

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Friday, 28 September 1928, is a day that would feature pretty large in history. I am not sure that many people alive at that time would have realised what a momentous morning they had experienced. Nor am I sure that, even for those who were involved, did they realise quite how important were the consequences of what they were involved in that day. Without doubt, every single person in this country has been affected by the events of that day. Globally, billions have benefitted from those few minutes from history. It was on that morning that Alexander Fleming described his discovery of the actions of penicillin, believing that, if it could be isolated and mass produced, then it would be of some benefit to the medical world. Time has only shown that, if anything, he underestimated the benefit!

As we come to this Easter morning, it is with a similar thought in my mind. For such a momentous day in history, it is striking that we do not even know for sure the exact date. But then the historicity of that first Easter, whilst undoubtedly true, is not really the great point of the first Easter. What is really important is what has been accomplished because of the events of that first Easter time. The events of that resurrection day were utterly mind-blowing, and yet, it has to be said, I am convinced that the disciples had little idea of the magnitude of what had happened and what would result from the events of that first Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

He is risen! (Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:6). We have had nearly 2,000 years to get used to the idea. Two thousand years to see the effects of His resurrection, and still we sometimes doubt the literal, physical, bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Those poor disciples - so privileged and yet so challenged. With their own eyes they had seen the risen Lord, with their own hands they had handled Him and still they found it difficult to be believed. I remember a holiday in North Wales when our children were younger. We were sat in the car having a picnic, when a builder's skip drove past, not on the back of a lorry, but driving along on the road. I saw it, but none of the rest of the family did. Initially, I thought I had mis-seen, and so said nothing. However, when it drove past the other way, I asked the others if they had seen it too. They, of course, thought I was telling a great tale! It was so frustrating knowing the truth of what I had seen, though not being able to explain how it could be, and yet not being believed. Poor disciples! It must have been so much worse for them. Later on, we came to another car park, and there was the skip, which had been welded onto the chassis of a mini, offering lifts to help raise money for a local charity. We all had a ride, but only one of us had a smug smile! Well skip, or no skip, little revolves around that. Penicillin, or no penicillin, somewhat revolves around that, but this morning we are going to consider a little of the momentous implications of that first Easter. If there is just one verse that describes to us the implications of Easter, it could be 2 Corinthians 5:17: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* Just 22 words, and yet their implications are most profound. Can you imagine the Chancellor of the Exchequer standing up at the next budget day and only saying 22 words? He would be ridiculed by the press, as having nothing to say! But, as we shall see, that is not an accusation that can be levelled against this verse!

I want to look at this verse in six small sections to see what this verse can teach us.

"Therefore"

Maybe 30 or 35 years ago I remember going to a Bible talk. The speaker used as his punch line, "Wherefore the therefore, and therefore the wherefore" explaining that whenever we read the word 'therefore', we need to look at what has just gone before, to help us understand why what followed the word 'therefore' was a logical consequence. Similarly, whenever we read the word 'wherefore', we need to look at what has just gone before. He then illustrated the truth of this from several important Bible texts. Well, to a child it all sounded a bit academic, and we probably poked a bit of fun at the speaker, but isn't it funny that that is one of the phrases from one of the talks I can still remember, whilst so many others have long been forgotten! God always is able to preserve the truth of what is done for Him! Anyway, we need to ask the question then: Wherefore, or why, the 'therefore'? What has just gone before this verse in Paul's argument that makes the rest of the verse an inevitable consequence? I think there are three probable thoughts.

1. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul says that we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ. Now this is quite different from the judgement of the lost before the great white throne, spoken about in Revelation 20. At

the judgement seat of Christ every believer will be assessed in terms of their faithfulness as a servant. Now only those who are saved will be there.

2. In 2 Corinthians 5:11 Paul speaks about the terror of the Lord. To meet God, with sins unforgiven, is a truly awful prospect. So we all need to be made new.
3. In 2 Corinthians 5:15, Paul gives us the principal reason. Christ died for all, so that those who trust in Him should no longer live for themselves, but rather to please Him. So we can see that Paul is talking about the awfulness of facing God with sins unforgiven and that, even for those who are saved there is a day of reckoning to come. Because of the love of Christ, He has died for all, enabling all to be saved. Now then we come to 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'Therefore', in the light of this, we get what follows in the rest of this verse.

