

Was God Really Here?

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[0 : 00] So who's already opened presents today? Quite a few. Okay, who got Lego for Christmas? I knew there would be some. I know we've got some Lego fans.

Who wants Lego for Christmas? Ah, far more. Okay, okay. Well, you might get some if you're lucky or if your parents are rich because Lego is quite expensive.

Maybe it's more of a birthday present than a Christmas present, but I love Lego and my kids love Lego. We all love Lego. It's great, isn't it? It is one of the most successful toys ever made, the most successful financially toy ever made, but it's a great thing because, and people love it because you can build your own worlds and you can build your own stories and build your own little characters. I used to, when I grew up, I had the Knights Lego and I had this castle and I had all these little knights and they each had names and they each had their backstories and I just spent days and days and days with this castle.

Obviously, you know, I don't do that anymore. I'm a grown-up and I do grown-up things and that's why I play with Star Wars Lego now.

[1 : 13] Yeah, that's my vibe. Star Wars Lego. I actually have a number of sets in my office and if you book some pastoral counseling and you're lucky, you may be able to play with some of the Star Wars Lego.

If you're lucky though, I don't let anyone play with it, right? But I actually, oh, look at that. I did bring it. I've got, this is one of my favorite ones.

This is Obi-Wan's Hut from Episode 4 of Star Wars. I've made it a little bit Christmassy. It opens up and it's got Obi-Wan Kenobi with the Christmas hat and Luke Skywalker, his little protege and that's one of the sets.

So that's just a little taster of what you can see in my office. But I want you to imagine for a second you're playing with Lego and you're making a town or a castle or whatever it is you make with Lego. But then I want you to imagine you don't just get to play with the town that you've made or the castle that you've made. You actually get to become part of it, right?

[2 : 19] You get to become one of the, these are called minifigures, the little Lego man, right? And you get to become one of them and enter into the whole creation that you've made and actually not just play with it or pretend but enter into and see the world from the eyes of one of the minifigures and actually talk to the other minifigures and be part of that story.

Be part of the world that you've made. Wouldn't that be amazing? That would be like Lego plus. You actually get to be part of it. Well, I was thinking about what we celebrate on Christmas and I realized that's exactly what we're celebrating because that's what God did with this world that He made if you think about it.

He made, God made this world, right? This world is made. This world is designed. We can see it. We learned about that and we learned how we can know that there's a God a few weeks ago in the first of our series.

And we know God made this world and God made the people in it. But He didn't stop there and He didn't just watch what He made from a distance and every now and again, you know, play with it. No. God decided to enter into the world that He made and become one of the characters in the story that He's made. And that is what the Bible claims.

[3 : 43] That's what we've been singing about. That's what we've been remembering. But I want you to stop and think about that and how amazing that is that the Creator became part of His creation.

It's actually one of the most outlandish claims the Bible makes. Of all the things the Bible says, that's probably one of the craziest. You don't find that in any other religion. That the Creator decided

to not just make everything but enter into the creation that He's made.

And that's the heart of what we celebrate at Christmas. Crazy as it is when you stop and think about it. That is what we're celebrating. We wouldn't have this day if it wasn't for that. And that's why for a few minutes today I just want to consider why Christians believe that.

Because it's a crazy idea. Why do Christians believe that? And how do we actually know it's true? And one of the best places to find the answers is in that passage Dylan read for us in John chapter 1.

Now John was a disciple of Jesus. He lived with and he sat under the teaching of Jesus and he witnessed everything that Jesus did. And later on he wrote his gospel in reflection of all that he realized about Jesus.

[4 : 58] And in the beginning of his gospel he writes these words. John 1 verse 14. And we can put them up on the screen. He says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us.

We observed his glory. And I think it's worth just stopping this morning before we go out and have our lunch and open more presents or whatever it is you do on Christmas Day.

It's worth your time to stop and think about each of the lines in this verse. Because it's very profound. John says, first of all, the word became flesh.

Now what does John mean by the word? It's a weird phrase. The word became flesh. Well he actually tells us before, earlier on in this chapter, he starts by saying this.

He says, in the beginning, the beginning of all things was the word. And then a bit later he says, all things were created through him and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created.

[6 : 05] And so, everything that is made we know has an origin, has a start, has somewhere that it was, that it came from, an origin. Came from somewhere, right?

