

Christmas Cracker! Jokes, Gifts & Crowns

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[0 : 00] beginning at verse 8. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them do not be afraid I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you.

He is the Messiah the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You'll find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel praising God and saying glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests. When the angels had left them and gone into heaven the shepherds said to one another let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen which were just as they had been told.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Brilliant. So we're going to think together now about that Christmas story. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we do that. Heavenly Father thank you for your word the Bible.

Help us to know you better as we spend time in your word now. For Jesus name's sake. Amen. Well there's one big Christmas item that we haven't used yet and it's the Christmas cracker and I've got plenty here. Is anyone willing to pull a Christmas cracker with me? Yeah Hannah do you want to come to the front? Okay. Brilliant. Okay great. Okay and we've got a hat there because grown-ups look silly on Christmas day don't they? They wear the Christmas hat. We've got the other things in there. Great. And we've also got, hi Matty. Brilliant. We've got a little crowd here.

It's all right because we actually have plenty of these crackers. They come in packs of ten and I was thinking unless we can use them all today you're going to be hearing this talk every Christmas day for ten years. So that's brilliant. Okay but we also we need help to open this really big Christmas cracker here. Look at this one. Isn't this brilliant? Okay so whoa exactly. Okay so Bethany do you want to go at that end? And Matty can you come at this end? You don't want to pull this one. Okay you think it's going to make a big bang? I doubt it. Okay so would you like to pull it? Oh other people are coming forward as well. This is just who knows what could happen in this talk. Okay great. So three two one pull. Great. Isn't that amazing? Well done everyone right you can go back to your seats now or if you want to stay at the front you can that's fine. If children want to be at the front you want to pull one here. Okay great. Let's just crack on. That's brilliant. Okay.

[3 : 42] You can pull one yeah that's fine. I think this might be the last one during the talk. We've got plenty more after the service. Okay so brilliant. Now guys just grab a seat now because the reason we've got crackers. I'm sure there'll be crackers later as well but we've got crackers for a special reason here. It's brilliant we've got them because it really helps us understand the Christmas message from the angels. So just think. Are you okay James? Distracted. It is difficult when you're wondering what's the joke what's the toy. Okay so there's three things in a Christmas cracker isn't there? Okay can anyone remember? Let's shout them out. A joke yeah? A hat and a toy.

That's right okay. So we've pulled our Christmas cracker and by looking inside the cracker we're going to think a bit about the angels message. So the first thing we're going to think about is the joke and I've got my joke here inside my giant Christmas cracker. Here we are. Okay there's my joke. Okay and we love jokes in Christmas crackers don't we? Jokes make us laugh. I think I've got

one here.

Let me see. This was one from my children. Why was the snowman rummaging through a bag of carrots? Because he was picking his nose. Oh it's great isn't it? Yeah. Knock knock. Wayne. Wayne in a manger.

Okay and one for the grown-ups here. Why is Christmas just like any other day in the office? Because you do all the hard work and the fat guy in the suit gets all the credit. There we are. Now jokes are funny or at least they make us smile and that reminds us that the good news about Jesus brings us great joy. The angels said to the shepherds don't be afraid I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Great joy and we need to think why is that?

It's not what lots of people think gives us joy at Christmas. I don't know whether you saw last month but Greg's had a Christmas advert for going to Greg's. Okay and they got in a bit of trouble for it but let's just have a look at the picture. Instead of baby Jesus it was a Greg sausage roll in the manger. Right? Okay and they got pounders for that. Right? They ended up withdrawing it. It was a bit bonkers but the thing is we're thinking that doesn't seem right does it to replace Jesus with some greasy pastry with processed meat inside and yet the reality is we all do that with Christmas don't we? There are things that we look to for joy instead of Jesus.

[6 : 27] It's fine to look at things and thank God for them but sometimes we we put them in Jesus place and when I was growing up I used to think Christmas the real action wasn't really Jesus. You might go to church but I used to think the joy came from the presents. The joy came from the food.

