

# This Christmas, You Can Find Forgiveness

Message for Sunday, December 8, 2019  
by Bruce Fraser

## Children's Message:

John 14:27, New International Version:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

When I was a young child, a lightning storm would frighten me. So what my parents did was to make lightning something that I would like, rather than something that I would fear. Here's how they did it.

Whenever there was a storm, we would sit by the big window in our home, so we had a good view of everything. My Mom and Dad would point out the lightning flashes and say things like

- “Oooh, that was a pretty one!”
- “Look how bright it is!”
- “Look, there were three in a row.”
- Ka-boom! “Wow! That was a close one!” Then we'd have a big hug to make sure we were all safe.

You can guess what happened: I started to enjoy lightning. I looked forward to it. It was fun! It was no longer scary.

The key point in all this is that my Mom and Dad were there with me. I knew that I was safe if they were around. And the hugs made it even more special.

Jesus told his disciples that they didn't need to be afraid, either. He promised he would give them his peace. He promised that he would always be with them by his spirit, no matter where they or what happened to them. Even when they were suffering, Jesus would be with them, to give them strength and hope.

**Message:** “This Christmas, You Can Find Forgiveness”

Do you ever say something like “When I die, I hope God will take me in”? If so, then this message is exactly for you.

## 1) Believe the Good News: the Saviour has come

This is the good news which the angel announced to the shepherds on the night when Jesus was born:

Luke 2:10-11, New International Version:

“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; he is Christ the Lord.”

Note that word Saviour. That's what Christmas is all about: God is giving us a Saviour.

## 2) Believe the bad news: we need a Saviour

But why do we need a Saviour anyway? The Bible says that God is perfect and holy. God's home is also perfect and holy. There is no sin there. So only perfect and holy people get to go there. That makes it a pretty lonely place for God.

God could have lowered the standard, and allowed, say “above average” people into heaven. But then it wouldn't be heaven anymore. People would be proud. Some would say, “I bet I'm in the top 5% of everyone here. God must be really glad to have me.” There would be envy, just like on earth. And just like here, it would lead to conflict and fighting and wars. So that's no good.

The other thing God could have done was to teach us to be better people. And so we have the church, with its preachers and Junior Church teachers, to teach us about right and wrong, to show us God's rules about how to live, to make us into good Christians. All through life we are preparing for the day when we present ourselves before God our judge. We hope that the sinful things we've done in our lives will not count too heavily against us, and that we will be reckoned good enough to be allowed into heaven.

Do you see yourself in that description? Maybe you're someone who's gone to church your whole life long. You've done all the right things—or at least, you've tried to. You're a decent person, certainly not “wicked” or “evil” like a murderer or rapist. And you're just hoping and praying that God will let you in.

There's just one problem with this picture: “pretty good” or “very good” or even “extremely good” just isn't good enough for heaven. I don't stand a chance

of getting into heaven based on my goodness, and neither do you. None of us is good enough. We don't come close to the standard of perfection.

A little boy wrote a letter to Santa Claus that said, "Dear Santa: There are three boys living at my house. Jeffrey is two, David is four, and Norman is seven. Jeffrey is good some of the time, David is good some of the time, and Norman is good all of the time. I am Norman."

You know the problem with that? Not one of us is a Norman.

We received a Christmas card a while ago, and on the back of it is this message:

**If our greatest need had been information, God would have sent an educator. If our greatest need had been technology, God would have sent a scientist. If our greatest need had been money, God would have sent an economist. If our greatest need had been pleasure, God would have sent us an entertainer. But our greatest need was forgiveness, so God sent us a Saviour.**

That's the good news of Christmas. "A Saviour has been born to you."

Lowering the standard for heaven wouldn't help. Teaching us to be holy and perfect isn't going to work. So God did something else altogether: God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He forgives our sin. Instead of lowering the standard to our level, he lifts us up so that we meet the standard: not on the basis of our own goodness, but on the basis of the goodness of Jesus, our Saviour.

### **3) Receive the Good News: receive the Saviour**

The angel appeared to Joseph, Mary's husband-to-be, and gave him a message very similar to that of the shepherds.

**Matthew 1:20-21, New Century Version:**  
**"Joseph, descendant of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the baby in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."**

"He will save his people from their sins." How do I receive that forgiveness? How can you be saved from your sins?

