more than a man**
- **Yet millions of people will acknowledge his wisdom and insight**
- **They will marvel even at the truth of his words**
- **They will get all sentimental with little nativity scenes**
- But they will give him **no more glory than is fitting for a man**
- That option is open I guess should you choose to believe it
- That Jesus was just a man, a wise sage on the level of **Buddha** or **Muhammad**
- And in the time of Jesus there were many who believed that lie – that he was mere man, a mortal being like us
- **But faith in Jesus allows us no such luxury**
- If you want to choose to receive the gift of Christ this Christmas
- **You have to accept the gift as it is offered, all the fullness, grace and mercy of the Father is in Christ**

- In fact Jesus tells us "if you have seen me you have seen the father"
- And so we are really left with no middle ground
- **C.S Lewis the great Christian author and the writer of the Chronicles of Narnia a Christian metaphor wrote this in "Mere Christianity":**
- A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be either a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else He would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.
- **There is no middle ground and John offers us none**
- **To believe that Christ is God in the flesh and to accept this as truth means you accept the struggle of faith that comes with it**

1. Jesus was man – Born to a virgin called Mary

- **But John does not stop there he speaks about Jesus having come**
- And how he came – **in the flesh**
- I preached last week on the **incarnation**
- That God should become flesh
- **God wrapping himself in our mortality, our frailty our weakness**
- **The gift being offered at Christmas by God is his Son**
- As much **divine** – God like the father is
- **Yet wrapped in frail humanity as one of our worship songs tells us**
- We cannot deny that he came in the flesh
- **And if we are to choose to accept the wonderful gift of Jesus at Christmas we choose that we will believe in the virgin conception and birth of this child to a teenager called Mary**
- **We choose to believe in the wonder that a holy transcendent, all knowing and all powerful would come to us in human flesh**
- **God is stretching us here, He is expecting us to make huge leaps of faith**
- **This is awe inspiring stuff**
- **Luther the great church reformer wrote this: "The mystery of the humanity of Christ, that He sunk Himself into our flesh, is beyond all human understanding."**
- **That is how the gift is being offered to us**
- **Contents and wrapping, spirit and flesh**
- But not two parts that can be separated
- **Spirit and flesh deeply woven into each other**
- **Not two separate entities** that can be **divorced** or chosen on their own

- **In the incarnation of Christmas God is saying to us all "Here it is all or nothing"**
- that is the Gift of Christ that God offers us and it requires to take leaps of faith
- The **scriptures testify** to these things
- And the **Spirit of God is leading** us to believe these things
- **John writes this: it is the Spirit of God in you that will help you to believe these truths and to profess them – that is how we recognize the spirit of God in us if we choose in the face of doubt to believe these things**

2. He stepped into our world

- **He stepped into our world**
- 1 John speaks of this implicitly
- **It is much more clear in John 1: "Made his dwelling with us"**
- Living with us – understands our pain and our anguish
- **Really this is true – from the most awesomely profound things to the outrageously mundane**
- Anyone ever had a **splinter**?
- Well Jesus understands our pain – being a carpenter he got plenty of splinters
- Who has been **tempted to do something wrong**?
- Well Jesus understands our temptation he was tempted with money, sexuality and power
- Who has **lost a loved one**?
- Joseph, Jesus dad must have died when he was still a child, and later in life he loses his friend Lazarus
- Who here knows the hurt of **having a friend go behind their back**?
- Jesus knows the pain
- He has walked as human the life we are all living
- He knows our pain, our worry and our sorrows
- **This is the power of the Gift of the incarnation – our God present with us**
- **At Christmas we have this mysterious fat man in red who fleetingly shoots past our houses to drop off Gifts and we want our children to believe in him**
 - You have heard the **physics analysis of Father Christmas**?
 - To visit all the homes across the world he has to fly so fast that the reindeer will be vaporized by the heat generated
- **Yet why do we find it hard to tell our children with the same sense of wonder and awe of the Christ who not only lived as a human**
- But who **continues to be present** with us always
- **"Surely I am with you always until the end of the age..."**

- **Not just once a year, not for a moment to drop off a gift**
- **But present in every moment of our lives, this God who never slumbers nor sleeps**
- **God is offering the choice again**
- **Will we choose the temporary – the half truth, the myth**
- **Or will we choose Him is eternal and unchanging: The same yesterday today and forever**
- **Joshua asks Israel the same question:**
 - **Joshua 24:15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”**

CONCLUSION

- You may have come to worship expecting a fun and exciting sermon
- Tinsel and gift wrap, something temporary and fleeting without substance
- But I have no message like for you
- The message that God is calling us to hear is a message of mystery and laughter
- It is a message of hope and understanding
- It is a message of substance that is retold year of year
- It is a message that in sending Jesus God could have offered us temporary freedom from our earthly troubles, but he chose to give us instead eternal freedom from wrath
- **The choice offered by God today is to believe in the wonder and awe of God made flesh**
- **To accept the fullness of what he has to offer**
- **Or to try, if it were possible to believe only half of it – but to do so is to reject Christ in his entirety**
- **You are about to either eat bread and drink wine or you are about to have the body and the blood of Christ**
- **You are about to take part in a religious ritual or you are about to share in the death and resurrection of Christ**
- **I want us to find the mystery in Christmas again**
- **Let us be reminded of the wonder of the virgin birth**
- **And of the God become flesh**
- **It is a season of faith where we trust this God miracles and wonders and the miracle of His Son made flesh who lived among us**
- It is the season where if we open the eyes of faith we will see his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.