"If anyone"

What a tremendous thing the offer of salvation is! It is truly global. We live in an age when the world seems a lot smaller than at any other time in history, and yet there are few things that are truly global. So many of the things that we consider essential to modern life are completely unknown, and maybe even quite useless, in other parts of the world. The internet, a refrigerator, trainers - we could make quite a list. One of the big banks recently had an advertisement involving the customs that we take for granted being quite inappropriate in another culture.

The story is told of the missionary who faced exactly this problem, as he tried to reach the Yanomano tribes people. He had shared with them the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 11:15-32), and was about to start applying this to what God has done for us, when he noted looks of incomprehension on the faces of the tribes people. You see the prodigal had been given a cloak (Luke 15:22), but this was an unknown thing to them, and they couldn't see what you would need a cloak for anyway. Then the prodigal was given a ring (Luke 15:22), but they did not wear rings, and they certainly were not a sign of love or family status. Finally, the prodigal was given shoes for his feet (Luke 15:22). Now shoes were familiar, but you only wore them for playing football, so was the prodigal about to start playing the beautiful game they wondered? All in all, it was utterly mystifying. Things that need little or no explaining in our culture, meant nothing in another culture.

The contrast with the Gospel could not be greater. The invitation is to anyone without exception. However we divide mankind, old, young, rich, poor, good, bad, cultured, crass, the Gospel is applicable and relevant to all. This is highlighted most powerfully at the cross itself. All sorts of people were there, but if we consider just those two others who were crucified with the Lord Jesus (Luke 23:32-43), then we see that one was saved so that none need lose hope, but only one so that none might presume. And the offer is still as true today as it was in the first century.

How often are we made aware that such and such an offer is for a limited time only, or first come, first served, so that once it is gone, it is gone? Part of the political scene at the moment concerns the issue of immigration and how many people should be allowed to come to the UK. Only last year a study reported that this country is now the most densely populated country in Europe, with the back story being that there is no more space for any more to come. Well, politicians can argue about that one, but again the contrast with Christianity is absolute. Before the return of the Lord Jesus, whilst the Gospel is being preached, God will never turn round and say that Heaven is now full or that one type of people are no longer welcome. The cross of Jesus stands as a testimony to the fact that we all need forgiveness, so far as God is concerned.

His coming in flesh, as the man Jesus Christ to die upon the cross, was not only a demonstration of the greatness of His love. It was a necessity, as the only way in which His righteousness could be met, allowing Him to form a relationship with individuals. But the cross stands as testimony to the fact that this forgiveness is available to all, without exception. None ought ever to think that they are beyond the forgiveness of God, for they are not. But note Paul says that it is **"if"** and this reminds us that whilst God has done everything necessary for our salvation, we must make the choice to accept that forgiveness, agreeing with God that we have sinned, and agreeing with God that His death upon the cross was sufficient for me. All can be saved, such was the infinite greatness of the worth of His sacrifice upon the cross, but not all are saved, such is the hardness of the heart of mankind.

"Is in Christ"

What does it mean to be in Christ? Well, you may have experienced for yourself what it means to be in love. It means that you don't mind eating things you would never have done so in the past, or going places in which you have no direct interest. In short, your whole life is taken over by a force that is directed towards another person. Or most probably you have known what it means to be in England. It means that you are governed by the laws of this land and not another. For instance, you must drive on the left, whether you like it or not. If you were in France that would not be true, and in fact would be most ill advised! Well, I think these two aspects are involved in the phrase "in Christ". Our whole lives should be full of Him, and therefore our behaviour should be affected by Him. In short, I suppose it

means that God views us in the same way that He views His Son, and deals with us on that basis. A consideration of a selection of just a few verses which speak about every Christian as being “in Christ” will show us what a wonderful thing this is. And let us be quite clear, this is true of every believer on the Lord Jesus, not just the privilege of a select “super-spiritual” few. This is not something that we do once we are saved. It is something that He has done for us the moment we are saved. I will not be more “in Christ” the older I get, or the more I serve Him. As I trusted Jesus as a young boy, God placed me “in Christ”, and there I shall always remain, no matter what choices I may make, or actions I may do.

Let us look first at Romans 8:1: *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* What a terrific result of being in Christ - knowing that we face no condemnation. Just imagine that. How often have we gone around with a terrible sense of guilt for something we have done, and not let the wonderful consequence of being in Christ fill our hearts, knowing He will never condemn us. We are like the woman caught in adultery (see John 8:1-12), to whom the Lord would say: *“Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more”* (John 8:11)

Next, let us consider Galatians 3:28: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* As a believer on the Lord Jesus, I have been made one together with every other believer. The divisions that we make are foolish and dishonouring to Him. We do not meet together with those who think like we do, or are socially similar to us. The only thing that matters is that we are all “in Christ”. This ought to have a profound effect upon the way that we view our corporate Christianity.

