

God's New Community
This is Amazing Grace
Ephesians chapter 2:1-10
October 17th 2021
Preacher – Pastor Roy Summers

What is the Gospel?

On a number of occasions I have been asked the question, “What is the Christian message?” or, “What is the Gospel?” “What do Christians believe? Can you summarise it, explain it, in just a few sentences?”

It's a wonderful question to be asked! We could answer with John 3:16,

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Or, we could answer with the words of Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 10 because these ten verses—which in Greek are one long sentence—turn out to be one of the comprehensive statements of the Good News of Jesus in the whole New Testament! And by expressing the Gospel in one sentence, Paul seems to be saying to us, “read everything I write before you stop, every thought is important, here is the full, the whole Gospel!”

Perhaps someone reading this is asking this very question: What is the Gospel? What does Christianity teach? Well God has brought you to the right place today! Or perhaps you are a backslider whom God is calling home through the very same Gospel that saved you in the first place. Or perhaps you are a weary but faithful follower of Jesus, who just needs to hear afresh the old story of Jesus and his love today. Because Paul is writing primarily to Christians; he believes that the good news isn't just a message for a lost world, it's a message to encourage Christians. This long Gospel sentence can be divided into three thoughts:

- What we once were (1-3)
- What God has done (4-6)
- Why God has acted (7-10)

#1 What we once were (1-3)

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound....that what “*saved a wretch like me*” Paul begins with bad news.....but that's often the case with Good News: it starts with bad news. “*I can cure you, let me explain the amazing treatment I want to prescribe*”, says the doctor. Good news!! But bad news was delivered *before* the good: “You have a life-threatening condition.” In fact Good News only makes sense in the light of Bad News! If the doctor only said to you “I can cure you” without first describing your medical peril which necessitates the cure you wouldn't understand the remedy—or want it!

And so it is with the Good News of the Gospel; it begins with some bad news.

I remember as a young Christian, how old was I, 21 perhaps? when I began to understand this truth in a fresh way: that the Good News always begins with Bad News. I was listening with some of my friends to a man sharing the Gospel, for some reason I can still picture the meeting room, the hall, in my mind's eye. And he preached something like, "Jesus loves you, Jesus died for you, Jesus loves you!" That was it!

And I said to my friends at the end, "That wasn't the Gospel!" "He's missed out the Bad News! He hasn't talked about sin and judgement!" I am sure I was too quick to speak; such is the zeal of youth!

But I was understanding in a new way that we do not have liberty to leave out the first part of the Gospel because it is difficult to share or because it may be offensive. For the power of the Gospel lies not only in the love and mercy of God, but also it's sin-convicting power! The Good news begins with Bad news: and indeed the bad news explains why the Good news is so wonderful!

The bad news is that without Christ, we are spiritually dead because of our sins (verses 1-2a. When Paul says "we were dead" he means spiritually dead, dead to God, cut off from God, out of relationship with God, enemies of God, no interest in God. And the cause of it was our transgressions and sins, our wrong thoughts, our wrong words and our wrong deeds.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment, their relationship with God was broken: on their part, they hid from God and from God's part, he expelled them from his holy presence and out of the Garden.

And from that moment onwards everyone hides from God, everyone suppresses the knowledge of God, whenever it pops into their minds, whether that impression comes from a beautiful sunset, or the miracle of a new birth, or the thought of a judgement day raised at a funeral.

People out there in the world don't think of themselves as dead do they? They may even appear to be very much alive! Alive to music and fashion, alive in sport and body, alive to creating and enjoying culture! But in reality they are dead men walking! And you can prove it in one instant! Talk to them about sport, drink, or culture and they glow with excitement, but talk about God, or Jesus or Heaven or Hell and your conversation will judder to a grinding, embarrassing halt!

The three causes of sin which cuts us off from God are, look

1) *The world.* "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.." The world is the ethical, philosophical and cultural environment that surrounds all of us everywhere and pours into our minds from education, Facebook, Newspapers, Hollywood, Instagram. Before we were converted to Christ, we both loved the "world" and were led astray by it! Next, we were led astray by Satan.

2) *Satan*. “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient...”

Christians believe in a real and personal being called Satan or the devil, “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” who is now at work in everyone who disobeys the conscience God has placed in his their minds or the commandments they have read in the Bible.

3) *Our sinful nature*. Thirdly, our sinful nature led us astray. “All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”

Before we came to Christ, we merely followed all the impulses of our fallen nature.

Have you watched—even one- episode of Downton Abbey recently? (I am sure that what I am about to say about Downton Abbey applies to Neighbours or EastEnders or any serial drama) The characters - both upstairs and downstairs—reveal the fallen nature we have all inherited:

- The spitefulness and immorality of Lady Mary
- The Pride of Carson
- The cutting sarcasm of lady Violet
- The gossip that runs both from upstairs to downstairs and downstairs to upstairs
- The unpleasant malice of Mr Barrow and O’Brien
- The troublemaking of Denker

“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts.”

