



# WAVELL HEIGHTS

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GROWING A CHRIST-CENTRED COMMUNITY

This message was delivered on Sunday 10 September 2017 at Wavell Heights Presbyterian Church, 64 Spence Road, Wavell Heights, QLD, 4012.

The views reflected here belong to Pastor Matt Viney. For feedback or questions, please email [matt@wavellpc.org.au](mailto:matt@wavellpc.org.au)

The audio of this talk (which is largely based on these notes), can be found at <http://wavellpc.org.au/topical-talks.html>

## BIBLE READINGS REFERENCED

### John 1:1-14

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—<sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NIV)

### Matthew 19:1-6

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. <sup>2</sup> Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. <sup>3</sup> Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

<sup>4</sup> "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' <sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?" <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (NIV)

### Mark 2:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. <sup>14</sup> As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

<sup>15</sup> While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. <sup>16</sup> When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>17</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (NIV)

[New International Version](#) (NIV)

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## INTRODUCTION: Feeling a little lost

Don't you hate that feeling, when you get lost?  
It's not nice, is it?

I remember years ago when I lived in Toowoomba, I drove down to Brisbane to visit a friend on the northside. And around 8pm I decided to head home – back to Toowoomba.

There was I, in my trusty Holden Camira, driving through the northern suburbs of Brisbane.

And it didn't take long before **I got completely lost.**

The map I'd scrawled on a piece of paper didn't help.  
For some reason, I didn't have a street directory. And smartphones weren't invented yet.

So I was lost. I was in the dark - **looking for a sign** that would point me in the right direction.

Y'know, some people get lost bushwalking; and some get lost at sea . . .  
*I got lost in Ashgrove!*

I think that's quite an achievement. You should get something for that!

But it wasn't very funny on the night. I felt disoriented, and frustrated, and worried.  
And as I looked around me on that night. Nothing was familiar.  
There was nothing to point me in the right direction.

And that feeling of being lost: feeling disoriented and worried, is something that a lot of Christians feel right now.

Many of us feel a bit like that, because we look around at Australia, and **we're struggling to understand where we are.** We're struggling to recognize *anything*.

Think about how much our country has changed - especially in the last 40 years.

It's a very multicultural country now. Nearly 30% of Australians were born overseas.  
That's not a bad thing at all – in fact, it's a good thing. *But it is a change.*

And this is a country with a real diversity of religion.  
Did you know there are more Muslims in Australia than there are practicing Presbyterians?

Our culture is now more individualistic. And attitudes to family, and marriage and sexuality have changed too.

**Christian beliefs used to hold a privileged position in our country. But not anymore.**

In fact, 1 in every 3 Aussies say *they don't even care about religion*.

And things have changed so much, that very soon you're going to get a letter in the mail.

It'll be from the government of Australia. And the letter will ask you: "YES" or "NO" - do you want to change the definition of marriage to include people of the same-sex getting married?

That's not a question that many people were asking 40 years ago.

But if you talk to people today, you find a lot of people talking about that. A lot of people want that to happen.

That's how much our country has changed.

As Dorothy said in the Wizard of Oz.

*"I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."*

The reality is, **Australia is not a Christian country**. It's a secular, western, liberal democracy . . . where fewer people *understand* Christianity; fewer people *care* about Christianity; and fewer people even *know a Christian*.

So we look around, like I did on that night, and it all feels a bit strange. Nothing feels very familiar.

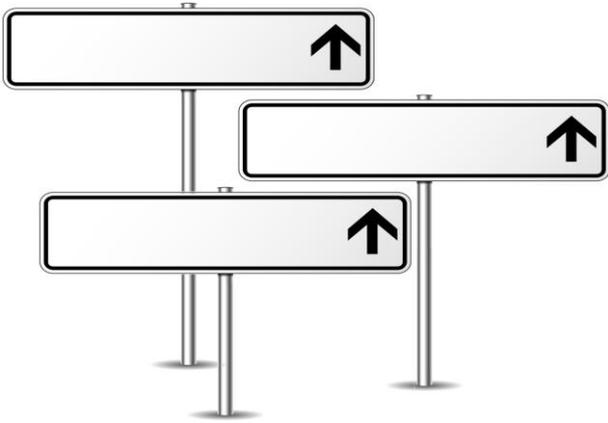
So where do we go from here?