But that was just using like a Greg sausage roll instead of what could really bring me happiness which is Jesus. And grown-ups I don't know what might be your greasy pastry this Christmas whether it's your career or your home or your kids achievements or your resting pulse rate but whatever it might be there are things that we look to and think that's what will give me joy. And if we think like that we haven't understood the Christmas message because that's where the real joy is. Everything else is like a greasy pastry compared to the true meaning of Christmas. So the second thing in our Christmas cracker is the gift right? And sometimes they're fun gifts aren't they? I've got I brought with me one of my gifts. Look at this. Some Star Wars bubble bath. Okay it's an Ewok. Okay so when it's bath time. I did have a bath once about three years ago. And I got something else as well. Where's my other thing? I think it's inside still. Oh it's falling out. Here we are. Look at that. A superhero face cloth.

Get in. Yeah. That's brilliant isn't it? I might even wash my face now. That is brilliant. Okay so toys often bring us happiness. Sometimes they're useful. Sometimes they're not so useful. They're just fun.

I've got some pictures. I mean that one that you get in the crack of what is that about? Where you put it on your hand and it curls up and it flips over. And then tells you often something quite mean about yourself. And then the next one that those mustaches. They're really hurt don't they? Inside your nose.

[8 : 15] But they're meant to bring us. They bring us a gift. And that's what brings us happiness. Now that helps us understand Christmas. Because it's the gift from God that brings us the joy. Let me read again what the angels said. They said don't be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you. And to appreciate that gift of a saviour we have to understand why we needed it so much. Last week I watched a Christmas movie called Elf. Have any of you seen Elf? It's a great Christmas film.

It's got Father Christmas in it. And like lots of Father Christmases in the films this Father Christmas has a naughty list. And so Elf finds out that his daddy is on the naughty list. Okay. And we all kind of hear that about Father Christmas don't we? That he's making a list and he's checking it twice. And he's going to find out who's naughty and who's nice.

But when you really think about it how nice do you have to be to get on Father Christmas's good list? Not very actually. There might be some child somewhere in the world that didn't make it. But most people are not on the naughty list. And the danger is that sometimes we think that the true God is like that. That yeah he wants us to be good but you know as long as you're good-ish it's fine. But that's not what the living God is really like. Because actually God is so good that as soon as we've done things wrong we can't stand in his presence.

and be his friend. We see this among grown-ups. Grown-ups if you think just this year one of the big things that's been in the news has been Christians being asked especially politicians but the new Bishop of London last week as well being asked about certain things. Is that a sin? Is that a sin?

Is that a sin? And it's as though the world thinks as long as you don't do certain things you'll get to heaven. But that's not true. Because sin is about our hearts and how we treat God in our hearts. And all of us have said to God no I don't want you to be God in my life. And that means that we can't be friends with him. That's what sin is. Unless you're perfect and none of us have been perfect here. Our hearts have turned from God. And the Bible says there is no one righteous not even one. There is no one who understands. No one who seeks God. All have turned away. They've together become worthless. And then it says just a few chapters later in Romans the wages of sin is death. [10:42] So we've got to get our heads around how perfectly good God is and that we had a real problem with him. And that's why this Christmas gift is the greatest treasure in the whole world.

Because Jesus was born in that wooden stable so that he could go to that wooden cross. And when he dies on the cross this amazing swap takes place. And he takes the death we deserve for our sin so that we can have eternal life. We come back to God.

We say sorry. We can be forgiven. We can be friends with God forever. He saves us. And that's why the angel says today in the town of David a savior has been born to you. Last month in the news there was a man called Morris Wrightson. I don't know if you saw the news about Morris Wrightson. He was driving in a coach in the Alps and it was one of those really windy roads in the Alps. And he was on this road with a coach full of people at a ski resort and the brakes failed. And he realized the brakes weren't working.

