

Once in Royal David's City

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[0 : 00] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. The Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 2.

Luke chapter 2. And we're reading at verse 10. The angel said to them, that is, the shepherds, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

What is the Gospel according to Christmas carols? What is the Gospel according to Christmas carols? That's the question we've been asking over this Christmas season.

Because as we've said before, Jesus is the reason for the season. Jesus is the reason we should rejoice and be glad this Christmas. And that's what our short series has been on.

[1 : 22] It's been on the Gospel according to Christmas carols. And it's sought to remind us and reaffirm to us that Christmas carols are not an obstacle to the Gospel.

But they are an opportunity for us to share the Gospel. And I mentioned to you before a quote from an article. The article was called The Gospel According to Christmas Carols.

And it says that Christmas carols provide us with a unique opportunity to share the Gospel. It's the perfect time to explain the meaning of these songs to those who don't know Christ.

And share the good news of the Gospel with them. And we saw that. We've been looking at different Christmas carols over the past number of weeks. We saw it with Isaac Watts' evangelistic prayer.

Where he said, Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing. We saw it with Wesley and Whitefield's evangelistic proclamation.

[2 : 23] Where they said, Hark the herald angels sing. Glory to the newborn King. We saw it with John Francis Wade's evangelistic plea. Where he said, O come, all ye faithful.

Come and adore Him. We saw it with Joseph Moore's evangelistic presentation. Which was Silent Night, Holy Night. And we saw it on Wednesday evening with John Mason Neal's evangelistic prophecy.

Where he says, O come, O come, Emmanuel. And this morning I'd like us to consider one more Christmas carol. The Christmas carol you were given at the door.

Once in Royal David's City. Once in Royal David's City. And as you can see there are six verses. I'm not going to give you six headings. We're going to group verses 1 and 2 together.

Verses 3 and 4. And verses 5 and 6. We're going to put them into twos. And look at them under three headings. Three headings boys and girls. Carol, compassion and crown.

[3 : 28] Carol, compassion and crown. So first of all, carol. We read there in verses 1 and 2 of the carol.

Once in Royal David's City. The word carol means.

To celebrate in song. Carol means to celebrate in song. And this well-known Christmas carol. It was, as you can see there at the bottom.

It was written in 1848 by Cecil Francis Alexander. Cecil Francis Alexander. She was the wife of a Northern Irish minister.

He was called the Reverend William Alexander. And this Christmas carol that we have before us this morning. It was written in a book alongside a number of hymns called, A Collection of Hymns for Little Children.

[4 : 48] A Collection of Hymns for Little Children. And Cecil Alexander, she wrote the book, A Collection of Hymns for Little Children. She wrote the book because as a parent, a Christian parent with boys and girls, she had four children.

Four children. And Cecil Alexander's burden was that she wanted to teach the next generation about the Bible. And the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

She wanted to teach children about the importance of following Jesus Christ. Putting Jesus first in your life. But you know, her intention in writing that collection of little hymns for children was that this collection of hymns would only ever be used in Sunday school or at home to teach children.

She never intended for these words to be sung in a church. She never intended that they would be part of a carol service. But you know, what's interesting about the collection of hymns for little children is that they were all based upon the Apostles' Creed.

They were all based upon the Apostles' Creed. And Cecil Alexander wrote the book. She wrote this hymn based upon the Apostles' Creed. And, well, we're familiar with the teaching of the Apostles' Creed.

[6 : 08] We did a study on the Apostles' Creed towards the end of last year and the beginning of this year. And the Apostles' Creed, it's one of those Christian creeds which has been read and recited and reaffirmed by Christians throughout the world for centuries.

And as you know, the Apostles' Creed, it's a summary statement of faith. It's a belief statement. It's a belief statement that asserts and affirms the teaching of Jesus Christ and the church of Jesus Christ.

More than that, it's a statement of faith. It's a statement of faith that we're called to believe and confess with our mouth. That's why it's called a creed. You'll see the Apostles' Creed.

It's on the other side of your sheet. The word creed, it comes from the Latin credo, meaning I believe. And the Apostles' Creed is to be believed in our heart and also confessed with our mouth.

