

# Jesus gave his life for us

**Aim: To understand the meaning of Jesus' servant ministry and sacrifice on the Cross, and so help us relate it to his birth this Christmas-time**

Well it's only a week until Christmas Day!

And this evening I'm going to talk about what Jesus did for us in his ministry on earth and what he did for us on the Cross, which you might feel is more suited to Easter time not Christmas...but for me, Jesus' birth cannot be fully understood without looking forward in time to the purpose of his life here on earth and ultimately his death and resurrection.

In the scriptures that we hear during Advent we are told that both Mary and Joseph were instructed to name their baby Jesus. The name *Jesus* was a sign that God would save his people from their sins. Its Old Testament form was *Yeshua* or *Joshua*, meaning "Yahweh is salvation," or God saves.

Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel, telling her, 'He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end' (Luke 1.31-33). Joseph is told to name him Jesus by an angel of the Lord, 'for he will save his people from their sins.' (Matthew 1.21)

So Jesus can save us from our sins!

## **To free us from our sins**

*"He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free" (Luke 4.18)*

Jesus said these words to those in the synagogue in Nazareth at the very beginning of his ministry, being filled with the Spirit after his testing by Satan in the wilderness. He reads from the scroll from the prophet Isaiah that is given him, and boldly announces, "The scripture you have just heard has been fulfilled this very day!" Jesus knows that he has come into the world to bring this Good news of the Kingdom of God to God's people.

He acknowledges that he is the one who is anointed with the Holy Spirit to preach and heal – he is the one who is the fulfilment of God's promises

*We have been set free from sin (Romans 6.18)*

Paul tells us in Romans 6 that as believers we are free from sin's control, and without Jesus we would be enslaved to sin with its consequences of guilt, shame and separation from God. Thanks to Jesus we can choose God as our Master and enjoy new life in serving him.

Maybe tonight we might want to ask ourselves, am I still serving my first master, sin? Or have I chosen God?

*Jesus came to save us from our sins and 'his blood is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'* (Matthew 26.28)

As humans we are unworthy and sinful, but because Jesus is full of mercy, rich in love, full of grace, compassion and unfailing love, we are forgiven.

As Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians (Ch.2.4-5), our God is 'rich in mercy...even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.' We are saved by his grace.

Each time we receive Communion, even though we are not worthy, we remember 'he opened his arms of love upon the cross and made for all the perfect sacrifice for sin.'

We thank God for feeding us with the body and blood of his Son, and that through him we might be 'a living sacrifice', to go out into the world, to be obedient to his will, and to love others.

A very wise and wonderful lady recently described the image of the Cross to me, as vertically looking up to God in obedience, prayer and praise, and horizontally reaching out to others, loving our neighbour – in other words, the summing up of the Commandments that Jesus gave us:

Love God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22.37-40)

This is what Jesus did on the Cross for us, and this is what we can do in our own lives for him.

Jesus can transform us!

### **To transform us**

*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood (Luke 22.20)*

This is the new covenant that was promised through the prophet Jeremiah.

### **Reading: Jeremiah 31.31-34**

In this prophecy Jeremiah foresees the new covenant that God will make with humankind by extending His grace to the Gentiles. In the Old Testament there are four acknowledged divine covenants; pledges made by God with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. But in Genesis we read how the first humans, Adam and Eve, broke the very first covenant with God, choosing not to be obedient, and therefore suffering God's punishment. The catastrophic consequences of this 'fall' of humankind meant that all humanity would be out of relationship with God and the whole of creation. The need for repentance and forgiveness begins here and is reinforced with each subsequent covenant made, right up to the New Covenant, established with the coming of Jesus.

This new covenant would be different, the means by which sins would be forgiven forever. God promises an everlasting covenant, to be placed on the hearts of each person, 'so that they may not turn from me.' (Jeremiah 32.40) This is a promise of new life through the Holy Spirit.

At the last supper, Jesus tells his disciples, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.' Jesus uses the symbol of wine being poured out to foretell the ultimate sacrifice he will make; the shedding of his blood on the cross. Moses had taken the blood of calves and goats, saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you.' (Hebrews 9.20) But animal sacrifices had to be repeated over and over, in order to seal the covenant between God and his people. John the Baptist called Jesus 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1.29); he would die in the place of sinners. His blood would be sufficient for the forgiveness of sins of all who put their faith in him, for all eternity.

One of my favourite writers, Tom Wright says, 'Instead of Passover pointing *backward* to the great sacrifice by which God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, this meal pointed *forward* to the great sacrifice by which God

was to rescue his people from their ultimate slavery from death itself and all that contributed to it.'

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined (Isaiah 9.2)*

Isaiah's prophecy of a coming Messiah tells of a deliverer who will lead those who suffer in their slavery to sin into glory. This message of hope was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus and the establishment of his eternal Kingdom. Jesus came to give us new life, a loving relationship of union with his Father and with himself, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knew the sacrifice he had to make on the Cross, and told his disciples he wouldn't leave them alone, but would send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever (John 14.16).

Jesus breaks the chains that hold us back, he turns lives around, he sweeps away our shame when we accept and believe in him as Lord.

When we look at the lights this Christmas, let us invite Jesus, the Light of the World, into our lives to shine more fully upon us.

Jesus can heal us!

### **To heal us**

*They put them at his feet and he cured them... (Matthew 15.29-31)*

I wonder if anyone would like to suggest how many references there are in the Gospels to Jesus healing individual people during his ministry?

Well there are at least 31! Nearly one fifth of the Gospel accounts is devoted to Jesus' healing ministry.

The leper in Galilee...two blind men in Capernaum...the Roman centurion's servant...Jairus' daughter...the deaf man in Decapolis...the list goes on.

And there are at least twenty references to mass healings in the Gospels. John twice acknowledges that the miracles of Jesus were too numerous to record! (John 20.30; 21.25)

Throughout his ministry Jesus saw healing as a physical symbol of forgiveness.

He performed healings because he came as God's healer- to heal and free us from all the sickness in our human personality that needs to be transformed, so we might begin a new life in him. Jesus died for us in order to liberate us from personal sin and from emotional and physical sickness. He leads us step by step, he never leaves us. He walks with us in our suffering and darkness and makes our burdens light.

Jesus can give us eternal life!

### **To give us eternal life**

*"I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (John 11.25)*

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (John 3.16)*

God sent his son into the world to satisfy the judgement upon us for our sins. Jesus, who is the creator and eternal Son of God lived a sinless life on earth and loves us so much that he died for our sins, taking our punishment.

Jesus wore our shame on the Cross and because of his awesome love for us he defeated death. If we believe and trust in him as our Saviour and Lord, we will be saved and live eternally with God. Jesus did this for us.

His death on the Cross leads to new life –salvation for 'the nations' – which means everyone. (Matthew 28.18-20)

The Cross is placed at the centre of Jesus' life and work. His ministry is that of a sacrificial servant, and his death a self-giving act as the Lamb of God. So as we approach this Christmas, let's reflect on the coming of Jesus; his birth and his Passion and let's ask God to help us reflect on our own lives and worship in relation to all that Jesus has done for us, and how we can fully love and serve him.

**Amen.**

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we thank you for all you have done for us on the Cross.

We thank you for your love, your kindness and your mercy.

We thank you for the price you paid to save us.

We thank you for salvation that you bring and the new life you give us.

Lord, we are humbled by the Cross, draw us closer to you, we belong to you.

All our hope is in you Jesus, to your name we give all glory and praise.

Help us to share your love with others and bring your Kingdom here on earth.

In your mighty name,

**Amen.**