And he realized if he kept going he just the coach would just fall off the side at the next hairpin bend. So he deliberately drove into the rocks. And he bore the full weight of the rocks. And he died. And nobody else on the coach died. They all survived. They were saved. But he had to die to save them. And they were on the news saying what a hero Morris Wrightson is. He saved their lives.

[12:04] He made that decision his life so that they could live. Well in a little way that's a bit like what Jesus has done for us. He saw us living in darkness in how we treat him and each other.

And he knows the wages of sin is death. And so on that first Christmas he steps into the world knowing it will mean he'll bear the full penalty for our sin so that we can have life forever.

He stands in the gap in the danger to save us so that we can live. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you. And it is wonderful. And it means Jesus is the hero. So we give each other gifts on Christmas day. But let's remember that gift that gives us greatest joy. The gift of forgiveness and eternal life. The gift of friendship with God. So we've had our cracker joke.

Christmas brings us joy.

We've had our cracker gift. Christmas brings us a saviour. And the third thing we get from our cracker is the crown. Now I had a special crown somewhere. Where's my crown gone? Have you found it?

Golly. Well spotted Ali. Here it is. Thank you. Now Hannah made this crown. But it's funny isn't it that my daughter Hannah. It's funny isn't it that at Christmas adults do look really weird all day don't they? Because they put these crowns on. And if you're a grown-up you can't avoid it can you?

[13:34] You try not to when everyone says get your crown on. Okay. But it's great to have a crown because it reminds us that Jesus who was born in the manger is the king. Verse 11 again.

The angels said today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you. He is the messiah the lord. Those are two big words about Jesus being king. Messiah. He's God's powerful promise rescuing king. And lord. Lord is a god word.

He is god stepping into the world. He's in charge. And one day the world will see that it's his world. Everyone will see it. But we need to recognize that he's king today. One of the big stories again this year in the news was about the king of the Netherlands. King Wilhelm Alexander. And he admitted. Did you see this? We've got Dutch people nodding in the congregation. This is a true story. That he admitted this year that for more than 20 years he has been co-piloting passenger planes.

And nobody knew. Amazing. These Dutch people have been flying on planes for years not realizing their king was on the plane in the cockpit flying it. It's not what we expect of a king is it? It turned out he was closer than they thought. And in a similar way when we get to Christmas our king is closer than we think. So the danger is we look at the manger and we just see a baby and think oh that's sweet. Baby Jesus. And we forget this baby is in charge. He hasn't stopped being God when he comes to be a baby. He's still God the son from heaven. So we see him wrapped up tightly in swaddling cloths by his mum. But all the while he is filling the heavens in his majesty. We see him clinging to his mum vulnerable. But all the while he is holding every atom in the universe in place. We picture him crying for comfort. Scared. But all the while he is sustaining the stars of the galaxies

of the universe.

He hasn't stopped being God. We see him sleeping among the donkeys. Misunderstood. Ignored. But all the while he is being adored by awesome terrifying angels in heaven. And all around us people won't make room for him. Just like they wouldn't make room for him in Bethlehem. But even when other people don't spot it he's still the king of the whole world. And the question for you is is he your king? He's a good king. Will we accept the gift that he's come to give us? That he dies the death we deserve in our place. So that we can have eternal life. And will we accept he's the king? [16:11] And let him rule in our lives from now on. So discover the joy of Christmas. For me it's only when I've come to understand what a wonderful king he is. What a wonderful gift he's come to bring.

That I've discovered the joy of Christmas. And I hope that will be true for you as well today. So in our house when we're doing a prayer that's about something amazing about God. we put our hands in the air and we call it a wow prayer. So let's do that together now. Put our hands in the air. It is optional. And let's do a wow prayer. Wow. Father God we thank you that Jesus coming is good news of great joy. Please help us to go to him to find our joy today and every day.

Thank you that Jesus is your gift to us of a rescue so that we can know you. And thank you that Jesus is your great forever king. Help us to give our lives to him today and every day. Amen.

Well we thought about the angels message and now we're going to sing about it. Let's stand and sing angels from the realms of glory.