And if you remember, that's what we did each Sunday as we studied the Apostles' Creed. We believed and we confessed the words of the Apostles' Creed either silently or spoken.

[7 : 12] And you have the words in front of you. I'm not going to ask you to say it. But I just want to read the Apostles' Creed again. It says, It says, Now, of course, you're not saved by simply reading or reciting or reaffirming the Apostles' Creed.

You're saved, as we were saying to the children, by believing and receiving and resting upon Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. But Cecil Alexander, she based her collection of hymns.

She based all her teaching upon the Apostles' Creed. Because besides writing this Christmas carol, once in Royal David City, she also wrote the well-known children's hymn, All Things Bright and Beautiful.

You've probably heard it before. The opening line is, All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful, The Lord God made them all.

And they're the words that are based upon the opening line of the Apostles' Creed. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Another hymn which Cecil wrote was part of her collection of hymns for little children.

[9 : 04] It was, There is a green hill far away. Another hymn you might have heard before, A children's hymn, Where it says, There is a green hill far away, Without a city wall, Where the dear Lord was crucified, Who died to save us all.

And these words, From that hymn, They were based upon the words in the Apostles' Creed, Where it says that Jesus Christ was crucified, Dead, And buried. Which means that once in Royal David's City, This Christmas carol that we're looking at this morning, It was based upon the statement in the Apostles' Creed about the birth of Jesus, Where it says there, I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord, Who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, And born of the Virgin Mary.

And you know what's fascinating, What I find fascinating is that This mother in Israel, Cecil Alexander, This woman, She took the time to write her collection of hymns for little children, And she took the time to put it together, Based upon the teaching of the Apostles' Creed, And she did it all, Out of a desire and a determination, To teach and tell the next generation about Jesus Christ.

She wanted children, And her children's children, To know all about Jesus. And you know, As parents, And as grandparents here this morning, As teachers in the school, As adults, As a congregation, You know, We should have that same desire.

We should have that same determination. That should be our prayer, And that should be our passion. That we want to teach and tell the next generation, About the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 56] Because if we don't, Who else will? If we don't teach them, The world will teach them something else.

The world will teach them, To live according to their will, And their way, And their wants. The world will have them, The world will hold them, The world will keep them.

Which is why we must teach the next generation, About this glorious gospel message. This message about Jesus Christ. And you know, That was Cecil Alexander's desire, And determination, In writing this Christmas carol.

She wanted the next generation of children, She wanted her own children, Her four young children, She wanted them, To be taught about the Savior. She wanted her grandchildren, And maybe even her great grandchildren, To be taught all about this Savior.

And you know what's amazing, Is that we were singing about that. We were singing about the desire, And the determination, To tell the next generation. We were singing about it in Psalm 48.

[12 : 05] We were singing where the psalmist said, At the end of the psalm, He says, Tell it to the generation following. That this God is our God, And that He will be our guide, Even unto death.

Tell it to the generation following. And you know, You find that throughout Scripture. This emphasis on teaching, And telling the next generation.

It was the same with the Jews, And the Shema. They were to teach and tell, Their children, And their children's children, All about the Lord, And to love the Lord. Tell it to the generation following, That this God, Is our God.

And He will be our guide, Even unto death. My friend, This carol reminds us, And reaffirms to us, That we must teach, The next generation. We must teach them, To celebrate the Savior.

But more than that, We need to teach the next generation, About the compassion, Of the Savior. Compassion. The compassion of the Savior. That's what we see secondly.

[13 : 10] So carol, And compassion. Compassion. Look at verses 3 and 4, Of this Christmas carol. It says, And through all his wondrous childhood, He would honor and obey, Love and watch the lowly maiden, In whose gentle arms he lay.

Christian children, All must be, Mild, obedient, Good as he. For he is our childhood's pattern, Day by day like us he grew.

He was little, Weak and helpless, Tears and smiles like us he knew. And he feeleth for our sadness, And he shareth in our gladness.