“Oh doctor Paul tell me no more of my disease, I have heard enough!”

But Paul has one more thing to say, and it is the most serious: We are all stand under God’s Judgement (verse 3b) *“Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath”*

Paul is talking about the righteous anger of God when he uses the word “wrath.” You will know from the news that a volcano is erupting on the little island of La Palma. When the red hot lava flows into the sea a great plume of steam flares off into the air! God’s Righteous anger is like that steam, it’s the natural product of God’s pure holiness when it confronts the wilful sinful rebellion of mankind. God is righteously angry with all our wilful sinful God-denying rebellion!

And the Scriptures teach us that his righteous anger will lead to eternal punishment in hell, because God is the righteous Judge of the universe who cannot let wrongdoing go unpunished.

Without Gospel medicine we are all dead to God because of our sins, led astray by the world, by Satan, by our sinful natures, and heading for eternal damnation. It's only once we have heard the doctor's fearful diagnosis that we are ready to listen to and accept his amazing treatment and cure.

Is this new teaching? Not at all. How does Article 9 of the Church of England put it: *"man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation."*

"It's time for some Good News Doctor Paul, please!"

#2 What God has done for us

It all starts with the eternal love of God for us: *"But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy..."* (verse 4) God's love is a unique and unearthly love that loves the unworthy, the rebel, the sinner. That gives generously and sacrificially without expecting anything in return! And out of that love, says Paul, God does three things for all who will believe, all of them through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

First, God has made us alive in Christ (verses 4-5a) What does that mean? We who were separated from God because of our sins he has reconciled to himself through the atoning death of Jesus Christ . Through the cross of Jesus Christ all our sins have been forgiven so that our relationship with God can be restored. And notice God did this when we were spiritually dead! *"God, who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."* It had to be that way! A dead corpse can't do anything and nor can a spiritually dead person; so one day through the power of the Gospel, and the power of the Holy Spirit, God made us alive!

Secondly, after making the corpse live, God gave us a new life. That is what "raised with Christ" means. Just as Jesus rose from the dead and began living a new life, walking and talking with his disciples for 40 days, so we too have not only been made alive to God, we've been given a new life to live in this world, a life full of new good works: *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."* (v10)

God gives us a new life with new purpose and new opportunities of serving him and his people and the world! And it turns out that those good works have been planned already! If you are a Christian here this morning, God has a work for you to do! Have you found out what it is? If not ask him to show it to you!

And thirdly, God has seated us in the heavenly realms with Christ Jesus! After 40 days Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father (last chapter) and although we will experience that for real in the world to come, God has already exalted us to that honoured position!

Imagine you have a sworn enemy who has hurt you again and again and again. Imagine taking the initiative and making friends with them! Imagine showering them with all they need for a new life and then, to top it all, imagine honouring them, lets say at the wedding of one of your children, by seating them at the top table! You've never heard of that kind of love in this world have you? But there you have a tiny picture of what God has done for us in the Gospel!

We deserve nothing but hell, but God, who is rich in mercy has reconciled us with God, raised us up in Christ to a new life and honoured us up seating us with his Son in the heavenly realms!

And all of this comes us as a free gift of God's grace (verses 8-9)

This week there's been an advert on Classic FM for a programme being aired today I believe "Moir Stuart meets", and today it's going to be the veteran broadcaster Trevor McDonald. And before Sir Trevor chooses a beautiful piece of music he says something like, "*If you've lived a very good life in this world and go to heaven, this is the first piece of music you'll hear.*" It's a very common misconception that you have to earn your way to heaven, "If you have lived a very good life and go to heaven."

But that's not the way it is says Paul! We are not saved by our goodness, our 'works', we are saved by the sheer grace of God. All we must do is to believe this message! And even the faith which believes is a gift from God! Salvation, from first to last is a work of God.

#3 Why has God done all of this?

Why has God saved sinners? "*...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*" (verse 7)

The 20th Century Anglican preacher, John Stott, tells how when one of his Christian teachers retired, the college put a painted portrait of him up on the wall, as you do. At the unveiling, this humble teacher said that he hoped in the future, people looking at this picture would not ask "Who is that man?" but "Who was the painter?"

In the world to come, God will hold up your portrait and mine to the gathered church and all the ranks of angels. And they will ask not "Who is that man, or who is that woman?" But they will wonder at the amazing and boundless grace of God which took hell-bound sinners and seated them on God's throne with Christ!

Well, friends, brothers and sisters, this is the gospel we are called to share, lost world. If you are not yet a believer this is the Good News you are called to believe. Why don't you believe it today? And if you do, tell someone that you have! And if you do believe, let us rejoice in the grace of God, which takes such poor sinners as we are, makes them alive in Christ, gives them a new purpose and a new life and seats them in the heavenly realms even now, as a precursor to heaven to come.