

Ephesians 2:1-10

So what do you want...then good news or the bad news?

The answer that is most often given to that question is...? We choose to hear the bad first, to get it out of the way but also because deep down, we all really want to know that the good news will overshadow and outweigh the bad news so completely that we'll be left feeling ok.

It seems to me that Paul understood the whole bad news good news thing, because we see him use that pattern here in Ephesians 2:1-10. In the middle of teaching the people in Ephesus about the truly glorious grace of God, he tells them the bad news first. And, thankfully, he follows that bad news up with the greatest possible news, and then challenges the people to change how they live in the light of it.

So, this morning, I intend to share with you the bad news, the good news, and how it would seem that we need to respond to both.

So what's the bad news here?

Well Paul seems to make it quite clear in v1-3 what the bad news is and he doesn't mix his words does he.

You were dead because of sin, you let the world that doesn't know the first thing about living tell you how to live. As the MSGE then puts it you filled your lungs with polluted unbelief and then exhaled only disobedience. All of us did this did what we felt like doing, when we felt like it. Isn't it a wonder that God didn't lose his temper and do away with the lot of us?

Let's be honest it's not the cheeriest of openers to a chapter is it? It paints for us a very dark, very grim picture of the reality of life without any acknowledgement of God. Basically it's life it's death. Paul says you were dead in your sins. The trouble I think that we can have with this picture and these words is that many of us may not have felt dead in sin, many of us may have even thought we were alright really, not bad people. I came into the Baptist tradition via the Pentecostal church. And in the Pentecostal church there was a lot of talk about people being saved which when I first heard it I thought was a bit strange. I mean saved from what? If you were to go out there and ask that question, or even tell people they needed to be saved they'd laugh in your face wouldn't they. Why because at the end of the day we like to think that we're ok, we're not bad people. At the end of the day we will all struggle to take on board the fact we're wrong, we break God's rules, and quite often it's no one else's fault but ours, because we like to be in control to do things our way we like to take our lives into our own hands. because we would rather listen to the world's ideas of what is good and right than God's.

I must say that I had a bit of a problem with this really. I was brought up in a Christian home, I was a good girl, never caused any real problems although I've told my parent there's always still time!

But I'd sit and listen to people giving testimonies about how they were mixed up in drugs and sex, drinking, crime and then how they'd met Jesus Christ and had a life changing experience and I'd think well I'm not that bad, I've never done anything like that or anything that even comes near that kind of stuff. I'd sing along to Amazing grace but never really have any ownership of the bit about being a wretch because I didn't think of myself in that way ever although I could always picture a few people who I thought were quite wretch like.

And I don't know when exactly it happened but it did, the time when I realised that it doesn't matter what I might feel I'm like in comparison to anyone else other than Jesus. And in comparison to the One who was and is without sin I'm filthy, I'm despicable, I'm an absolute wretch. There came a point where I realised afresh something of the awesome wonder of God's holiness of how he is without sin, like a burning brilliant light that simply consumes darkness and I knew I had darkness

within me and therefore I could never ever have a hope of being good enough sinless enough to be able to approach such a God. I was and am a sinner however un pc that might sound. And so much of my sin and our sin isn't necessarily bound up in the things we do that are wrong, much of it will stem back to what we see in the story of Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are tempted by the snake in the garden. Tempted to follow a belief that there is another way, a better way to live in God's world than living His way. Much of our sin then we can see it is all about the things we don't do. For every moment we live without acknowledging the rule and reign of God in our lives and this world we sin, when our thoughts are not acknowledging God's rule and reign, when the use of our money does not acknowledge God's rule and reign, when our plans for the future does not acknowledge God's rule and reign, when our use of time does not acknowledge God's rule and reign... I could go on and I know you know that!

This is the picture that these first 3 verses of Ephesians paint and its a picture that we're all in regardless of who we are. Living in this way is death says Paul. It doesn't matter how good we might think we are, or how many good things we think we are doing we can never ever make the grade, be good enough doing things our way . This says Paul makes us spiritually dead always in the grip of sin, always whether we know it or not living to the pattern of the world around us and of the devil himself.

As bad news goes this is the very worst kind. We are in a situation here that we are powerless to do anything about ourselves. But of course then comes the good news!

V4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—6and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

The two words that open this section, “but God,” may be the most beautiful two words in all of the scriptures. You and I were dead. You and I had sinned before God. You and I were destined for deserved wrath. But God did something. But God stepped in. But God made a difference. But God brought the good news.