It's really simple. Relax, and look at this:

**Acts 10:43, Contemporary English Version:**  
**"All who have faith in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in his name."**

Notice that it simply says, "All who have faith." It doesn't say anything at all about how good you are, all the good things you've done. Do you know how you get Jesus to save you? Just admit you need him to do that. Let go of my pride, my self-righteousness.

There are two types of people who find it very hard to believe this good news, to receive this forgiveness. I'll tell you a story about the first type.

A large church in London, England had started three mission churches in the slums. On the first Sunday of the New Year the members of all the churches came together at the large church for a combined Communion service. The mission churches were largely made up of people who had once been drunkards, prostitutes, thieves, and so on; but they all knelt side by side at the Communion rail.

At one of these services, the pastor saw a former burglar kneeling beside a judge of the Supreme Court of England — the judge who had sent him to jail where he had served seven years. After his release this burglar had been converted and become a Christian worker.

After the service, the judge was walking home with the pastor and the judge said, "Did you notice who was kneeling beside me at the Communion rail this morning? What a miracle of grace." The pastor nodded in agreement. "Yes, what a marvelous miracle of grace." Then the judge said "But to whom do you refer?" The pastor replied, "Why, to the conversion of that convict." The judge said, "But I was not referring to him. I was thinking of myself." The pastor, surprised, replied, "You were thinking of yourself? I don't understand."

"Yes," the judge replied, "it did not cost that burglar much to get converted when he came out of jail. He

had nothing but a history of crime behind him, and when he saw Jesus as his Saviour he knew there was salvation and hope and joy for him. And he knew how much he needed that help. But look at me. I was taught from earliest infancy to live as a gentleman; that my word was to be my bond; that I was to say my prayers, go to church, take Communion and so on. I went through Oxford, took my degrees, was called to the bar and eventually became a judge. Pastor, nothing but the grace of God could have caused me to admit that I was a sinner on a level with that burglar. It took much more grace to forgive me for all my pride and self-deception, to get me to admit that I was no better in the eyes of God than that convict that I had sent to prison.”

Good people find it extremely difficult to accept the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. Maybe that's you. You're like the one I described earlier: you've lived a fairly decent life, and you're hoping that you're good enough for God to take you in.

If you ever say, “I sure hope God will take me,” that shows that you are putting your faith in your own goodness. My friend, if that's you, I say to you just this: get rid of your pride. It is ruining you. God sent Jesus to be your Saviour. This Christmas you can find forgiveness: just surrender your life to him, and you are there. No “if” or “hope.” You can be sure.

**Now I'll tell you about the other type of person** who finds it very hard to receive this forgiveness. Some people think they have gone too far to be forgiven. Maybe that's you. You might think that God could never forgive you for what you've done. It may be something that happened years and years ago, but the sting of it is still fresh in your memory.

I knew a woman who was about eighty years old. One time when I was visiting her, she told me that she had an abortion when she was eighteen years old. Ever since then, she has been consumed with guilt. She never told anyone about it, not her parents, her siblings, her children. She carried this torment by herself all those years. She feared dying; she was terrified at the thought of standing before God and being judged for her secret.

This is the Bible passage I read with her. You can take it to heart for yourself, too.

**1 John 1:7, New Century Version:**

**The blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin.**

*Every sin. No one is beyond God's grace.*

I invite you to silently join me in prayer.

### **Prayer**

Jesus, I need you.

I confess my pride at what a good person I am. But now I realize that I'm nothing like you. Not even close.

You are holy and I am not. So I need your forgiveness for all the wrong things I've done. The Bible says it's as if you wash me and make clean, like brand new. That's what I need.

Thank-you, Jesus, for doing that. I am now one of your followers.

I turn away from all that is wrong in my life, and I turn to you, to follow your ways.

I want to be like you. I want to be able to love people, even enemies, like you did.

I want to be able to forgive others who have hurt me, like you did.

I want to be close to you, to know you — not just know about you, but to know you personally in my life.

Fill me with your Holy Spirit, so that I will have the power to do this. Change not just my outside behaviour; but change me from the inside out. Mold me and shape me to become the person I was meant to be.

This is my prayer, my heart's desire. Thank-you, Lord. Amen.