

Mark 14:12-25

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Date: 26 December 2021

Preacher: Donald Smith

[0:00] I want you to put yourself in my shoes just for a second. It is 2013. I am 17 and have all the wisdom of a 17-year-old boy.

Mum and Dad are going away for the weekend. This is great news. They are loving parents and have filled the fridge full of everything you could ever need.

They go away and simply say, just make sure the house is tidy when we come back. It's an opportunity that will not go wasted.

I have a few friends over. I say this wasn't my motto. It's still my motto. Dishes can wait till later. It's better to do them all together. Leave as many as you can at once and then get them all out of the way in a one-er.

Friday, Saturday, Sunday passes. The house represents less of a well-loved home, more of a landfill.

[1:06] Monday comes. Mum and Dad are coming home at some point. But you think it will probably be later. So you sit down in front of the TV and just enjoy your last few hours of freedom.

And you hear the door open. Is it good news? Is that something you want to happen?

It depends what's going to happen to you. Right?

Something of what happens at Christmas on a cosmic scale. God has left his people in his good creation with all they could ever need.

And they have made an utter state of the place. And then one Christmas morning, the King comes back into his creation.

[2:10] Is it good news? Or does your heart skip a beat? And think, oh no. The good news of Christmas is not just that Jesus came.

The King of the universe coming into his world on its own would be a frightening thing for people who have made an absolute mess of it.

Thankfully for us, that is not why Christ Jesus came. Paul says it most clearly in his letter to Timothy. He says, the saying is trustworthy and true.

Christ Jesus came to save sinners. Without those last three words, Christmas is a frightening thing. But when he first came, Jesus came not to judge the earth, but to save sinners. And I want to just focus this morning on that very simple word, right, that Jesus came.

[3:29] He came to save sinners, but Jesus came himself. Might be one of the most famous verses in the Bible, right, John 3, 16, teaches us that, the wonderful truth, that God sent his son into the world.

Right, so whoever believes in him would not perish, but have eternal life. God sent his son, but that does not mean that Jesus did not come as well.

Let me just illustrate what I mean there by bringing you into an evening in the Smith flat in Edinburgh, the proper Smiths, Donald and Mary, right, the rest of them are just imposters.

It's been a long day for Mary, right, she's come home, it's been a tiring day at work, she sits on the sofa, and starts watching on the TV somebody unload their dishwasher.

I kid you not, this happens. She puts on YouTube and watches other people do housework. She's had a long day, we've not seen much of each other, and I think, you know what, I'll be a good husband and spend some time with her.

[4:45] The intention's good, the execution is subpar. Because I sit there watching this woman Hoover her flat, and I start to make some sarcastic comments about the evening's entertainment.

Who wouldn't? It's ridiculous. Please speak to Mary about it afterwards. Right, utterly ruining Mary's attempt to rest and relax after a long day.

So she turns to me and very lovingly says, why don't you just go through to the other room and play your Xbox? What's happening there's Mary is sending me to the other room, but let me tell you, I gladly go.

I have no reservations about going to the other room to play the Xbox. It is something both parties want.

That is what happens at Christmas. God not only sends his son, but the son willingly and eagerly goes. Jesus Christ came, and he came to save sinners.

[6 : 05] Point is this, right? From the very beginning, Jesus came willingly and with a purpose. He knew what he was doing, and he wanted to do it.

He wanted to do it. Little baby Jesus in a manger has not been placed there against his will, and that carries on through his whole life.

He's not stuck with these twelve annoyingly at times slightly thick disciples because he has to be. He chooses them. He wants them to come with him. All the way to the cross, Jesus is in control. He is going willingly. He wants to do it. We see something of that in those verses we just read in Mark 14.

You see there in verse 13 of that chapter, Jesus knows exactly what is going on. Go into the city, he says to his disciples, and he instructs them exactly how things will pan out.

[7 : 19] A man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, the teacher asks, where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover of my disciples? He will show you a large room upstairs furnished and ready.

Make preparations for us there. Verse 16, the disciples left, went into the sea and found things just as Jesus had told them. From the beginning, from his birth right through to the passion narrative, Jesus knows exactly what's going on.

He's in control of it. Jesus comes and Jesus is in control of everything he's doing.

He came with a purpose to save sinners. He knows that purpose. He's in control of that purpose and he's going to make sure it happens. You might think, well, right, okay, what's the point of that? Why focus on it so much? Let me just illustrate something of what this means. This may or may not be a true illustration.

[8 : 35] Joe, are you ready? Joe, right, I suckered you all in into thinking he's a nice guy. You've been taken for fools.

Right? He's been playing you all along thinking, oh, isn't Joe nice? Isn't Joe lovely? Let me tell you. Joe has just been working his way into the right places.

He's had this scheme all along. One day, the elders find out that the building has been sold and the money's vanished.

Right? Everything's been taken. The little lamb's biscuits are gone. This is the act of a heartless man. It's an absolute disaster.

Right? Our church is gone. What are we going to do? Someone has to go and break the news to Joe. So a couple of the elders go around, surprised to see this three-story extension going in the back of a manse.

[9 : 47] It's unusual. They go on to see Joe sitting in his new gold-plated kitchen. Suspicions start to creep up. They go to the living room and it's just full of overpriced coffee beans.

You're about to break the bad news to Joe when he explains how excited him and Susie are for their luxury cruise around the Caribbean next week.

You might not think your elders are the brightest bunch. You might be right. But they managed to put two and two together. Right? Joe's been at it. Turns out that Joe's managed to do this with the whole free church.

