

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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What difference does it make: Why did Jesus come into the world?

Today we begin a series of four talks on the theme "What difference does it make?" After all, it is now some 2,000 years since Jesus Christ was here in this world. Much has changed since then and we need to ask what difference has His coming made firstly, to the world at large and secondly, to me in particular. We will consider this general question under the four headings:

1. Why did Jesus come into the world?
2. Why did Jesus have to die such a death?
3. Why is Jesus in heaven now?
4. Why will Jesus come again?

So to today's question, "Why did Jesus come into the world?" What difference has His coming made to the world at large and to me in particular?

Let me say straight away that His coming has had a profound effect upon human history, if for no other reason than that our history dates are reckoned from His coming. There may be some argument about the exact year when He was born but when we say that Julius Caesar landed in Britain in the year 55 BC, we mean that that event took place 55 years before Jesus Christ was born (BC standing for 'Before Christ'). Similarly that we are now in the year 2011 AD means that it is now 2,011 years since He was born (AD being short for 'Anno Domini' which is Latin for 'in the year of our Lord').

Every day, then, if we did but realise it, we are reminded of the fact of His coming into our world! But there are far more important reasons for His coming into our world than that simple fact. We will consider these under the three headings:

1. Revelation
2. Redemption
3. Representation.

Revelation

We can ask all kinds of questions about God:

- How do we know that there is a God?
- What is God like?
- Does God care about any of us? etc., etc.

Apart from the revelation of God that the Lord Jesus brought by His coming, we would have had no answers to these important questions.

The Lord Jesus had been with His disciples for some three years. During that time, they had had the privilege of seeing the miracles He performed and listening to His teachings. But now He was about to leave them. On the night before He was crucified, He took them apart in an upper room and celebrated the Feast of the Passover. He then took bread and wine and instituted the Lord's Supper - the remembrance of His death. He then began to speak to them about His impending departure. In John 14 we read, "Jesus said to [Thomas], 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.'" Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.'

Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet have you not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father, so how can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves'" (John 14:6-11).

Up until the coming of Christ, no one had seen God. So John tells us in his Gospel, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). It is true that Adam and Eve had heard His voice as He walked in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day (Genesis 3:8). On Mount Sinai, Moses was privileged to hear Him and to see His back parts (Exodus 33:23). But now, in the person of Christ, God was to be seen and heard so that men might know what He is like.

In those three years of the public ministry of the Lord Jesus, there was the daily evidence before men's eyes of what God is like. So when He took the little children in His arms and blessed them, even although His disciples would have sent them away (Mark 10:13-16), we see God's love and care for even the most insignificant members of society. When we see Him stilling the storm on Lake Galilee (Mark 4:35-41), we see God's power at work in His creation. God did not bring this world into being and then abandon it, but would still be at work in it. He still cares for it today! When we see Him weeping at the graveside of Lazarus, we see God entering into and sharing in the sorrows we encounter in life. He is neither unaware of them nor aloof from them! But when we see Him casting out the money changers and traders from the Temple (Mark 11:15-17), we also see that a holy God cannot tolerate man's sinfulness.

It is not only in the works of the Lord Jesus, however, that we see what God is like. In His words, too, there is the revelation of what God is like. This is especially marked in the three parables of the Lord Jesus in Luke 15:

- The shepherd who went after the sheep that was lost until he found it; (Luke 15:1-7);
- The woman who took a light and searched the house for her lost coin; (Luke 15:8-10); and
- The father who ran to meet his wayward son to welcome him home again. (Luke 15:11-32)

In these three pictures, we see firstly the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd who would give His life for the sheep (John 10:11), then the Holy Spirit who by the light of God's word would work with men to recover them to God, and finally, the Father who is ever ready to welcome repentant sinners to Himself and to take them into His family as His sons. So the whole Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - are to be seen in all their love and concern for mankind. What a great God we have!

But the Lord Jesus by His coming not only brought us the revelation of what God is like, He also shows us what we are like! There was a very telling occasion when the scribes and Pharisees brought to the Lord Jesus a woman taken in the act of adultery. They expected Him to ratify the penalty of death by stoning as the Law required. Instead, we read, "And again [Jesus] stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst" (John 8:1-11). Undoubtedly the woman was a sinner, but those scribes and Pharisees, as they stood in the holy presence of the Lord Jesus, realised that before a holy God they, too, were sinners. That perfect life of the Lord Jesus shows us so plainly just how imperfect our own lives are!