Well John says, okay, we all agree that everything that was made came from somewhere. I'm going to call the origin of everything the word. But then he reveals that this word is actually a person.

Which makes sense that all persons, personalities are made by someone who was a person. Not an impersonal force, but an actual person.

And he calls him a him. This word. This origin of all things. But then he also calls him the word because it turns out he didn't just make everything, he also, and this is amazing, he speaks to what he made.

He communicates. That's why he's called the word. He tells us why we're here, why he made us.

And he reveals truths from outside of our world that we wouldn't have otherwise ever known if it wasn't for him communicating, revealing.

[7 : 11] Okay, so that's all really in that phrase, the word, the origin of all things, but who speaks to us and reveals to us things from outside our world. It's like, imagine you're making a Lego set, but then the minifigures in your Lego set actually learn that their world that they can see, the little town or whatever that you've made, isn't all that exists, that actually they're part of a teenager's bedroom.

And they, someone communicates to them that there's a whole world outside of their little world.

well, that's what the word does for us. He connects us as human beings on planet earth with things that are outside of the world that we can see around us.

But it turns out that to do that properly, the word from outside had to come in to our world. And that's the amazing thing.

And that's what this verse claims here, that the word became flesh, the origin of all things and all people himself became a person. Think about that. The origin of all people became a person.

He became one of the things he created. And he did that so that we don't have to guess what's out there, but we can see it, we can talk to it, we can touch it, we can hear it.

[8 : 35] The truth from outside our world came into our world. So that we can talk and see and hear. You know, I sometimes like to talk to Luke Skywalker, but I don't think he hears me, you know, no matter how much I talk to him, because he's a minifigure.

Can't talk to a minifigure, that's ridiculous. But if I became Obi-Wan Kenobi and I actually became him and became a minifigure and entered into it, suddenly I can communicate communicate to Luke and I can tell him about things that he would never know.

I can help him to find out about me. I can tell him you're part of a Lego set and you're being used in a sermon illustration right now and you're part of this big church and he would never know these things.

And if I became part of the set, I could talk to him. Well, that's what God did. The one who made this world that we live in came into it and spoke to us so that we can know things that we wouldn't otherwise know, that we can know who he is and we can know what is true about our lives. That's what we're celebrating today, that the creator came here and became part of his creation so that we can know him. The word became flesh.

[10:03] But that's not all. Next, John says, he didn't just become flesh, he dwelt among us. He dwelt among us. You know the literal, it's in the ancient Greek language, the literal is he pitched his tent with us.

Isn't that a great phrase? He pitched his tent with us. I don't know if you like camping. Who likes camping? Put up your hand. Lots of people. Okay, more than I expected, more than I expected. Not everyone though. Not everyone likes camping. I get that. I like camping, we like going camping, but I get that not everyone likes camping because some of it is uncomfortable. Your own bed at home is always better, right?

And some people are just like, why would I go and live, you know, where it's uncomfortable, where there's no, you know, maybe running water or no toilets or whatever. Why would I do that?

You have to put a fire on to boil your water. I've got a kettle at home. So I get, not everyone likes camping. Turns out though, God likes camping. God likes camping.

[11:02] That's what John's trying to say here. He pitched his tent with us. God likes camping in his own creation. That's how much he likes what he made. He likes to come and camp in it.

Even though, here is not nearly as amazing than where God comes from. And yet, he doesn't mind. And so, why?

Why does he not mind coming and camping here when he comes from something and somewhere which is far more amazing? Well, because, this is the reason, he gets to be close to the people he made. That's why he comes and camps out here.

And to him, being close to the people he made, being close to you, is more important than comfort for God. Think about that. You know, we, when Gene and I got together, we went camping.

when we first got together, we went camping in Scotland. And I remember, I loved that trip. It was great to be with the person I loved. And Scotland, it wasn't the best season.

[12:07] I don't think there is such a thing as a best season in Scotland. Beautiful country, but some of the places were quite dreary and wet. And some of the camping sites we went to weren't, you know, the best.

But I didn't mind. I didn't mind at all. I didn't mind how uncomfortable it was because I got to be with Gene. And that was far more important to me than being comfortable.

Well, it's the same with God. He doesn't mind pitching his tent in whatever situation, even if it means coming and living in this uncomfortable world and experiencing all the difficulties we experience because to God, relationship with us is more important than comfort.

And yet, sadly, we couldn't say the same. You see, as humans, our comforts are often much more important than our relationship with God because there was a problem.