You know, When it comes to celebrating Christmas, Almost every adult will say, And they'll admit, That it's all about the children. It's all about the children.

Whether it's the Christmas tree, Or the decorations, Or the chocolates, Or the lights, Or the presents and the food. Whatever it is, It's all about the children. Although the adults enjoy it too. It's mainly all about the children. And you know, In many ways, It's good that Christmas Is all about the children.

[14 : 17] Because as we said, Cecil Alexander, She wanted Christmas, To be all about the children. It was all about teaching children, The truth about Christmas.

It was all about teaching children, The truth about Christmas. That the real reason for the season, Is not Santa, But the Saviour. It's all about the Saviour.

It's all about Jesus Christ, Showing compassion, Towards sinners, Such as we are. And you know, I love that word, Compassion.

Boys and girls, That's our second heading, Compassion. The word compassion, It depicts and describes, The overflowing love, Of Jesus, Towards us.

The overflowing love of Jesus, Towards us. I'm sure I've mentioned to you before, That I always think about it, When I see the word compassion. I had a great auntie, Who lived next door to my parents, In Melbust.

[15 : 17] And there was one night, She was unwell, And she asked me to come over, And have worship with her. And so I did. And when I sat down with her, She handed me her Bible, A Bible that she'd had for many years, And I started flicking through it, To find a suitable passage to read.

But as I flicked through the pages, I noticed that she had, She'd used a highlighter pen, In her Bible. And she'd highlighted, A phrase that often appears, In the Gospels.

The phrase, Jesus moved with compassion. Jesus moved with compassion. And you know, My great auntie, She noticed that I had stopped, To read what she had highlighted, Wondering what it was.

And she said to me, Murdo, Don't you just love that phrase? Jesus moved with compassion. He moved with compassion. She said, It's such a beautiful way, To describe our Savior.

That he moves with compassion. And you know, It really is, A beautiful way to describe Jesus, Because, When Jesus saw the crowds, And all the multitudes, That followed him, He looked on them, With compassion.

[16 : 29] They were harassed, And helpless, Like sheep, Without a shepherd. Even when Jesus, Told the parable, Of the good Samaritan, He told, All the crowds, That the good Samaritan, Moved towards, This man, Who needed help.

He moved towards him, With compassion. And in the parable, Of the prodigal son, A well-known parable, To all of us, I'm sure, Jesus said, That the father, The father who had lost, His son, He moved, With compassion, Towards his wayward, And prodigal son.

He moved, With compassion. It's a beautiful phrase, That tells us, And teaches us, The truth about Christmas. The truth about this, Saviour, Who moves, With compassion, Towards sinners.

How Jesus moves, With compassion, Towards sinners. Because, You know, The wonder of wonders, The wonder of wonders, Is that Jesus, Moved with compassion, From the crown of glory, Down to the cradle, In Bethlehem.

As we were saying, To the children, All the way down, To the cross of Calvary. And every step, Of the way, Was a move, Of compassion. From the crown, To the cradle, To the cross.

[17 : 44] It was all, In compassion. Compassion, Towards lost sinners, Like you and I. But you know, The wonder of this, Christmas carol, Is that, Cecil Alexander, She wrote these middle verses, Verses three and four, Not only to highlight, That Jesus moves, With compassion, Towards sinners, But also that, As Christians, As followers of Christ, As those who live like Jesus, Or seek to live, Like Jesus, And love like Jesus, We ought to show, Compassion, Towards others.

And that's what, Cecil sought to emphasize, And explain, In verses three and four, That as we consider, The compassion of Jesus, As we consider, The fact that he, He humbled himself, From the crown, To the cradle, To the cross, We have to show, The compassion of Jesus too, We ought to teach, Our children, And show compassion, Like Jesus, Just as it says, There in verse three, And through all, His wondrous childhood, He would honor, And obey, Love and watch, The lowly maiden, In whose gentle arms, He lay, Christian children, All must be, Mild, Obedient, Good as he, For he's, Our childhood's pattern, Day by day, Like us he grew, He was little, Weak and helpless, Tears and smiles, Like us he knew, And he feedeth, Feeleth for our sadness, And he shareth, In our gladness.

