

The REAL Reason for the Season

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Introduction

For those who are accessing this via the Internet, you can download a PDF of my notes including the slides and all references from <https://willows.org.za/sermons>. Look for 19 December, 2021.

Let us start in prayer:

Thank You, Father, for giving us Your Son. Thank You, Jesus, for giving us Yourself. Thank You Holy Spirit, for guiding us into all Truth, and may we hear and heed Your voice as You declare to us what You have taken from Jesus to give to us.

Amen.

I would like to quote what might be the best-known verse in The Bible, John 3:16... and then also verse 17.

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

— John 3:16,17

Before we continue I would like to step outside of the sermon, so to speak, to comment on its structure. Initially we shall jump around a lot, touching on things which may seem disconnected, but hang in there: they are all connected and I shall bring them together shortly. Right! Let's go!

I am sure we have all heard the phrase 'the reason for the season'. Well, the season we are in at the moment is Advent, so called because of its Latin root *adventus*, which means 'coming', or 'arrival'. Advent can refer to three arrivals: Christ's birth, Christ coming into our hearts, and His second coming.

The title of today's sermon is:

The REAL Reason
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Sermon

‘For God so loved the world...’ His heart is for you, just as we sang at the end of the Carols Service two weeks ago. I want to sketch the bigger picture, so that we have context for what is happening here.

Here is the opening sentence of the book containing this fantastic news. After all, the opening sentence of a book is a rather important one.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
— Genesis 1:1

Before we look into that a bit more deeply, I want to read the first sentence from another set of books, which I am sure most will also recognise. It is considerably more frivolous.

‘When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton.’

That is the first sentence of Chapter I of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first book of *The Lord of the Rings* by JRR Tolkien, our boytjie from Bloemfontein. Yes, he was born there, and left South Africa at the age of three.

You may be wondering how these are related. It hinges on this excerpt from Romans 7:

For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ...

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.
—Romans 7:15, 16, 18, 19

When we are honest, that describes every single one of us. If you think you’re doing OK, just wait... it usually doesn’t take that much for us to lose our composure. Maybe it’s a taxi, or a sock that went missing (and you know that socks come back as plastic lids without a matching bowl). Maybe it is your internal reaction to the biting sarcasm of someone in some form of relationship to you.

Whatever it is, every one of us fails... repeatedly.

Let’s link these together by working backwards.

I think we can all agree that The Bible is the most important book that there is, but we’ll look at Tolkien first, since I mentioned him last and I did say we’d be going backwards.

Who here has read the trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*? Actually, count watching the three Peter Jackson movies as well for this quick poll. Who has read (or watched) it twice? Three times? Four? More than four times?

Now for the next question — and please, no show of hands for this one. Have you read The Bible? Not just your favourite parts, but *all* of it? You might say that it's unfair, as it is a very large book, with difficult parts. Well, so is LotR. In fact, you don't even have to read it twice to have read more words than there are in The Bible.

<HOLD UP THE TWO BOOKS>

I have read the LotR trilogy... well, I'm not really sure. I gave up counting at 12 times. The Bible? Mmm... moving on.

Let's carry on going backwards.

While there is not much to gain from studying the opening sentence of LotR, it is a very different story with The Bible. Before we do so, let's zoom out a bit and ask the question 'What is the purpose of The Bible?' Any takers?

From such scriptures as Hebrews 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:16,17, and many others, we see that The Bible helps us in our daily lives, but its grand scheme can be encapsulated in these four words:

- Creation
- Fall
- Redemption
- Restoration

The first prophecy of Christ is widely taken to be in Genesis 3:15, speaking of the *seed* of the woman who will crush the serpent's head. I stress the word 'seed' because even though it is often translated as 'offspring', Hebrew has a word for 'offspring', and it is not used here. The one used here means 'seed', and once one understands genetics, it makes perfect sense. I'm not going to go into that now, but want to use it as an example of how important faithful translation is as we look at Genesis 1:1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
— Genesis 1:1

It is written in Hebrew, which has language constructs which don't exist in English. For example, the Name used for God in verse 1 ('Elohim') is in the plural form, while the verb for 'created' is in the singular.

[plural singular]

In the beginning, **God created** the heavens and the earth.
— Genesis 1:1,26

These were not mistakes. Moses was one of the most highly educated men of his day. Furthermore, God is quite capable of seeing to it that the people He used to write The Bible wrote things down *correctly* — He is, after all, **God**. So here, in the very first sentence of The Bible, God describes Himself in a way better understood much later, when He reveals Himself as Trinity.

These ten words also give us a great deal of doctrine. Verse one denies the following, amongst others:

- Atheism, because ... God
- Polytheism, because God acts as one
- Pantheism, because God is before all things and is apart from them
- Materialism, because God is separate from matter
- Eternity of matter, because God created it
- Fatalism, because God acts as He Wills
- Accidental cause, because again, God created
- Unitarianism such as Islam or Jehovah's Witnesses, because Elohim is in the plural

This very clearly sets apart The Bible from all religious texts of the day and since, but why this focus on Genesis?