You see, when God came into our world, there was a problem. When God came here, it was nothing like He originally designed it to be. When He came here, this world had become broken.

[13:21] It had become corrupted. Imagine you're building a beautiful Lego world, right, in your bedroom, you know, on your desk or whatever it is, and you spend weeks on this, and you, every little detail, intricately designed, every little minifigures is the character that you've designed and they've got a little job in your little world and everything is exactly perfect.

After weeks and maybe months of building this thing, but then one day you're not around and your little sister gets into your room and starts taking apart the Lego that you've built.

By the way, this is not from any true life scenario. It's totally hypothetical. Okay. And your little sister starts taking it apart, taking apart the minifigures, putting them together with other halves of other minifigures that it was never designed to be, and you come and the whole thing is ruined.

Right? Nothing is what it was meant to be. Nothing is how you created it to be. Well, you know, the Bible reveals that's pretty much what happened to this world. Something from outside came in and changed us so that we don't live as we're meant to live, as we're designed to live.

And worse is we went along with it. We were like, okay, yeah, we don't want to, we don't want to do what we were designed to do. We'd much rather live what we think is the right way to live.

[14:54] We loved the idea of being independent of our maker, living how we want. Now, if that happened to the Lego world that you built, you would, you know, the obvious thing to do would be to break it apart and start again.

Right? And God could have done that with us. He had every right to. This is what He made. He could have totally just destroyed it and restarted. But the amazing thing is He chose not to. Because God loves what He made. Even when it was broken. So instead of destroying it, He chose to do something much more difficult. And that was to, to fix it rather than destroy it. And that's ultimately why He came. That's why God decided to camp out in this broken world. That's why He got His hands dirty to fix this world from the inside. And that is the glory of Christmas. That's really at the heart of what we're celebrating. That the Creator became part of His creation because He loves this so much that He was willing to get His hands dirty and fix it.

[16:00] And fix us. That's what the Bible claims. That is in the center of the Bible's message. But, how do we know it's true? I mean, it sounds great, doesn't it? But come on.

That's, that's pretty far-fetched. How do we know that this man, Jesus, who was a carpenter in the Middle East 2,000 years ago, was actually the Creator of the cosmos come to fix us?

How do we really know that? Well, that's because of what John says next. He says, we have seen His glory. We, we observed His glory.

You see, John knows that what he's saying here is a massive claim and it's going to be really difficult to believe that the Creator became a creature in His creation. As I said earlier, no other religion has anything close to that kind of idea.

We can't make this stuff up. And John knows that, that people are going to struggle to believe it. And so, that's why he doesn't just make the claim. He goes on to say, let me show you how I know.

[17:06] And that's what the rest of his book, The Gospel of John, is. It's an eyewitness account of what he saw and why he ended up believing this about Jesus. First, because he saw Jesus do things that only the Creator could do.

There was a, there's a number of things. He says at the end of his Gospel, there's many other things that Jesus did, but I've written these things down so that you may believe what I believe about Him. Okay, and he writes a story about how there was this cripple man, but he had never been able to walk.

He was born cripple, which means he never had any of the muscles in his legs that you need to walk. Never had that. Jesus comes and touches him and he says, get up.

And you know, the man, probably very hesitantly, gets up and he starts walking around. He's never done that before. Without a stick, without any help. And he starts jumping around.

Muscles that had not been there a few minutes before suddenly were in his legs. How does that happen? There was another man who was born blind. He'd never seen anything. He didn't have the cells in his eyes that you need to be able to see things, to see light.

[18:13] Jesus touches this man's eyes and he can see for the first time in his life. And even more amazing, there was this man called Lazarus who died. And he had been in the tomb a number of days.

His heart had stopped. He had stopped breathing. He was officially dead. Jesus tells him to get up. And he comes, he walks out of the tomb and he's breathing again.

Only the creator of life can do that. Only the creator of legs and eyes can do things like that. Right? That's what John saw.

That's why he's making this outlandish claim. That's what he saw. Only the giver of life can do things that Jesus did. You know, it's like, it's like going back to the Lego illustration.

It's like, it's like someone who builds a Lego town, right? Or a Lego village and becomes a minifigure in that village but still being the maker of that and walking around and seeing, oh, some of the stuff is broken.