Next we shall consider Ephesians 1:3: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”* To be “in Christ” means to be the recipient of every spiritual blessing. Imagine that! Did you wake up this morning with a feeling akin to that of winning the Lottery? How incredibly rich we are! Every good that God has is ours. But for an inheritance to be of any value it must be enjoyed and used. If we feel spiritually impoverished, it is through no fault of God’s. Maybe we do not spend enough time considering what is ours “in Christ”.

Ephesians teaches us a lot about being “in Christ”. In Ephesians 2:10 we read, *“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”* I remember when I was a child helping my mum make the annual Christmas cake and Christmas pudding. Well, what I know about baking wouldn’t fill a postage stamp, but the end product was always yummy, and her cakes looked great. I have often thought that that is exactly how it is with us and God. Very often we may feel inadequate and confused so far as serving Him is concerned, and think we make so many mistakes. Yet we are working together with the Master Craftsman, who takes our efforts, working round them, and producing all that He intended, just like my mum’s cakes - only better.

Lastly Ephesians 2:13 says: *“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”* To be “in Christ” means to be near to Him, in fact so near to Him that we could not be nearer. The distance that sin had brought into the relationship between God and man has been permanently removed. If you have never really thought about it before, rejoice in the fact that you are now “in Christ”. It is by far the best state to be in.

“He is”

Here is another important piece of instruction about English grammar. The verb tenses of the Bible are always important. Note Paul does not say that “he will be” as though we have to await some future day before all this will become true of us. No! What Paul is talking about in this verse is true of us now. It is a reality that we are to enjoy now, not wistfully long for at some stage in the future.

Have you ever noticed how we spend so much of our lives wishing for some other time? Perhaps we wish it was our holidays, or Christmas, or some other special event. When we are at school we wish we were grown up with all its privileges. Then when we are working we wish we could retire, with all the spare time. Then when we are retired we wish we were younger with more energy. We need to learn, particularly in the realm of spiritual things, to enjoy the here and now. We have so much that God has done for us now, that we need to encourage ourselves to meditate on these, and make the most of what we have now in Christ.

“A new creation”

You have to wonder at the way God works! He doesn’t do things by half measures. When He intervenes in our lives, He doesn’t just patch us up and make do. No! He completely renews us. This was what the Lord meant when He was talking to Nicodemus about being born again, in John 3:1-21.

At the end of our garden we have a neighbour’s garage that backs onto our fence. The water from the roof of the garage used to run straight onto the fence and it soon became rotten, so we put up some guttering. Unfortunately,

where it joins onto the rest of the gutter there is a leak. I have tried several times to patch it up but it keeps on leaking from one place or another. What it really needs is a whole new joint, but I just can't be bothered, so we put up with the leak. Is this what God does with us when we come to Him for forgiveness? Does He tell us to go away and try to be better from now on, to do more good things to cancel out the wrong we have done? Oh no! In God's grand design He completely renews us.

Inside my body, there are two Jonathan Hugheses. The old one was rotten and was responsible for all that I did wrong, and will do wrong, today, tomorrow and for the rest of my life. Now when I came to Jesus for forgiveness that Jonathan was judicially pronounced dead by God, and when my body dies, that nature will go with it. Now a dead person can no longer be expected to respond, just because they are dead. However, I now have a new Jonathan, and the really exciting thing about that Jonathan is that its nature is just like Jesus. It cannot sin. Isn't that incredible? I now have a nature that can only please God, because that is the way that He has made me, now that I have been born again, receiving the forgiveness of God.

That forgiveness can freely come to me only because of Jesus' death and resurrection that first Easter time. As we live our lives now, it is vital that we understand this wonderful truth. The failing, sinful me is dead so far as God is concerned. That is how I should view myself too. But I now have a new nature that is capable of pleasing God. It is that nature that needs feeding through reading the Bible and fellowshiping with other Christians. It is that nature that needs to spend time in God's presence in prayer. But that is the only nature that God will deal with.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new." This Easter time, as we remember Jesus, let us marvel at the incredible results that have been achieved because of what He did at the cross, and in His resurrection.

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