

## **2 COR 5.17: THE NEW HAS COME!**

*[Chelmsford Baptismal Service 26/6/2011]*

### **1. IN JESUS THERE IS A NEW LIFE**

Some years ago one of my boys went on tour to the Middle East with Rick Wakeman, the rock composer and keyboard player.

As I stood waiting for him at Heathrow, I heard another parent say with a sneer. “*Of course, he’s a born again Christian, you know*”.

Sadly, the term ‘*born again Christian*’ has almost become a term of abuse.

Or if not abuse, then it has come to represent a somewhat naive and narrow-minded form of Christianity.

In preparation for this sermon I ‘googled’ the term ‘*born again Christians*’, and came across one site which began: “*I’ve just lost my brother to born again Christianity.*

*What can I do about it?*” One person replied:

*“Born again Christianity is like a cult so there is not much you can do. I’m sorry it must be really sad I’ve known people who have gone that way and like you lose the person you knew. There is probably not much you can do as he has been brainwashed, just hope that in a few months he’ll stop being so preachy to you so that you can at least have a normal conversation”.*

But, as you will discover on *Wikopedia*, the only type of Christian the Bible knows is a born again Christian.

- Jesus himself once said: “**No one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again**” (John 3.3).
- Similarly the Apostle Paul when writing to the church at Corinth said: “**Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come**” (2 Cor 5.17).

What both Jesus and Paul were saying is that when a person becomes a Christian, a radical change takes place in their life - they become a new person.

Of course we’re dealing with *a metaphor*. Physically people remain the same.

If before they became a Christian they liked to eat everything with a liberal helping of tomato ketchup, that trait is unfortunately likely to remain with them even when they become Christians!

But nonetheless a change has taken place - a change of heart/personality.

I.e. becoming a Christian involves more than

- starting to attend church
- doing a little extra for this person or that
- being dunked in a tank of water as Sarah will be dunked today

Becoming a Christian involves becoming a new person.

Think back to your school science lessons, and you will remember *the difference between a mixture & a compound*:

- If, e.g. you take some sulphur & iron filings, shake them up together, & tip them onto the table in a pile the result = *a mixture*. The important thing about a mixture is that you can undo it. E.g. pass a magnet over the pile, you'll collect all the iron filings, leaving the sulphur alone.
- But put the iron filings & the sulphur into a crucible & heat them to a high temperature, something different happens. Instead of a mixture, the result is a *compound* = ferrous sulphide. However many times you may pass the magnet over, nothing will happen.

Here we have a picture of what happens in conversion.

When a person becomes a Christian, they don't have a little bit extra added to them - rather a deep transformation takes place – they become what Paul calls a "**new being**".

I.e. a Christian = not an improved, but *a changed person*.

What is more, it is a change which is *permanent* - it cannot be reversed, even by our own failures & shortcomings.

The Swiss psychotherapist Carl Jung put it this way: "*Christianity added a new rung to the ladder of evolution. Christ has produced on this earth a new creature who lives in a new way to which the natural man can no more attain than a crawling thing can fly - a creature whose way of life is so radically different from what it has left behind, that it can only be described as 'rebirth'*"

To underline the newness of this new being Paul uses a special Gk word: *kainos*.

There are in Greek two words for new – *neos* & *kainos*: just as in French you have 'nouveau' and 'neuf': *neos* = "new" in terms of time; *kainos* means "new" not just in terms of time, but also in terms of quality.

- E.g. some of the "new" furniture being produced today is a load of rubbish, or if not rubbish is certainly not up to some of the standards of the past: you just can't compare shall we say a MFI or IKEA chair with a Chippendale. Such furniture might be "*neos*", but not "*kainos*"
- But when people put their faith in Jesus, they become a "new" being - *kainos* - new in the sense that the old becomes obsolete & inferior. To quote a major NT Dictionary: "*new in the qualitative sense of something previously unknown, unprecedented, marvellous*"

## 2. IN JESUS THERE IS A NEW WAY OF LIVING

"OK", you might say, "You've made your point - the Christian faith involves a "new being". But in what ways does this newness express itself?"