How can we go forward without getting more lost?

Well . . . as a church, as Christians . . . as we look around, I want to us to see some signposts that can help us.

I want us to come and see in the Bible, **three big realities** that will help us move forward in these changing times.

**Three signposts.**



## SIGNPOST 1 – JESUS, CREATOR KING

We see the first signpost in our reading from John’s gospel.

The first signpost that points us forward is our **Creator King: Jesus**, and the good news about him.

In our reading, the Apostle John – one of the first followers of Jesus – wrote this . He says . . .

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.  
Through him all things were made . . . (John 1:1,3a)*

The ‘Word’ he refers to, is another way of saying “Jesus”.

He says that Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago, was so much more than a wise religious teacher; so much more than a miracle worker.

He was, in fact, God in the flesh. The eternal Son of God, who became human.  
The one through whom all things were made stepped into the human story.

John goes on and says, in this dark and broken world, **he is the light**.  
He says . . .

*<sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the  
darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:4-5)*

Jesus came into a world of people who’ve lost their way - they’ve stumbled into darkness. They didn’t *mean* to, but they did.

That's what **sin** is. It's thinking you know what you're doing, and pushing God away - only to end up lost.

Jesus came to be the light, to show us the way.

And he came to give his life, so that we can be reconciled to God . . .

So we can not be lost any more. So we can leave the darkness of our brokenness, and find God.

From verse 11, John says . . .

<sup>11</sup>He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God (John 1:11-12)

The coming of Jesus was all about coming into a dark and broken world. And he comes to deal with *the darkness that's in us*: the way our hearts push God and others away.

That's what Jesus is about.

He's the Word. The Creator. The Light . . .

Redeeming people, and recreating from the inside out.

Giving them hearts that are alive to God.

That's why **Jesus is our message**.

Because he's the Creator King. He's the one who died, and was raised to life.

By his Gospel - by the Spirit's power - lives change!

Whatever happens in our country; whatever happens with marriage, **we need a deep conviction, firstly, about who Jesus is.**

We need to remember that the only way people's lives really change, is when they transfer their trust, from themselves and the temporary things of this world, to Jesus.

**Jesus changes people.**

**Not us.**

**Not rules.**

So, our message is all about pointing people to the one who really changes things.

But often the church's message in the world is **morality**. All the "do's and don'ts."

And there *are* dos and don'ts that are good for the world.

That's something our State Moderator in the Presbyterian Church of Queensland said recently. He said God's commands are good for everybody. [*\*see end of these notes for the full statement*]

And he's right.

But morals are not our message.

**The message is Jesus**, and the light and life that you can have in him.

Only in a context of real relationship with God in Jesus, can people really learn to obey God. Only in Jesus, do God's commands make real sense to us.

Whatever happens with same-sex marriage, Jesus is still the Creator King. And Jesus is our message. Our focus.

Let me ask you . . .

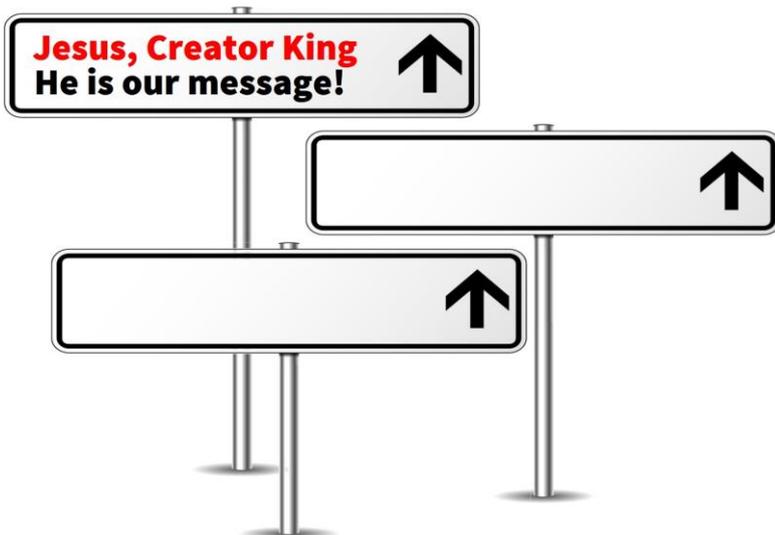
When you meet people, do you want them to know Jesus? Is that even on your radar?