Everything they own is gone. All those coffee beans. You wouldn't believe how overpriced they were. Joe needs to pay a punishment for his crimes.

And so he is sent to prison. Right? He is sent to prison for as long as it takes him to pay back everything he has taken. He's in prison.

[11 : 06] Right? There's no way he can make anything to pay anything back. He is stuck there. Helpless and hopeless on his own.

But for reasons that escape any rationality, you like Joe. right? You think, you know what? I feel bad for the guy.

I want to do something to help him out. So you fork out everything you have to pay Joe's ransom for him. To set him free.

To restore him to his family once more. Right? little Caleb has a dad. Little Caleb has a dad again. It's a great redemption story. You chose out of your own pocket to pay a price he had no say.

There was nothing he could do. He was locked in a cell. He couldn't even ask for help. You get to church the next Sunday and you see Joe sitting there with Susie and little Caleb again.

[12:15] you think what a wonderful sight. What a wonderful sight. But Joe is just looking despondent.

Guilty. Sad. You go over to him and he goes what's wrong? Why aren't you happy? Why aren't you rejoicing? He just says I'm so sorry about what you had to do for me.

I'm so sorry. Can you please forgive me? I wish she didn't have to go through that. He said Joe, no, no, I chose to do that for you.

Right? You didn't get a say in the matter. I wanted to do this for you. Stop feeling bad. Start rejoicing. Sunday by Sunday it's the same picture.

Joe looking sad and miserable because you paid the price to set him free. I don't know how much money is in the free church bank accounts but the price Jesus had to pay to set sinners free was infinitely steeper.

[13:35] And that is what he came to do. Right? That passage we read in Zechariah. Because of the blood of my covenant, I will set your prisoners free.

What is the blood of the covenant? It is Christ's own blood. It is Christ's own body. God said to them.

Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying, take this, this is my body. He took a cup, when they had given thanks, he gave it to them and they all drank from it.

this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many, he said to them. Jesus' own body is broken.

His own blood is poured out to set prisoners free. you see it is him that is doing.

[14:55] He breaks his own body. He pours out his own blood and he gives it to his disciples.

He says, take it, I am giving it to you. I don't know about you, but there have been times in my Christian life when I felt guilty about what Jesus had to do for me on the cross.

Before we take communion and often sit there and feel bad, I think, Jesus, I'm so sorry that you had to do this for me. Jesus didn't have to do anything for you.

You were where you deserved to be, in prison. The New Testament goes for dead in your trespasses.

There was nothing you could do. You were hopeless and helpless outside of Christ. we do not go to Jesus and unload our sins onto His body on the cross.

[16:22] We are pinned down by them. Hopeless, helpless sinners, and Jesus comes and takes them off us. And He pays the price by breaking His own body.

He does not go to the cross against His will. You see that in these verses, that Jesus knew He was going to be betrayed. It was well within His power to avoid it.

But He goes because He came to save sinners. He breaks His body. He pours out His blood.

He gives it to His disciples. He commands them to take it. that is why the King coming home is not scary.

It is not a fearful thing. That's why that passage we read in Zechariah opens with the words rejoice. Rejoice because your King has come.

[17:40] rejoice because your King has paid the ransom that you could never have done. Rejoice because your King has set prisoners free who were hopeless and helpless without Him.

We should not, cannot sit there feeling guilty about what Jesus did. Not only does it take away from the wonder of what He has chosen to do by Himself, but it gives ourselves far more power than we ever had.

We have no ability to do anything about our own condition. Jesus gives us His body. He says to us, take it.

How do we respond to this wonderful news, to Christ's coming to save sinners? The answer is that we ought to rejoice and be filled with thankfulness beyond measure.

Those are two things that should define Christians above and beyond everyone else. Joy and thankfulness that surpasses anything we can know in this world.

[19 : 18] I wonder if that's what you know this morning. Do you know the joy and thankfulness of being in Christ?

If you feel, if you ever feel guilty about it, don't. Because Christ came to save sinners.

But so often we go the other way and we grumble at what we have. We forget about what we deserve.

We forget about what we have in Christ. And we think of what could be better, what we think should be better. There's a woman in our church in Nidri who, whenever you ask her how she is, no matter what kind of day she's going through, she'll simply turn to you with this beaming smile on her face and say, I am so much better than I deserve.

That is the wonderful truth of the gospel, of Christ coming to save sinners, is that we sinners who were dead in our trespasses, imprisoned to our sin, are so much better than we deserve.

[20 : 52] is that the attitude of your own heart? Is that the attitude of this church? People come in here and be blown away by how grateful these people are.

When someone asks you how you are, is your first instinct to think I'm much better than I deserve or to think of all the things in your life that you think could be a bit better? Grumbling and guilt have no place in the Christian life because Christ has removed those things.

They are gone forever and ever. We are commanded only to rejoice. Rejoice at what Christ has done for you.

Rejoice that though you were once a prisoner you have now been set free. Rejoice that though you were once dead you are now alive. Rejoice, people of God, for your King has come and He has done for you what you could never do on your own.

He has taken the hopeless and the helpless, given them life once more, live lives that are rejoicing in Him, praising Him and thanking Him for all that He has done for us.

[22 : 42] Let's pray together as we close. our great God and loving Heavenly Father, we do just praise you so much for the wonderful news of Christmas, Lord, that you did not come to judge but to save.

Lord, help us to remember what we deserve and where we are in Christ. Forgive us for the times when we take for granted all that you have done for us.

Forgive us for the times when we think we deserve more than we do. Lord, help us to rejoice in Christ Jesus and give ceaseless thanks to Him for all that He has done for us.

In His name we pray. Amen.