And why did God do this? God did what he did because he is rich in mercy. Throughout the Bible, even in the Old Testament, God has revealed himself to us as the LORD, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. God has always been incredibly merciful. If God were not merciful, he would simply destroy us all at the moment of our first sin, and that would be the end of the story. If God were not merciful, he would never have revealed to us what he expects us to do to please him. If God were not merciful, we would have no hope at all.

Also, God did what he did because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our sins. God's love for his creation is something deeper than we could ever grasp. And, the fact that he loved us even when we were dead in our sins makes it clear that he did not love us because of something good we did. He loved us because and only because he chose to do so. He loved us because that perfectly fits who he is. We can take no credit for the love of God. He did not owe it to us and we did not earn it. He just loved us, For God so loved the world that he gave.. if you hear and remember only one thing from this am then I pray its this God loves you just as you are right ast this moment and there is nothing you can do to make him love you more and nothing you can ever do that will make him love you less. that is all we can say.

And because of God's love and his mercy even when we were dead in our sins, God made us alive together with Christ. This is a reference back to Jesus' resurrection. Just as God physically raised Jesus from the dead, God took dead sinners like you and me, and he raised us from the dead spiritually. As Christians as followers of Jesus our identity our true identity is not determined by personal characteristics or experiences or abilities it is determined simply by life in and with Jesus.

Jesus who was perfect and without sin took upon himself all of the consequences of your sin and my sin, he died your death and my death. But God then raised him from the dead and the power of sin, its hold over us was broken. One of the great delights and privileges of Baptist ministry I think is believers Baptism where the Baptismal candidates re-enact the death burial and resurrection of Jesus, they are plunged under the water dying to their old identities and are brought up out of the water, raised into newness of life with Jesus, raised into a new identity as a child of God in Christ.

All who would place their trust and faith in Jesus Christ are made new by him and raised to new life. And Paul just cannot help exclaiming that it is by grace you have been saved. However you might describe this plan of salvation, one thing is clear: it is a salvation that is by grace. God's riches as Christ's expense, Grace the unmerited favour of God. We did nothing, absolutely nothing, to earn it from God. God did it all. As Paul says in vers 8 by grace you have been saved through faith, its a gift of God.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he also ascended into heaven and sat down beside his Father on the throne of heaven. That is what Paul is pointing to in verse 6 where he says that God raised us up and seated us with Christ. Not only do we who are forgiven by Christ have at present a new life together with Jesus, we also have a future promise of blessing. It is such a sure thing that Paul speaks of it as if it were already done. He has raised us up with Christ. That is to say that he will one day take us to heaven to be with Christ. He will also seat us with Christ on the throne of his kingdom. We who are children of God will inherit all the glorious blessings of his grace purchased for us in Christ. All those blessings are already ours. We only await the day when we die or when Christ returns so that we can actually take possession of the blessings already given to us in Jesus.

This is the true identity of all those who would profess Jesus as their Lord and it is a gift of Gods unmerited favour - his grace. But I wonder have you received it, really taken hold of it, are you living in the reality of it? We need to hear this today for what Paul is urging upon us is here is that we hear a message which at its heart calls for us all to get a life. For some of us maybe we've never really acknowledged Jesus as the one who has saved and rescued us, maybe you've thought you were good enough, do enough good things, Paul here makes it clear that the life on offer in Jesus is not one we earn, or work for its a gift that is given, a gift that is there for you and I to take hold of to receive. Today is a good day to tell him that you are ready and would like to receive the gift of life from Him. To pray and ask that he would forgive you for living with no regard for him at all, and ask that he would grant you the courage and strength to live in the new identity that he offer, that you would today leave here knowing you've got a life a life that God has always intended for you to have and know and experience in him with him for him.

And for those of us who might have already made that step I ask, are you really living in the reality of it are you living the life as living breathing works of art created in Christ Jesus, that's what Paul says we are in verse 10 we are God's workmanship. Created to display and make known the wonder and glory of the one who created us. God has granted to you an identity and a life beyond everything you could ever imagine. God has a purpose for you, are you living in that, displaying his glory, doing the good works he has called you too, or have you got a bit lazy. Born again but still in baby clothes? Well today hear again this call to get a life and know that today is as good a day as any to pray that God would grant you the courage to fully step into and grow in your identity in Christ and into the life he has ordained for you.

This is a message of bad new and good news that culminates in a cry that we all get a life. What do you need to do today in response to it.