Do you want them to see how wonderful and satisfying he is?

Or do you just want to get in fight with them?

Do you just want to point out how wrong they are?

Maybe that's *not* you, but in these dark and lost days we're looking for a signpost to point us in the right direction. And the first one is here in the gospel of John . . .



. . . that our focus, and our message is Jesus. The Creator King.

We need to stay 'on message' - no matter what happens.

## SIGNPOST 2 – JESUS, COMMANDING KING

But as we look in the gospel accounts, we also see that our Creator King, is our **Commanding King**.

From Matthew's gospel, chapter 19, some Pharisees come to Jesus to test him.

They ask him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

Jesus replies, "Haven't you read," that . . .

at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

The Jesus we serve and love and proclaim is the one who gives commands and instructions, so people live within God's designed parameters for life.

Because the church is to be a community of people who are being remade and recreated by God, it's a community within the wider community who are learning to take God's commands to heart.

And **God's commands are good for us.**

Y'know, life is a bit like the carpark at Westfield Shopping Centre, down here at Chermside. It's big. There's lots of us all there. And there are lines painted to keep the cars in the right places.

You know what it's like when you're looking for a car park, and you see a space, only to find out that no one's parked there because the person next to it *is over the line* - and their car is encroaching on that space. How annoying!

The lines are drawn for a reason.

And that's how God's instructions work in the Bible.

God's not trying to be mean. He's not trying to make everyone unhappy.

He's trying to promote good order, and proper human flourishing.

And make no mistake about it, Jesus is very clear.

He draws the lines clearly when it comes to marriage and sex.

God's obvious, good, design for the complementary realities of men and women, is that sex be expressed in a life-long loving relationship between one man and one woman.

But there are some people saying that Jesus didn't say anything about same-sex sexual activity. Or anything binding about marriage.

But that's just not true. It's clear as crystal. And it's backed up by the rest of the New Testament where you learn, that sexual activity, in any other context, is sin. It's not parking within the lines of life.

The lines are clearly drawn - for our good.

And the church is the place where people who've been rescued by our Creator King now see him as our loving, **Commanding** King.

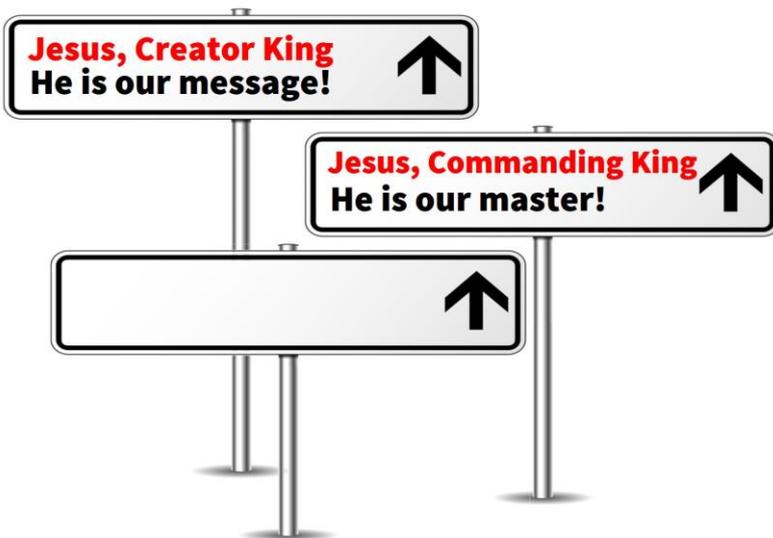
We're meant to be practicing what we preach.