You know, I love that fourth verse, Because we're reminded, That Jesus not only moves, With compassion towards us, He also knows, And understands, All that we're going through, He knows, And understands, All that we're going through, You know, There are things, That go on behind, Closed doors, That nobody else, Will know about, And yet he knows, And this Christmas, We might be, Encountering, Or experiencing, Sin, Or sickness, Or suffering, Or stress, Or sorrow, Or the loneliness, Of separation, And yet Jesus knows, Jesus knows, And understands, All that we're going through, Because as, The Bible reminds us, He came into this world, To bear our griefs, And to carry our sorrows, The Bible assures us, He's our great high priest, Who is able to sympathize, With all our weaknesses, Therefore we're told, To come, Boldly,

We're told to come, But we're told to come, Boldly, To the throne of grace, That we might receive mercy, And find grace, To help, In our time of need, He's our childhood's pattern, Day by day, Like us he grew, He was little, Weak and helpless, Tears and smiles, Like us he knew, And he feeleth, For our sadness, And he shareth, In our gladness, But you know, The amazing thing about, This woman, Who wrote this carol, About Cecil Alexander, Is that she practiced, What she preached, Or you could say, She lived out her lyrics, Cecil was known as someone, Who imitated, And emulated, The compassion, Of Jesus Christ, She was involved, In charity work, Almost her whole life, And you know, With many of the churches, Buying her book, The collection of, Little hymns for children, Or, Of hymns for little children, All these churches,

That bought her book, All the proceeds, Of buying the book, They went, To support different charities, She gave the money away, It supported those, Who were deaf, And those who were disabled, It helped women, Who had been abused, And assaulted, And Cecil even worked, To develop, A district nurses service, Within her community, In northern Ireland, Cecil Alexander, She was a remarkable woman, Who was described, By others, As this unrelenting visitor, To the poor, And to the sick, She practiced, What she preached, She lived out, Her lyrics, She loved Jesus, And she lived for Jesus, She moved, With the compassion, Of Jesus, And you know, It should remind us, That as Christians, That's what we should be like, We should practice, What we preach, We should live out, The lyrics of scripture, In our lives, We should live for Jesus, And love like Jesus,

[22 : 19] We should move with the compassion, Of Jesus, Towards one another, And so as we consider, This Christmas carol, We have three headings, Carol, Compassion, And crown, Crown is the last heading, Crown, Look at verses five and six, Of the carol, And our eyes at last Shall see him, Through his own redeeming love, For that child so dear and gentle, Is our Lord in heaven above, And he leads his children on, To the place where he is gone, Not in that poor and lowly stable, With the oxen standing by, We shall see him, But in heaven, Set at God's right hand on high, Where like stars his children crowned, All in white shall wait around.

As you can see from the title, And even the opening line, Of this Christmas carol, Cecil Alexander, She pinpointed on the map, The location, Of the cradle, Of Jesus, She says, It was once in royal David's city, Once in royal David's city, But you know, What's remarkable is that the saviour of this world, He wasn't born into the fortified palace, In Jerusalem, But he was born into a filthy pen, In Bethlehem.

Is that not what the angel said, There in verse 11, For unto you is born this day, In the city of David, A saviour, Who is Christ, The Lord. But you know, The thing is, Many of the Israelites, They knew that the Messiah would be born, In royal David's city, But in their mind, Jerusalem, Was royal David's city, Not Bethlehem.

Jerusalem was royal David's city, Because Jerusalem was the city, In which King David, Established the monarchy, Over the nation of Israel. Jerusalem was the capital city, Of Israel.

Jerusalem was where David brought, The ark of the covenant. Jerusalem was where the tabernacle, Finally rested. Jerusalem was where the temple, Was built by David's son, Solomon.

[24 : 30] Jerusalem was where the glory cloud, Rested. Jerusalem was where David's palace, Was situated. Jerusalem was where all the, The regal and all the religious life, Of the nation, Centered around.

It all happened, At Jerusalem, Upon the holy mountain, Of Mount Zion. We were singing about it, In Psalm 122. Everyone went to Jerusalem, With joy.

