

## John 1:6-8, 19-28

What do these sayings have in common?

*“Brilliant!”      “Help me! I’m feeling!”      “Bah! Humbug!”*

Yes – if you’re younger you’ll recognize the first two as coming from Roald Dahl’s story and the film: The Grinch that ate Christmas.

And if you’re older you’ll recognize that “Bah! Humbug!” comes from Charles Dicken’s novel, A Christmas Carol.

Both The Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge want a world without Christmas.

Both The Grinch and Ebenezer Scrooge object when others want to celebrate Christmas.

What would a world be like without Christmas? Some of us might feel – well, that would take the pressure off! I wouldn’t have to rack my brains trying to find and buy gifts they don’t need for relatives I never see. It might be good not to have Christmas. Why don’t we try it next year?

Others of us might be really sad – not because we know we wouldn’t receive any gifts, but that we wouldn’t be able to give any gifts. We wouldn’t be able to express our love for others by feeding them well in celebration.

I don’t know what your reaction would be – you might tell me after.

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A world without Christmas is why we celebrate Advent each year. Like every year in Advent we've been reading our way through the promises of God to send his Son found in the Old Testament part of our Bibles. And we've also been reading from the New Testament about how God signalled over 2000 years ago that the time for keeping those promises had come.

How do we know all this? The way the gospel writer John puts it is it's like we're in a courtroom. Just like in a courtroom, there are rules of evidence. There are rules about sticking to the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. There are rules about how much testimony is needed before the court can reach a decision.

And in this courtroom the decision has life-changing effects. It's not just about getting the facts right, getting to the truth.

At both the end and the beginning of his "gospel" as we call it the evidence, the testimony, if true, changes everything.

In John chapter 20 and the last verse he tells us: these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

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Not only believe – that the evidence about Jesus can only have one real conclusion, but the effect of that real belief is to have the eternal life with God, life as it was meant to be for eternity as God’s beloved children. That the only life worth having is found in Jesus. And I’ve written the evidence for him being the Messiah or Christ, the Son of God down for you. Look at it. Take time out to consider it. And know that my purpose is to show you Jesus alone as the way to really live, both now and in the new world where everything will be right.

And he also begins his gospel book with evidence. The evidence of John the cousin of Jesus, the man known as John the Baptizer.

In our gospel reading today, we have in John 1 verses 6 to 8 something about who John is and why he is important.

And in verses 19 to 28 of the same chapter an interrogation of John by the lawyers for the prosecution.

(I know it’s confusing to be mentioning all these “Johns!”. But just keep in mind that It’s John the gospel writer, or evangelist who is writing here about John the Baptist.)

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John the writer tells us his considered view of John the Baptist:

1. John the Baptist was “sent from God” (1:6)
2. He came as a witness – summoned like any witness to give his testimony. The fact he tells us John was sent from God means that at least for John the writer, what John the Baptist says about Jesus is God’s own view of Jesus.
3. And John “B” gives evidence about the “light”. This is one of the ways Jesus describes himself: “I am the light of the world” he says. And John W has been talking about how that’s so already.

And the purpose of John B giving his evidence is that “through him all might believe”.

We’ll come back to that point, but John now takes us to a scene where John B is clearly on trial.

Some of the “heavies”, the thought police, are sent down to the River Jordan where John is doing his baptising to check out his credentials.

They run through a checklist:

“Messiah?” No

“Elijah?” No

“The Prophet?” No again!

“Come on, fess up – who are you really”

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And John's next words are shocking, stunning and deeply encouraging all at the same time.

Quoting from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (ch 40 v 3) he says *"I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'"*

He's claiming that he is the one sent to get people ready for the LORD God of Israel to arrive among his people and make everything right. They had longed for this day through long centuries of being exiles, then refugees, then being a conquered people. And their question was always: "How long?"

So John says – At last God is coming. The time is now. Get ready. Everything's coming together nicely. Things will be different from now on.

But the most surprising thing he says is in verse 26: *"I baptize with water," John replied, "but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie."*

He's saying – look in the queue – he's here! God himself!

This is one of those important bits of evidence as to who Jesus is.

As to why we have Christmas. I don't mean Christmas celebrations. I mean the Nativity.

As per the message of the angels: *"To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord"*.

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As per the message of the apostles: *“When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law”* (Galatians 4:4)

As per the message of Jesus himself: *“I have come that they might have life – and have it to the full”*

A world without Christmas is a world without hope.

A world without Christmas is a world doomed to destruction.

A world without Christmas is a world abandoned by its creator.

But a world with Christmas – the true message of the Saviour and Lord, God himself coming to bring the mercy of God to his rebellious creatures – is a world that has an almost unimaginable future.

A world that not only looks back to the first advent of Jesus coming to be the perfect rescuer of those who turn to him, but forward to his glorious and majestic return when his rule will be recognized by all; when he will bring his people home into the new, restored creation where everything is right.

That’s what John B testified to.

And that’s what John W wants us to commit ourselves to.

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Will you look again at the evidence and then commit yourself or commit yourself afresh to this Jesus this Christmas?