And that's one criticism that people make of the church. And it's a good point. People hear in the news about abuse in the church. They hear about churches where the leadership gets wealthy off the ministry. They hear about a rude co-worker, who goes to church. And they have a pretty low view of Christians.

And I'm sure many of you have your own stories about how a Christian has disappointed you.

**The church has given itself a bad name.** And so, it's no wonder that fewer people care about what the church says about marriage, or sexuality: because the people who say they believe this stuff *don't always do it*. They pick and choose what they want to obey, as they "follow Jesus."

Whatever happens with Same-Sex marriage, the second sign post is pointing us to our Commanding King.



His commands are wonderful and good for us.

And we need to be people who honour him, by obeying him.

Before we go ‘advising’ other people of what God commands . . . we need to make sure, we’re trying to practice what we preach.

### **SIGNPOST 3 – JESUS, OUR COMPASSIONATE KING**

So, as we look around for some kind of way forward, **we see Jesus**.  
Our *Creator* King. Our *Commanding* King.

He’s our message. He’s our master.

He’s the Loving Lord. And we’re to live like it.

And then we see **another signpost**, which points us to Jesus as our **Compassionate King**.

This time, we’re looking at the gospel of Mark, chapter 2.

Jesus is having a nice dinner at the house of tax collector.

And you need to know that in Jesus’ day, in Israel, tax collectors were hated. They were usually Jewish people, who were working for the Romans – the ones who’d invaded their country.

So, tax collectors went around collecting taxes for the Roman Emperor.

And they were known for taking more tax than they should, and getting quite wealthy.

And here’s Jesus: this teacher, this miracle worker, eating in the house of one of these people!

And worse than that, there’s whole bunch of other unsavoury people there. Mark just calls them “sinners.” They’re the ‘morally loose’ people - the ones that good clean folk don’t hang around with.

So the Pharisees – the religious gurus of the day – ask Jesus’ disciples a question. They say . . .

“Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Mark 2:16)

That’s a good question.

If he’s so ‘spiritual’ and ‘righteous,’ why’s he eating with *greedy* people, and the *immoral* and *dirty* people?

It goes on . . .

<sup>17</sup> On hearing this, Jesus said to them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus came to connect with broken people. The people who need remaking and redeeming.

Including you, and me.

We're in the same boat.

**All people need heaven's doctor:** The gay people. The straight people. The white. The black. The young. The old. The rich. The poor.

All people need their Creator King to call them, and to begin to remake them inside.

Jesus hated people who were 'prim and proper' when it came to the rules, but had no heart for the broken.

If you're a follower of Jesus this morning, we need to remember: **Jesus was known as the friend of sinners.** He would eat meals with people, and other people would whisper “*What's he doing that for? Ewww!*”

And that's a lesson for us: that we need to be serious about getting to know people outside the church. We can't reach the world with the good news about Jesus by sitting in this room for an hour on a Sunday!

We need to develop loving, lasting friendships with people who don't follow Jesus yet.