I quote from AM Hodgkin's book 'Christ in All the Scriptures':

Genesis is in many respects the most important book in The Bible. Almost all the truths of God's revelation are contained here in germ.
— AM Hodgkin, *Christ in All the Scriptures*

A few verses on we read about how Adam and Eve decided to go against God's explicit instruction, and the disaster at a universal scale which followed: the Fall. Remember the excerpt from Romans 7? The one about how we know what's right, but still do the wrong? This is why it happens.

We would do well to heed these words of God, which He spoke to Cain *before* he killed his brother Abel.

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.
— Genesis 4:6,7

I am going to spend two minutes highlighting a very important point we don't have to time consider more deeply, so feel free to speak to me if you want to know more.

In the book *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis popularised the so-called trilemma of Jesus's claims. In short, Christ is one the following:

- Deluded, yet convincing:
Got Him killed.
- A deceiver:
Got Him killed.
- Divine:
He rose again.

In my sermon notes is a reference to an approachable article on this including a response by Lewis to some of the more common counter-arguments to this trilemma.

I mention this because those really are your only options, and you need to decide how you are going to deal with Jesus's claims and His statements.

In the book *Christ in All the Scriptures* you will find multitudes of references to Christ in the Old Testament and by Christ back to the Old Testament. He made it clear that He regarded Moses as the human author of the Law and at least as the editor of those parts of Genesis to which he was not an eye witness.

Furthermore, it will show you how Christ quoted from 19 books of the OT. He also refers to 20 people in the OT, He refers to creation, to the institution of marriage, the history of Noah, to Abraham, to Lot, to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to the burning bush, the manna in the desert, and much more.

Jesus believed those things.

Do you believe Jesus, or are you edging in the direction of Him being deluded or a deceiver? There really is no option of "He was a great man..."

If you are struggling with this, then by all means let's have a chat. God has given us free will for a purpose, and you are free to exercise it. It's not my place do judge you — rather to point you to The Light.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, this:

We are the reason for the season. Our fallen state separates us from God, and the only way back into His arms is with Jesus, Who famously said:

‘I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’
— John 16:6

So we have...

- **Creation:** God made it all and keeps it going.
- **Fall:** God gave us free will and we turned away.

- **Redemption:** God has made the way back to Him available to us all, freely.
- **Restoration:** God will create a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

If we want to take Jesus at His Word when He talks about the nice things such as love, acceptance, and forgiveness, then we need to be sure also to take Him at His Word when He talks about less nice things such as sin in our lives, His exclusive claim on our lives, and our responsibilities.

<BLANK SLIDE>

We are going to end by watching a song video. (Copyright disallows us from including it in our recording, so those not here in person can find the link in the sermon PDF, but please note: you will get the full impact if you *watch* the video.)

Lisa Clow and Bob Kauflin from Sovereign Grace Music wrote this song to encourage people who feel too weary, condemned, or burdened to enjoy Christmas. This excerpt from their web site explains the video:

‘This video contains people who are processing [the song], most of them for the first time, through the lens of their own experiences. A stillborn child. A strained marriage. Feelings of shame. Legalism. Loss. Loneliness. Or simply having a heart that weeps with those who weep.’

‘We think seeing their responses as Lisa sings communicates even more clearly that Jesus wasn’t born for people who have it all together. He was born for those who have nothing.’

<PLAY VIDEO>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-QHbpYjulg>

Come to Me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.
— Matthew 11:28–30

She will bear a son, and you shall call His Name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.
— Matthew 1:21

I want to challenge you: if you need to get right with God, do so without delay! And please... I am not only speaking of salvation, but of the result of Him showing you up, of His prompting to change: to let go of something bad, to start something good.

He is God, He is Creator, He knows best, and He Loves you with an everlasting Love — you can trust Him, so do just that. He will even give you the strength you need.

Just be aware that His road is narrow. While He gives us strength, it is still not easy. The result, though, is more than worth it!

<MOVE TO PIANO>

<SWITCH MICROPHONES>

Would the rest of the worship team please make their way to the front? This morning we opened with the first two verses of that glorious hymn, *And Can it Be*. We are going to close with the last three verses. They are gloriously victorious, and as we sing them with joy in our hearts I would like to encourage you: if you have unfinished work with God, finish it. Ask for help if you need to, but get it sorted.

I want to close with the same prayer with which I opened. It will be on the screen, so let us all pray together:

Thank You, Father, for giving us Your Son.
Thank You, Jesus, for giving us Yourself.

Thank You Holy Spirit, for guiding us into all Truth, and may we hear and heed Your voice as You declare to us what You have taken from Jesus to give to us.

Amen.

Main external references

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