

And he made known to us the mystery of his will...which he purposed in Christ...: to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. *Ephesians* 1.10.

And so, after two years, we now come to the end of our journey through *Acts*. Having ended with St Paul in prison in Rome, I thought we might now study one of Paul's *letters*, the Letter to the Ephesians. Of course, the scholars will tell you that we can't be sure that Paul actually wrote *Ephesians*, or even that it was written only to the Christians at Ephesus. (Look on p1173, at *Eph1.1* footnote 'a'... 'Ephesus' is missing in some MSS. NB also how Paul - for I'm going to call the author Paul - describes the Christians 'saints'. This is the NT word to describe 'Christians'. It doesn't mean they are super-holy people. It means that Christians are those God has 'sanctified', ie 'set aside' from the world).

Just look at the very first verse ... Jesus is mentioned twice in once verse, and then again in v2... It's pretty clear what the focus of *Ephesians* is going to be, isn't it? Vv3-10 is in Greek one enormous sentence. The NIV breaks it up for us. But in that huge eight-verse sentence Jesus is named or referred to staggering *nine* times.

Last Monday I broke a habit of a life-time and went on a 'course'. The object was to study a book about mission. I would be surprised if Jesus was mentioned nine times the whole *day*. In the afternoon we listened for an hour to a Methodist minister telling us all about her mission. She invited people off the street to make bread. By being creative, this brought people closer to God the Creator, we were solemnly told. It got worse, and you really couldn't make it up, but I can tell you

that Jesus didn't get a look in. It really isn't hard to see why churches in Britain are closing, is it?

But look how different *Ephesians* is. It's *all* about Jesus, right from the very first verse. (He's in the very *last* verse also!) I'm not convinced that we need new trendy books about how to 'do' mission. We've got the book here: *Acts* and *Ephesians* tell us what works - focus on Jesus. Make him your priority, your essence, and your church will grow. Sorted!

So why is this Jesus so central? The key word to understand *Ephesians* is the simple word 'one'. *Eph* is all about 'oneness', 'togetherness'. It's about breaking down walls and building bridges. A great NT scholar once summed up the essence St Paul in the word 'reconciliation'. In this person Jesus, God is working to reconcile all the brokenness and the divisions of this world. We human beings try our best to bring divided people together. We try to do it through politics, through counselling, through marriage counselling, through arbitration like ACAS, through the UN. We mean well, but we can't do it. Why? because we are part of the problem, not the solution.

So our *hearts* are in the right place. We all *want* peace and resolution and reconciliation, but we can't deliver. But *Ephesians* lets us into a secret: that God will bring about the reconciliation we all crave for, and he will do it in and through Jesus Christ. It's our problem but his solution.

Look at *Eph* 1.9... Just step back for a minute. God has let us know the mystery of his will? Just imagine the Queen rang me up and said, 'Brian, I've got a plan and I'd like to share it with you'. Wow! Well, that's exactly what God has done

with us. He has a plan and he is letting us all in on it. What a God he is! That's why you absolutely *must* read your Bible. Because, what God is thinking, he has expressed in his Word. If you don't read it, you are missing out, you really are.

Whether we are Christians or not, we all look at the world, and we all see the same thing. We all see massive injustice. We all see terrible wars and innocent suffering. We all see human abuse, cruelty. We see it on the news. We see it in our personal lives. All around us are walls, division, defences, people taking sides. Even *within* us, we are divided: the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. There is strife within our own personalities, tensions in our marriages and families, conflict at work, in our communities. The whole of *Marxism* is predicated on the reality of conflict between groups. First it was the class struggle. Then it was the struggle between black and white, then between men and women, then between straight and gay. It's endless.

But God has let us into a secret. One day, when the time is right, he is going to end all this division. He is going to reconcile all this conflict. We cannot do it. But he will do it for us, through and in Jesus Christ, vv9-10... I remember the first time I read those verses. They nearly blew my head off!

You might think that this world is crazy and out of control when you read your newspapers and listen to the news. And as things are at the moment, they are crazy. But you would be wrong to think that no-one is in charge. You might *think* that God is absent and not doing anything about the appalling things in the world, but these opening verses of *Eph* remind us

that God is biding his time. Things have yet to come to completion, v10a... Then God will execute his plan, his plan to bring all the world's brokenness and division into one under Jesus Christ, the Reconciler. The end of all this will be the 'new heaven and the new earth' which is revealed to us in the Book of Revelation. The NT is a book of great hope. God knows what he is doing. He has a plan and it's all here in the Bible. Just believe God. Why does the world imagine that what the Bible says is irrelevant? Who does not yearn for an end to the world's divisions? Here's a rule of thumb: the devil divides while Jesus joins. The Bible speaks of the Sabbath. This is not about boring Sundays. The Sabbath is about rest, when conflict is finally resolved; and everything is finally at rest, because Jesus the joiner has finally defeated the devil the divider.

And that bringing everything together in Christ has actually already begun. *Eph 1.7*... Through his sacrifice on the Cross we sinners have been reconciled to the holy God. *Vv13-14* speak of the Holy Spirit as a down-payment of what is to come... At Pentecost the Holy Spirit allowed all those people with different languages to understand what Peter was saying. Babel was undone. God's joining together work has begun.

At the beginning of the 20thC Argentine and Chile very nearly went to war over their border. King Edward VII helped to resolve the situation. When peace came, the cannon were melted down and turned into a statue now on the border of Christ the Redeemer of the Andes. Underneath are the words from *Eph 2.14*: 'For he is our peace who has made us both one'. That is what *Ephesians* is about, and the world desperately needs to hear it.