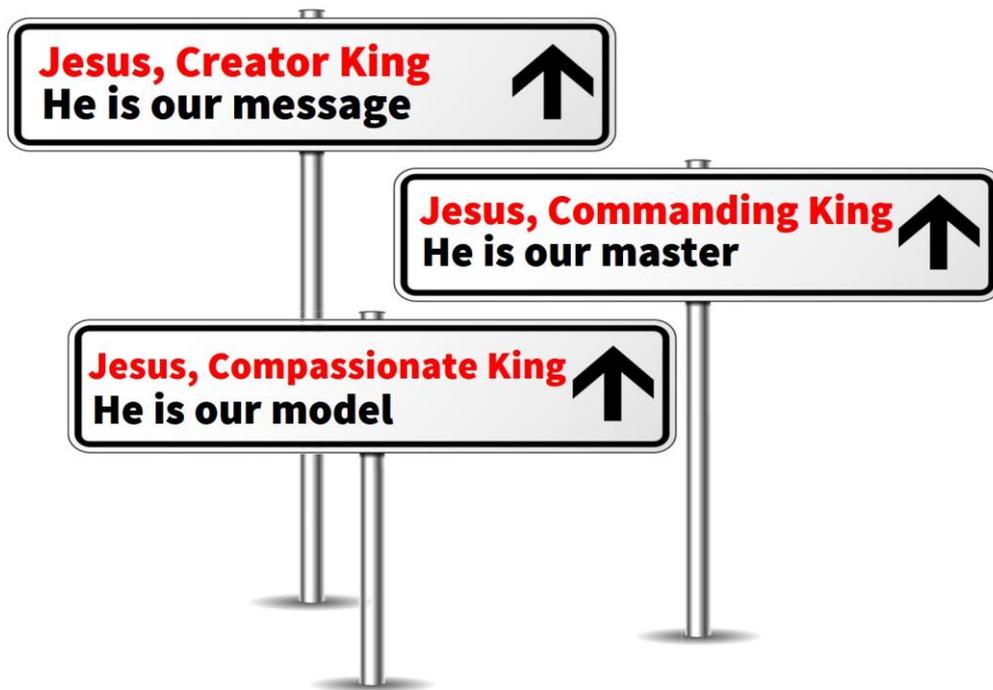
We've got to slowly, carefully, patiently, witness to people about **how wonderful he is.** About **how he's better than anything.**

And you can't do that, if you don't know people.

**We need to be a church that's learning to connect with people who are not like us.** Not to judge them, or to bible-bash them.

But to point them to Jesus, the friend of sinners.

He's our model for how to connect with people.



## SOME CONCLUSIONS

So here we are: modern Australia.  
And religion is struggling. Gay marriage is on the cards.

Many of us feel a bit lost, because Australia is changing so quickly.

And the church needs to work out: **what is the role of God's people in an increasingly post-Christian country?**

Are we activists who push for moral purity?

Are we to withdraw into our little group, and keep a distance?

Are we to act like society's chaplains - giving a little bit of nice advice to those who want it?

What are we meant to do?

Today we see three signposts that can point us in the right direction.

We see Jesus. The Creator King. The Commanding King. The Compassionate King.  
He is our message. He is our master. He is our model.

We should **believe** him, with great conviction and love.

We should **obey** him, and practice what we preach.

And **we should love those who don't know him**, and long for them to hear his call.

Friends, I assume that most of you will vote "no" in this postal vote - if you vote at all.

But if same-sex marriage is brought in, don't worry.

The sky won't fall in . . . because it already has: 2000 years ago, when our sin fell on Jesus.

And yet, he conquered it, and rose from the grave.

And in light of his cross, and his empty tomb, **our message is not primarily about marriage or morals.**

**It's about the satisfying beauty and joy and freedom that is found in Jesus.**

Whatever happens we need to see those three signposts, and point people to him.

We need to be **the light in a dark world, that lights the way to him.**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God.

<sup>3</sup>Through him all things were made

<sup>4</sup>In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Let's see those signposts.

And live as light in this world.

Let's pray . . .

## **APPENDIX: Letter from the State Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland**

23rd August, 2017

TO ALL CONGREGATIONS WITHIN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF QUEENSLAND

In keeping with Rule 5.13 of the Code of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland, I, in my capacity as Moderator, write this pastoral letter, requesting that it be read during public worship in all congregations of the Presbyterian Church of Queensland.

I endorse the actions of the Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia affirming that marriage is the life-long union, entered into voluntarily, between one man and one woman.

I further affirm that marriage falls within the realm of God's general grace, and is therefore available to all classes of people, not just believers in God through Jesus Christ, and that in voting "NO" in the postal plebiscite Christians are not in any way violating any Gospel principle, but rather upholding what is part of the whole counsel of God.

I join with the Moderator-General in encouraging all Presbyterian Christians to participate in this postal plebiscite and vote "NO" - being careful, as we do so, to deal graciously and gently with those who differ with us on this matter.

In Christian fellowship,  
Right Reverend Gregory Watt,  
Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Queensland