This morning I want to list five aspects of this newness

### *i. a new start*

Have there ever been times when you have wished you could live life all over again? When you have longed to be able to take a fresh sheet of paper, with all the past mistakes forgotten?

I guess that many of us have. To take a superficial example: I have always regretted that I never persevered with my piano practice - if only I had kept at it....

But there are other more important areas of life where not only I, but also I would imagine many of you too, are conscious that we have failed - there have been times when we have messed up our own lives and maybe messed up the lives of others.

***The good news is that Jesus offers us a fresh start*** - freed from failure - freed from what the Bible calls sin. And what a difference this new start makes.

It frees us from past guilt – and it also makes all the difference to the future.

For this sin – this failure to be what God intends us to be – threatens to spoil life eternally. Indeed, the Bible tells us that sin results in “**death**” – it results in eternal separation from God.

But as a result of Jesus dying for us on the Cross God offers a new start

In a way which ultimately defies understanding Jesus dealt with our sin, with our past. Paul puts it this way in 2 Cor 5.21: "**Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God**"

Jesus, if you like, became the world's scapegoat, so that in him we might begin again.

Jesus offers a new start. To quote the Apostle Paul: "**the old has gone, the new has come**" (2 Cor 5.17)

### *ii. a new relationship*

Jesus offers a new relationship with God himself

Does that sound incredible? Yes, it is indeed almost beyond belief.

The God of a 1000 galaxies can become your Father and my Father?

The God who is beyond time - who was there at the beginning, and who will be there at the end - is interested in people such as ourselves, people whose existence must seem as brief as the flicker of a divine eyelid!

But this is the Good News Jesus came to share: Jesus, who dared to call God "**Abba - Father**", offers us a new & intimate relationship with God Almighty.

"*But how is this possible?*" Through his death on the Cross.

To quote Paul again: "**God has changed us from enemies into his friends**" (2 Cor 5.18).

Before our relationship with God was to all intents and purposes non-existent. To use the imagery of the parable of the Prodigal Son, we were living '*in a far country*'. *God was remote* from our experience.

Why? Because of our sins. Our lifestyle was opposed to God  
Unconsciously/unconsciously we had rejected God and his ways.

But on the Cross God dealt with your sin and mine.  
Jesus is therefore able to offer us a new relationship.  
This was my experience... this too can be yours.  
**"The old is gone, the new has come!"**

### *iii. a new hope*

What hopes do you have?

- Ask many young people about their hopes & they would say they want to go to college/university - what then? A good job - what then? Promotion. What then? Wife/husband, house/children - but what then?
- Ask an older person, it might be a decent pension – or simply good health.

The hopes of most people are just confined to the next 70 or 80 years - for the fact is that most people are wrapped up in the things of this world.  
But one day we shall die - what then?

The good news is that *Christians can face death full in the face*

To use the picture language which Paul adopts at the beginning of the chapter in which our text is found: "**We know that when this tent we live in – our body here on earth – is torn down, God will have a house in heaven for us to live in, a home he himself has made, which will last forever**" (2 Cor 5.1).

In this world life is fragile – we are not built to last forever, BUT there is a new world coming, where all the vulnerabilities and weaknesses of this life are gone. A world where life will be lived in the presence of God.

How do we know that this is not wishful thinking? Because Jesus rose from the dead. This is the great theme of 1 Cor 15, termed by one Bible translator (JB Phillips) as the greatest chapter in the Bible: "**The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee of those who sleep in death will also be raised.. Then the scripture will come true: 'Death is destroyed; victory is complete!' 'Where, Death, is your victory? Where, Death, is your power to hurt?' Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!**"

Jesus offers a new hope. **"The old is gone, the new has come!"**

*iv. a new outlook*

If the truth be told, many of us tend to spend much of our lives judging other people. We judge them according to their outward success/intelligence/physique/wealth/achievements.