Before we leave this section on revelation, we need to consider the challenge that it presents to each one of us. I believe it was CS Lewis, the author of "*The Chronicles of Narnia*", who first pointed out that in making up our minds as to who Jesus is, there are really only two choices. Either He is who He claims to be, that is God Himself in the person of His Son come into our world so that we might see and know what God is like or the alternative is to say that He is an impostor, even a lunatic. That He is a good Man who by His life sets us a good example and by His teaching gives us good moral principles is not really a valid choice, though many might opt for that. No good, sane man, if that was all he was, would make the claims to deity that Jesus so plainly makes. Have you made up your mind as to who Jesus is?

Redemption

If the sole purpose of the coming of the Lord Jesus was for revelation, then that would only serve to highlight the hopelessness of our situation. We have already seen that that revelation not only shows us a God who cares for His creatures, but at the same time shows us how far we are from God in our sins. It might almost have been better to have been left in our ignorance of God! But, thank God, the Lord Jesus came into our world with the express purpose of doing something about our desperate need.

It is surely significant that just before the Lord Jesus was born, the Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21). Similarly, when Jesus was born, the message of the angels to the shepherds outside Bethlehem was, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). Finally, when Mary and Joseph brought the eight day old Baby Jesus to the temple, we read that the aged priest, Simeon, "took Him up in His arms and blessed God and said, 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word: for my eyes have seen Your salvation...'" (Luke 2:28-30).

In this threefold testimony, God would leave us in no doubt whatever that the purpose of His Son's coming into the world was to be the Saviour. It is also interesting that before the Lord Jesus began His public ministry, John the Baptist pointed Him out to the crowd and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). John's listeners would quickly pick up this reference to the Passover lamb, slain in Egypt, and God's promise at that time, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). John leaves us in no doubt that for the Lord Jesus to take away the sin of the world - and note the words, 'the sin of the world', not the Jewish nation only - this would involve His sacrificial death at Calvary. The Lord Jesus Himself would later describe the purpose of His coming in that same way, "The Son of man has come to save that which was lost" (Matthew 18:11).

Redemption is one of the important themes in the Bible. Let's remind ourselves of some of the things the Bible tells us about it:

- "In Him (the Lord Jesus Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).
- "He (God the Father) has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).
- "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18).

Two main thoughts underlie this word 'redemption'. The first is of a price that is paid; the second is of a freedom granted. The word is still used today in the pawnbroker's trade. A person in need of ready cash might obtain some by depositing some valuable object with a pawnbroker. While the object was in the pawnbroker's custody, it was no longer free to be used by its owner. The owner might recover it only by first paying a suitable price for it, redeeming it, and would then be free to use it as he wished.

The Bible verses we have read make it clear that our redemption was purchased for us through the death of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. God is Spirit (John 4:24) and, as such, cannot die. Only by becoming Man, entering into our human life, sin apart, might God die. The Lord Jesus, by His death at Calvary, paid the penalty for our sins so that we might receive, as God's free gift, the forgiveness of our sins. In this way, we are set free from the tyranny and bondage of sin to be the people God wants us to be (Romans 6:17-18).

Representation

The Lord Jesus did not enter our world as a full grown man. No, He came as the Babe of Bethlehem, growing up through childhood to manhood. In this way, and only in this way, could He become fully acquainted with all the weaknesses of our human condition. As a baby, He would be fully dependent upon His mother, Mary. As a child, growing up in Nazareth, He was obedient to Mary and Joseph (Luke 2:51). He knew what it was to be tired (Mark

4:38); to be thirsty (John 4:7). He shared in the joy of newlyweds in Cana of Galilee (John 2:2), but also in the sadness of a bereaved family in Bethany (John 11:35).

In every way, the Lord Jesus has shared in all our joys and sorrows, yet without sin. As the only sinless Man who has ever lived in this world, He is unique; at the same time, He is uniquely able to sympathise with us in all the ups and downs of life. He is now in heaven at His Father's right hand as our Great High Priest. So we read in Hebrews 4:14-16: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." A little further on, we read: "By so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. And there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Hebrews 7:22-27).

We cannot do better as we conclude this third section on 'Representation', by quoting part of CL Bancroft's hymn:

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
A great High Priest Whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands,
My name is written on His heart;
I know that while in heaven He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart.*

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