

# Ephesians 2.11–22

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## *Reconciled*

Amington Parish Church

Sunday 16 February 2020

That was then, this is now [5]

### **The bad news (11-12)**

The owner of an art gallery said to one of his top artists, 'I have some good news, and I have some bad news.'

The artist said, 'Tell me the good news.'

'The good news is that a woman came in here today asking if the price of your paintings would go up after you die. When I told her they would, she bought every single one!'

'That's great!' said the artist, 'What's the bad news?'

The owner paused, 'She's your GP.'

As David said last week, sometimes people like the good news first, and sometimes people like the bad news up front. And, there's so much bad news in the world, and in the media, so much negativity, it's hard sometimes to see beyond the bad news.

We need to look *beyond* the bad news that Paul starts with, to see the amazing, wonderful, beautiful *good* news of what God has in store for us. I agree with David – Ephesians 2 is one of the most precious and powerful passages in the whole of the Bible.

So what is the *bad* news?

The churchwardens came up to their vicar one Sunday and said, 'The good news is that church attendance is up significantly over the last two weeks! The bad news... you've been on holiday.'

The churchwardens told their vicar, 'The good news is, the PCC would love to send you on an all-expenses-paid trip to the Holy Land. The bad news is, they want to wait until the next war.'

The bad news in Ephesians 2.1 is pretty blunt: **as for you, you were dead**. That doesn't mean physical death but *spiritual* death, or 'you may as well be dead' – look at how Paul describes it in verse 12. ¶


**You Gentiles**, he says, i.e. non-Jews, which includes us, **were**:

- ¶ **separate from Christ**
- ¶ **excluded from citizenship**
- ¶ **foreigners to the covenants of promise**
- ¶ **without hope**
- ¶ **without God**

That's quite the list. This is what Paul meant when he said **as for you, you were dead**: we were **separate, excluded, foreigners, without hope** and **without God**.

It's not a great place to be.

And, as David said last week, it's hard to hear. The truth about who we *really* are is challenging – but that doesn't make it not true.

If you know Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* we are like  Ebenezer Scrooge, outside in the cold, face pressed up against the window, looking at the warmth and fun on the inside.

Paul is not talking here about swindlers, murderers, and those who've done even worse. He's talking about everyone – because we are *all* on the outside. It doesn't matter whether our faces are pressed up against the window or we're 5,000 miles away: we are *all* on the outside.

That's the bad news.

## **Brought near (13)**

**But now.** The 'but's in verse 4 and verse 13 are two of the best 'but's in the Bible – Bathsheba notwithstanding (!).

**But now – in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.**

Let's hear a story from the Alpha Course.

§ (5) *How and why should I pray? Abraham Lincoln story.*

When Paul talks about being **brought near**, this is exactly what he means – he means through Jesus' death we have access to God: *with Jesus we can be brought inside, no longer on the outside.*

## **Reconciled (14-16)**

Next Paul talks about Jesus being **our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility** (14). What's he on about here?

Paul is talking here about the hostility between Jews and Gentiles, or Jews and not-Jews. The Jews were God's people – everyone else was not, and if you weren't born a Jew, well that was pretty much tough luck. To the Jews, Gentiles were 'dogs', barely worthy of the scraps of God's provision, let alone his promises and love.

In sports terms, you might think of football derbies and rivalries, for example § Liverpool and Manchester United. You may have seen in the news the fighting between fans.

In politics, I imagine you've all had arguments with family and friends about ¶ Brexit... Leave or Remain.

On a larger scale there is the ethnic cleansing or genocide of one group of people against another – from ¶ Nazi Germany to the Balkans to Rwanda and countless other countries.

We all know, from afar or closer to home, the terrible reality of what Paul calls ¶ **the dividing wall of hostility**. Sometimes that wall seems insurmountable... *but not for Jesus*.

*Pause*

Let's pause a moment there. I have a question. Why did Jesus die? Or, to put it another way, what did Jesus' death *do*?

It's not a trick question! Most of us would give an answer that's quite individualistic – that is, focused on individuals: for example, Jesus died so we could be forgiven and have new life. Or, Jesus died to pay the price for our sin. Or, Jesus died to defeat sin and death so we might be set free.

All good, all things the Bible tells us Jesus' death achieved, all reasons why Jesus died. But there's *more*.

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

*Ephesians 2.16-17 (NIV)*

The theme of today's service is... *reconciled*. Jesus died to reconcile us to each other, and *together* to reconcile us to God. Jesus sees our hostility to one another, the dividing walls we are so quick to put up – but he doesn't take sides, he makes **one new humanity in himself** (15).

The name of this **new humanity**? The church. The church is not a building, it is a *family*: God's family. In 1.5 Paul says,

In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

*Ephesians 1.5-6 (NIV)*

It's not that God wants us all to be men, it's about God choosing us, adopting us, and giving us the full status and rights of an heir, or rather *the* heir, God's only *Son* Jesus. God chooses for himself people to join his family, to become Jesus' brothers and sisters. And he does this *through Jesus*.

## Through him (17-22)

When Jess and I were in New Zealand a year ago, one of the highlights was visiting § Milford Sound. It was pretty much top of my list of places to visit – and it didn't disappoint.

To get there you start at a place called Te Anau, and then you drive for nearly two hours down what is effectively a § 75-mile cul-de-sac. There is one road to Milford Sound. But what a road – it's simply stunning. Jess took over driving because I was looking at the mountains too much instead of the road!

The problem is, Milford Sound is literally surrounded by the Darran mountain range – which is made of granite. It's why it's so spectacular, but it's also why there wasn't a road to it until 1953, when the Homer Tunnel was completed.

§ Here you can see our little camper waiting to go through the tunnel (there's only one lane through the tunnel so it's controlled by traffic lights and each side has to take it in turns). It's nearly a mile long – you can see the two entrances there on the right.

To drive to Milford Sound you don't have a choice, there is only one way: you have to pass through *that* tunnel.

**Through [Jesus] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit** (18). Jesus has dug the tunnel and made the way to the Father.

The **dividing wall of hostility** which separates us from one another and from God – there is nothing we can do about that ourselves. It's simply too big. Cut off from God and each other, we may as well be **dead** (1), **separate, excluded, foreigners** (12).

But Jesus made a way. Jesus is **our peace** (14). Jesus makes us **citizens, members of** God's **household** (19). Jesus makes us – together – **a holy temple** (21), for God to live among us (22).

Do you see how God isn't content simply to forgive my sins, to give me new life? Do you see how his vision is so much bigger? Do you see how important the church is in God's eyes?

Jesus has made the way, Jesus has dug the tunnel: he's done all the hard work. Our bit is to stop trying to dig our own tunnel, to lay down our pride, and join Jesus on the journey.

Joining the family is only the *first* step – being reconciled is the *beginning* of the life Jesus wants to give us, of the journey he wants to walk with us. If you want that life, to be part of that family, to be on that journey with Jesus – talk to him about it this week in prayer, spend some time in quiet, listening, and see what he says.



Friends, let's not stop at what God does for us as individuals. The forgiveness and life he offers to all is wonderful – and we all need to accept it to have life.

But let's not stop there, let's not forget God's grand vision for a huge new family, in which we aren't all the same, but we are all reconciled and united in Jesus.

And let's commit ourselves to living wholeheartedly as members of that family: following Jesus together.