We sang about it, In Psalm 48, That Jerusalem stood, As the city, Of the great king. But that's not, Where the saviour, Of the world, Was to be born.

Because as you know, Jesus Christ, The son of God, The second person, Of the trinity. He's the God of glory, The king of kings, The lord of lords, The sovereign, Supreme, Supreme, And superior, Ruler, Of all creation.

He wasn't born, In the fortified palace, Of Jerusalem. No, He was born, Into this world, As we read in that passage, In Luke's gospel, He was born, As a defenceless, Dependent baby, In a filthy pen, In Bethlehem.

[25 : 41] And it was there, He was laid in a manger. Now when Luke tells us, As we saw last, Lord's day, When Luke tells us, That he was laid in a manger, It wasn't a top of the range crib, From mamas and papas, It was a feeding trough.

That's how low, He went. My friend, Royal David's city, Wasn't this large, And luxurious, City of Jerusalem. No, Royal David's city, Was the tiny town, Of Bethlehem.

The tiny town, Of Bethlehem. But it was, Royal David's city, Because that's where, King David was born. And that's where, The descendant of King David, Was to be born.

That's where the, Saviour of the world, Was to be born. And you know, I don't think we appreciate, How tiny the town, Of Bethlehem really was. Bethlehem was a tiny town, In the back of beyond.

Nobody really knew about it, Nobody really spoke about it. That's why in 1868, The American pastor, Philip Brooks, He wrote his Christmas carol, Oh little town, Of Bethlehem.

[26 : 50] Because Bethlehem, Was this tiny town, In the middle of nowhere. In fact, Bethlehem, Was such a tiny town, That whenever Bethlehem, Was spoken of, By any of the Israelites, You not only had, To name the place, Bethlehem, But you also had, To name the larger region, To which it belonged, So that people, Would actually know, It exists.

And so if you were, Speaking about Bethlehem, You would call it, Bethlehem, Ephrathah. Bethlehem, Ephrathah. Ephrathah was the larger region, In Judea, To which this tiny town, Belonged.

And you know, What I love about the Bible, Is that this is what was prophesied, By the prophet Micah, 800 years, Before Jesus was born. Micah wrote, Micah 5, Verse 2, But you, O Bethlehem, Ephrathah, Who are too little, To be among the clans of Judah, From you shall come forth, For me, One who is to be ruler, In Israel.

My friend, Although Bethlehem, Was an irrelevant, And insignificant, Tiny town in Israel, What the Bible reminds us, Time and time again, Is that God often chooses, What is irrelevant, And insignificant, To display his power, And purposes, And reveal his glory, And his grace.

God often chooses, What is irrelevant, And insignificant, To display his power, And his purposes, And reveal his glory, And his grace. That's what Paul said, About the church, Of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 33] He said, God has chosen, The weak things, Of this world, To confound the strong, God has chosen us, As fallen sinners, Those who are irrelevant, And insignificant, And yet, He's chosen us, To display his power, And his purposes.

He's chosen us, To reveal his grace, And his glory, In the gospel, Of Jesus Christ. He's chosen us, As insignificant, And irrelevant people, All for his glory, And the furtherance, Of his kingdom.

And that's what we see here, With Jesus being born, In the tiny town, Of Bethlehem. Bethlehem, By the way, It means, House of bread.

It's called the house of bread, Because Jesus, Is the bread of heaven. He came down from heaven, To give life, To the world. Jesus declared, That he is the bread, Of life.

You know, My friend, We have a great king. We serve the king of kings. We serve a great king. But as Cecil Alexander, Concluded her Christmas carol, She wanted to remind everyone, Who read it.

[29 : 47] Whether a child, Or an adult. She wanted to remind us all, That he's a king. He's a king, Who is no longer, In a cradle in Bethlehem. But he's now a king, Who is crowned, In glory.

And that's where we need, To look this Christmas day. We need to look, Beyond the cradle. We need to look, Beyond the cross. We need to look, To the crown, In glory.