[19:13] Well, let me just fix it because I know where the box is that that piece comes from. Imagine a little minifigure going around and fixing the creation where it's not working properly where he comes across another minifigure with no legs and he's like, don't worry, I know where the leg box is and he goes and finds the legs and puts them on.

That's essentially what Jesus did. He was our maker come and whenever he saw brokenness around him, he could fix it because of who he was. But even more than his miracles, John knew this

about Jesus because of what he says next.

Have a look. At the end of verse 14, he says, we observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Grace and truth. Grace and truth. You know, those are the two things you need if you're going to have a right relationship with your Creator. Grace and truth.

Truth about who he really is and grace because we're sinners and we need forgiveness for the sins and the rebellion against God that we're all guilty of.

[20 : 17] We need grace. We need forgiveness that we haven't earned. That's what grace means. And we need truth. Well, those are the two things Jesus came to bring into this world. Truth about God and forgiveness for sins that we haven't earned.

And that was possible because of what else he did when he was here. He died on the cross. He died on the cross as a human being to take the sins of other humans on himself so that their record could be wiped clean and they could be forgiven even though they did nothing to earn that.

That's what Jesus did on the cross. He brought true forgiveness for us. That is how he began to fix things by starting to fix us.

Now he hasn't finished yet. He's still continuing to fix a lot of people and he's still got a plan for fixing this world which we'll find out about on Sunday if you come back. But that's how he began to fix us. by bringing truth and grace into this world. And that grace and truth John saw it but it also came out in how he spoke and how he lived.

[21 : 29] That's another thing that John and the other disciples realized about Jesus that in him they were seeing the perfect human. See in Jesus was a human as humans were designed to be as the creator intended for humans to be.

And they realized that. And that's this grace and this truth that flowed out of Jesus and how he dealt with people and how he spoke. They were seeing the perfect human because they were seeing the maker of humans in front of them.

And that's why John says we have seen his glory. We have seen our maker in Jesus. And when you read John's gospel you will too.

as millions of people from around the world have done when they have opened this and read it for themselves and they've read about Jesus and they realize that they are seeing their maker in front of their eyes.

Of course our maker is like us. When you read about Jesus you go of course. Something inside you resonates and you realize this is what our creator is like.

[22 : 38] Of course he's like us. because this is what he made us to be. That's the experience you have when you read about Jesus. You resonate you realize that you are seeing your creator.

That's what John realized. And he and the other disciples have written these gospels so that you can see what they saw. That you can see this for yourself. And so if you haven't done that yet if you haven't seen for yourself in the word if you haven't read it properly or read it at all don't rob yourself of the opportunity to see your maker.

Come to discover Jesus that Dylan spoke about earlier. It's the perfect opportunity to come and investigate these claims for yourself and ask the questions you have. Because people have questions of course and that's fine.

Investigate the evidence. Don't be blind to it. Don't let yourself miss this opportunity to investigate for yourself and to see what John and these other disciples wrote.

And in the meantime so we're starting that in January and I invite you to come along sign up on Connect but in the meantime if you want to and I encourage you to read through the gospel of John.

[23 : 53] If you don't have the Bible I have a pile of John's gospels here. And this is I'm willing to give this to you as a Christmas present which is much better than any Lego you could ever get.

I promise you read it. If you haven't yet if you don't have a Bible at home come to me take one of these free of charge no questions asked. I'd love to give these to one of you. I want everyone to have access to be able to read what John has said so that you can see what he saw.

Because your maker has come. Your maker has come into this world because he wants you to know him. He wants you to know him but you need to see him first.

The question is are you willing to see him? Because when you do it will change your life. And a lot of people aren't for that reason willing to open their eyes.

Listen to what else John says. He says he was in the world and the world was created through him and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

[25 : 01] But to all who did receive him he gave them the right to be children of God to those who believe in his name.

Who believe who he really is. And I pray this Christmas that you will be one of those people and that you will see your maker in Jesus.

Let me pray. Lord we thank you so much that you have made yourself known. That you the God of all creation decided to enter into and camp out in this creation broken as we are so that we can know you and that you can fix us.

Lord we we thank you and praise you. And even more Lord that you God became human so that humans could be children of God that we could enter into a real eternal relationship with you.

Lord I pray for anyone here this morning who does not have that relationship with their creator you yet. I pray Lord that you would cause them to read John's claims to read the evidence so that they too can see you in Jesus and enter into that relationship that you made us for.

[26 : 19] We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.