

## Sunday 16 December 2007 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

### Advent 'Preparation' Series Week 4 - Excitement

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#### **Whole advent theme is 'Preparation'**

Felt fitting in many ways, not least because that follows our broader call from God at this time to prepare our hearts and lives, in cutting out the dross and distractions and going deeper in relationship with the Trinity, because He is promising to move in a greater way through his Holy Spirit.

So Week 1 – Paul 'waiting'. Week 2 – Rich 'hunger'. Week 3 – Nick 'Expectation'.  
This week – 'excitement'

#### **Excitement in the Christian life begins when we choose to engage with being a disciple.**

- The excitement began for the shepherds in the Christmas story when they listened and obeyed what the angels had said, and set off on pilgrimage to seek out the new born saviour of planet earth.
- The excitement began for Mary, having heard the offer of amazing lives laid out for her and her son when she was met by an Angel said...."I am the Lord's servant, May it be to me as you have said." (Luke 1:38)
- Many people are excited when first becoming a follower of Jesus. They experience the power of forgiveness – knowing you can be free of guilt, fear, shame. Like a weight lifted off your shoulders
- Others who perhaps have been 'in the fold' a while find themselves getting perhaps disillusioned, or less motivated than they were before. Disappointed that God isn't everything they thought He was – or maybe He doesn't do all quite what they thought He would for them – when they signed up for being a Christian

As Marjorie and I reflected on the theme of excitement for this week, we realised that the real 'goodies' of the kingdom - which breed serious excitement within us - come to those who choose to engage fully with God, on His terms, and follow Jesus and his Spirit wherever they choose to take us. Its like Jesus said (Mark 8:35) "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.."

So who is this Saviour who we are called to follow whole-heartedly? In this Christmas season lets remind ourselves again of a few prophecies about Jesus, and reignite our inner excitement to be His friends and followers:

#### **Isaiah 40:-9-11**

<sup>9</sup> You who bring good tidings to Zion,  
go up on a high mountain.  
You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem,  
lift up your voice with a shout,  
lift it up, do not be afraid;  
say to the towns of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"

<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,  
and his arm rules for him.

See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.

<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.

### **Isaiah 9:6-7**

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Finally – ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’  
(John 14:6)

We’re going to hear from folk soon about how walking with God has impacted their lives this past year. One of the famous names for the messiah is Emmanuel = God with us. [Isaiah 7:14, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (God with us). Technically not Jesus in original context but is taken for him too.]

As we close the year, want to reflect on how much God really is ‘with us’. In daily life, in yearly/seasonal life, individually, as a faith community.

We preach & teach the kingdom relentlessly

- The kingdom coming (Advent) and the kingdom now (testimonies today)
- But we shouldn’t be unrealistic – pretend everything is OK because of Christmas or Easter. The kingdom is also ‘not yet’ (delayed).

So excitement is real at Advent time as we recall the prophecies about the messiah, then the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, and the influence on the world (and us!) ever since. There's naturally an excitement to this season – but also to our normal lives (last week = are called as Christians to a life of expectation)

Perhaps its better unpacked as 'anticipation' - of future hope, of kingdom coming, of lives changed

But we must be careful also to acknowledge that the current circumstances of many may be far from perfect. In our own community this past year we've shared in times of grief (think of Gary Robbins and his family, and of the wider France family mourning John and caring for Sue and the children, and continuing to care for Dave France with the other Sue)

We go through 'downs' as well as 'ups'. **But I firmly believe that its at times like these that the gospel becomes even more 'good news', not less.** Hope in despair, grace under pressure, friends in loneliness, comfort in grief

Soon – testimonies to hear from our church family of the excitement and impact of walking with Jesus this past year. For 5 minutes now, lets take a look at a carol which encapsulates the 'now' and 'not yet', the excitement of Advent yet the frustrations of waiting still for God to heal this world.

One of the most insightful Christmas songs is **“O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”** It connects the joy of the arrival of the Saviour which we celebrate with the 2nd coming of Christ which we long for. It is both joyful and sad. Excited and longing.

- That's a fair reflection of our lives
- The reality of salvation for this world is **an on-going thing** in our lives.
  - In part, its happened. We're washed clean by Jesus to walk a forgiven life
  - In part, we're still waiting, longing for it. To bring to reality all that was promised about Jesus from years back.

**Oh, come O Rod of Jesse's stem,  
From ev'ry foe deliver them  
That trust your mighty pow'r to save;  
Bring them in vict'ry through the grave.**

The rod of Jesse refers to Isaiah 11:1. "There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse."

- It is a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah through the line of David. Jesse was the father of David (the stem) and Jesus, who came from the line of David, is the Rod.
- Jesus was from the line of David. As David conquered earthly foes, Jesus is also the rod that conquers.
- He defeats every foe that might be against us and want to oppress us. Despair, depression, hopelessness, poverty, demonic principalities & powers, satan himself. Loneliness, isolation, confusion
- Christ came and conquered both sin and death.

In principle – God accomplished all of that when Jesus came and died and was resurrected. But because we are in the 'not yet' waiting for the kingdom to come fully...

- While we see and experience his power to save us, yet we still need delivery from our foes, we long for the time when death completed loses its sting, when the earth is finally delivered into God's hands
- So we still sing, and pray. 'Oh come, Oh come Emmanuel...'

**Oh, come, Desire of nations, bind** (last verse)  
**In one the hearts of all mankind;**  
**Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,**  
**And be yourself our King of Peace.**  
**Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel**  
**Shall come to you, O Israel!**

The reference in this verse comes from Ephesians 2:14. “For he [Jesus] himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility....”

- Made the two into one = Jew & Gentile, also a picture for other people groups
- Humankind is famous for division, whether represented in racism, violent nationalism, etc. Jealousy, hostility between people. It still shows how fallen we are – that we are still so inclined to divisions. Always a war going on amidst our Christmas time celebrations in the UK.
- Christ came, as a centre part of his vision, to end these divisions and to unite us together in his love. Ultimately to bring humankind together under Jesus’ rule. To tear down walls of hostility.
- In principle – he did this with his first coming – he set it in motion
- **Jesus continues to do this in the church.** Its called to be a place which celebrates unity and diversity
  - So we rejoice in God’s power to unite and reconcile people by in His love (we’re a mixed bag in KC, but we get on and love each other bc of God’s love for us)
  - Yet we still long for the day that peace and reconciliation is fully realized!
- Yet, we continue to mourn over a world still divided by war and unforgiveness. No need to be unrealistic about that – can’t read the paper without see that!
  - There is much to prayer for in our world. For peace and justice to reign
  - With hope, with joy but with longing.... We continue to sing Oh Come oh come Emmanuel – God with us

### Round-up

So this Advent, as we continue to prepare our hearts, we celebrate the coming King, and call for more and more of coming kingdom – which comes through the submission of ourselves, and our agendas, to His will and discipline in our lives.

Excitement in the Christian life begins when we choose to engage fully with being a disciple.

Lets celebrate now some of the ‘good news’ stories from our own community this past year:

Some great testimonies followed. You can hear them by downloading the [mp3 recording here](#).