That's where he's seated today, At the father's, Right hand. We need to look, Beyond the cradle, And the crown, Beyond the cross, But look to the crown, In glory.

Because you know, The reality is, Christmas day, Isn't the end of the story. We all know that. Jesus is coming again.

And you know, This is the thing, I find fascinating, About the run up, To Christmas day. I'm sure, You've maybe asked it, Heard it, Said it, But you hear people, Asking one another, Are you all set?

[30 : 50] Are you all ready? Are you prepared? Maybe you've said it yourself. You can't go into Tesco, Without hearing people saying, Are you all set?

Are you prepared? Are you ready? But you know, The question shouldn't be, Are you ready for Christ's, First advent? His first coming, At Christmas. The question, This carol, Leaves us with, Is, Are you ready for his, Second advent?

Are you ready, For his second coming? When he comes, In the glory of his father, With his holy angels, To judge the world.

Because as Cecil Alexander, Concluded, She said, At the second advent of Jesus, We will see him, And we will see him, Verse six, Not in that poor and lowly stable, With the oxen standing by, We shall see him, But in heaven, Set at God's right hand, On high.

My friend, On this Christmas morning, We celebrate the first advent, Of Christ. But the gospel, According to Christmas carols, Reminds us, All, We need to be ready, For the second advent.

[32 : 08] We need to be ready, When Christ comes again. We need to be ready, For as Jesus said, So clearly, And so compassionately, Therefore, Be ye also ready, For at an hour, When you think not, The Son of Man Will come.

The Son of Man Will come. Well, May the Lord bless, These thoughts to us, And let us pray. O Lord, Our gracious God, We give thanks to thee, For the wonder of the gospel, That God became man, And dwelt among us, That we might behold his glory, The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, Full of grace and truth.

We thank thee, That Christ came at all, That we weren't left in our sin, But that he came to be our saviour. But Lord, Help us, We pray on this, First Advent, As we remember it.

Help us, Lord, To realise, That Jesus is coming again, That he is coming the second time, And as the Apostle John prayed, Amen, Even so, Come, Lord Jesus, Or that thou wouldst hear our prayers, We ask, Because Lord, As we have often prayed, In this place, That thy will be done, That thy kingdom would come, Thy will be done, On earth, As it is in heaven, Lord, Do us good, And we pray, Go before us, Cleanse us, We ask, For we ask it in Jesus' name, And for his sake, Amen.

Amen. Well, We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning. Sing the words of Psalm 98.

[34 : 04] Psalm 98. Page 360 in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 98.

We're going to sing from the beginning down to the verse marked four. Before we sing, I'm going to ask the questions. Are you all awake? See, question one, Cecil Alexander, She wrote the Christmas carol once in Royal David City, But how many children did she have?

Four. Four. Well done. Why did she write her carols and her hymns? Who did she write them for? The next generation.

Well, great answer. Next generation. So children. And children's children. She wanted people to know Jesus. And so what are today's headings? There was three.

Carol, compassion and crown. Well done. Very good at listening. Well done. So we're going to sing Psalm 98 in conclusion.

[35 : 09] As we mentioned before, Psalms 96, 97, and 98. They are all Christmas psalms. They're all psalms that point us, point us forward to the coming of the King, this coming Saviour.

That's why we're encouraged to sing a new song. Oh, sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders He hath done. His right hand and His holy arm, Him victory hath won.

The Lord God, His salvation, hath cause to be known. His justice in the heathen sight, He openly hath shown. He, mindful of His grace and truth, to Israel's house hath been.

And the salvation of our God, all ends of the earth, have seen. So we'll sing Psalm 98 from the beginning down to the verse marked four. And we'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise.

Oh, sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders He hath done.

[36 : 18] This fight hath done His holy arm, Him victory hath won.

The Lord God, His salvation, hath caused it to be known.

His justice in the heathen sight, He openly assured.

He might fall of His grace and fruit, to Israel's house and me, and the salvation of our God,
all ends of the earth, have seen.

Let all the earth, lift up your voice, shout out to Him, sing praises and rejoice.

[38 : 30] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.