But such judgments can be highly superficial.  
Indeed, for a Christian such judgments are not on.

Listen to Paul again: "**No longer, then, do we judge anyone by human standards**" (5.16).

We now have a totally different yardstick of measurement, and that measurement is Jesus.

Outwardly the high-flying executive or the top-ranking pop star may seem to have everything - wealth/status/all the trappings of the good life.  
But with the eyes of the Spirit of Jesus we see things differently.  
We see through the masks & the plastic existences of so many of our contemporaries, & see that inwardly they are crying out for meaning, for purpose, for forgiveness, for Jesus.

I wonder whether there is anybody like that here this morning.  
Outwardly you have everything going for you - but inwardly you are empty & aching.  
With the gift of his Spirit God gives us a new outlook on life.  
We see things as they really are. "**The old is gone, the new has come!**"

*v. a new desire*

God gives us a new desire - *to share the good news of Jesus!*  
Our greatest longing = for others to discover what we have discovered; viz the new life God gives to us in Jesus.

This was certainly Paul's experience. 2 Cor 5.13,14: "**Are we really insane? It is for God's sake? Or are we sane? It is for your sake. We are ruled by the love of Christ, now that we recognize that one man died for everyone**"

Paul no doubt was regarded as a religious nut-case.  
And of course, this is how many regard those of us who are "born again" Christians.  
*"Why are they forever going on about Jesus? Don't they realise that religion & politics are not subjects for polite conversation".*  
Hopefully we are not deemed that discourteous.  
But for us our faith is the most important thing in the world.

For us it is all a matter of life & death.  
To go the way of Jesus = to go the way of life - now and forever.  
To remain quiet, would for us be criminally negligent.

Yes, God gives us a new desire - for in Jesus we have discovered something is "**new**", which is 'superior' to everything else life might have to offer.  
Yes "**Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come**".

### 3. JESUS IS THE WAY TO LIFE

But you might say: "*How may all this be mine? How can I have a new start – new relationship with God – a new hope – new outlook on life?*".

The answer is to be found in our text: "**Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being**". All hinges on our relationship with Jesus.

Listen to Paul again: "**Our message is that God was making the whole human race his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins.... We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends**" (vv19,20)

In Jesus God has done all that is necessary for you to enter upon a new life with him - he has sent his Son to die/rise for you. He waits for you to respond.

Jesus was right when he said to Nicodemus: "**You must be born again**"

As CS Lewis put it: "*We're like eggs at present. and you can't go on indefinitely being just an ordinary egg. We must be hatched or go bad*"

There are only two categories - in which are you?

- Once or twice born?
- Being saved or being lost?
- Those who have committed their lives to Jesus or those who are living for themselves?

This morning we are baptizing Sarah Jeffery.

In being baptized Sarah wishes to publicly commit herself to Jesus and to the new way of living Jesus offers.

Yes, Sarah has had the blessing of Christian parents; I guess that has never been a day when she has not loved Jesus.

But grateful as she is for her parents, today she wants to own her own faith.

She wants to tell the world that she believes that Jesus died for her – and rose for her – and that as a result she knows that even if she messes up, she can start again with Jesus; what's more, in spite of all the uncertainties of life, she can face the future with hope. In Jesus she has discovered God to be her Father – and he has given her purpose and direction for living.

Her desire – as also the desire of our church – is for everybody here to discover the difference that Jesus makes.

"**Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone the new has come**". There is the key – we need to join ourselves to Jesus – we need to commit ourselves to Jesus and discover in him the new life.

Today you have an opportunity to respond to Jesus

Or as Paul put it: "**This is the hour to receive God's favour; today is the day to be saved**" (2 Cor 6.2). Don't let that opportunity escape you