

## **“Live As A New Creation!”**

12 July 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call To Worship:**

Well, good morning everybody! Lovely to see you in church this morning and you're looking well in your masks, and thank you for making the effort to come this morning. Anybody who is joining us on the livestream you're very welcome as well. We do pray that God would bless us this morning. When I say to you, "I welcome you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ", I'm actually saying a lot of things to you, because that name means a lot - *Lord Jesus Christ* - and what I want us to do this morning, in that we have got some opportunity to be flexible, is that I want us to look at the catechism, which I think should come up on our screen there. So, this is the Heidelberg Catechism. It was written, believe it or not, in 1563, and this section explores the meaning of the name Christ. And I'm particularly interested in the next question, because it tells us what it means to be Christians, *Christ-ians*, followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, we'll say this together. I will say the question, and then let's all of us just slowly say the answer together. You're allowed to speak but not allowed to sing, so let's say this.

Q 31: Why is Jesus called Christ, meaning Anointed?

A: Because He has been ordained by God the Father and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit to be our chief Prophet and Teacher who perfectly reveals to us the secret counsel and will of God for our deliverance; our only High Priest who has set us free by the one sacrifice of His body, and who continually pleads our cause with the Father; and our eternal King who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who guards us and keeps us in the freedom He has won for us.

Q 32: But why are you called a Christian?

A: Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in His anointing. I am anointed to confess His name, to present myself to Him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and afterward to reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity.

Jesus Christ is our chief Prophet, our High Priest and eternal King and in Christ we share in the same anointing by the Holy Spirit. We take on those roles: as prophet, to speak of and confess His name; as priest, to give ourselves sacrificially to Him; and as king, to oppose His enemies and reign with Him.

Amazing stuff. And that's what we are going to start our service, by meditating upon the name of Christ, and we will listen to this first song: *Come O fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Your grace.*

**Hymn of Preparation:** Come Thou Fount Of Every Blessing

**Prayers of Adoration & Confession:** Jennifer Wilson

**Reading:** Well folks, if you've got your Bibles there, we're going to look at this passage. So, last week we saw that Paul urged the Ephesian Christians, and therefore us as Christians

living in this city of Dublin, to live a worthy life. As we looked at that, what Paul was writing about was humility, unity, diversity and to live with growing maturity. He continues to spell out what that looks like now in v.17 in more detail, and in fact he looks at the theology behind it - why we are *not* to live as we once did and how we *are* to live. So, Ian's going to come and read that section to us, Ephesians 4:17-25.

### **Sermon:**

Well folks, here's the question that I want to address with us today: how do you explain the state of the world? What is our worldview? How might change come about?

I thought about that recently after a chat with someone. They told me of trouble in a local park - violence, large crowds, alcohol, drugs, police, arrests, noise in the early hours - viewed from their window, and all in "good South Dublin". How do you explain that behaviour? I personally was shocked by the scenes in the UK, particularly Bournemouth beach, the total disregard for any sense of social distancing, that giving over of themselves, that lawlessness - not doing what the government had asked them to do. And you know why it stuck with me? I was absolutely shocked to hear that 33 tonnes of rubbish was collected the subsequent day from the beaches and seafront. And maybe not on the same scale in Ireland, Ballycotton beach in Co. Cork, the residents have reported parties of people there leaving behind tents, chairs, portable BBQs and rubbish post-party. How do you explain that behaviour?

Paul's concern for the church members is their behaviour. That's why he says in v.17, "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do." The church members appear to be slipping back into behaviour like the Gentiles in their city. The Gentiles are non-Jews, but John Stott, in his commentary, calls them "pagans" which is a word that has very strong associated ideas, including immorality from a Judeo-Christian point of view, and dark, Satanic, cultic and most definitely "non-Christian". So when we talk about Gentiles here, we are talking about those who are not followers of Jesus. He is naming a people and their way of life in the city of Ephesus who do not know Jesus Christ. To get a better idea of what that life would have been like, we can do some background work about Ephesus at the time Paul ministered there (AD 54-56), when he stayed for over two years as part of his third missionary journey.

Ephesus was a large, leading, administrative city of Asia Minor, now Turkey. It was a port and a centre for commercial activity. It had a significant arts and cultural presence with an amphitheatre that seated 24,000-25,000 people built into the side of Mount Pion. It had inherited and developed from the original peoples a fertility goddess called Artemis (in Greek), also called Diana (in Latin). The temple associated with her was one of the then Seven Wonders of the World. Worship of Artemis was global, sexual, and generated much income for all the associated businesses. There was a thriving magic or sorcery industry as well, which we can read about in Acts 19.

At the start of lockdown I read some Christian fiction. I don't often read Christian fiction, but I read two books written by Francine Rivers. It's a trilogy, but I have one left to read. It follows the life of a Christian who becomes a slave to a wealthy Roman family, who were merchants in the shipping trade, and had bases in Rome and Ephesus. It gives a very vivid description of life in Ephesus through the lives of this family and their Christian slave. The debauchery, drugs, sexual experimentation, brokenness; the callousness, violence, persecution of

Christians in the arenas, worldviews bankrupt of truth. It leads to a broken, sad mess of people's lives. You felt sorry for them, because their lives were so sad and broken.

That is the life that Paul is seeing. That is what he doesn't want them to go back to. That is what they were saved from. Paul sees this way of life as contrary to the way of Christ. He urges these Christians not to live that way (v17). *I tell you this, I insist on it that you must not do it.* It's instructive that he anchors this in Christian theology and avoids some of the avenues we might take.

It's important for us to grasp this reality, because what we often do, what I often hear, is this route. We are outraged, we gossip, we're full of condemnation and we lambast the society that we live in. We then say things like, 'Well, it's the government's fault, it's the parents' fault, it's the young people's fault.' We say we need better policing, better alternatives for young people. And to an extent that is true. And really one of the things I hear most often is that people are basically good and just need some better direction in their lives. But I want us to see that if we are to understand our world, and if we are to see change in our world, we need to go where Paul goes.

Paul goes to the heart of the individual and their way of thinking and points out with devastating clarity and strong language that the problem of behaviour is a result of the human heart. It is an articulation of the doctrines of the Fall and sin (vv.17-19) and the only hope is the gospel of salvation and the radical change in our hearts when the old self is taken off and the new self is put on (vv.20-24). Then, Paul seamlessly applies this doctrinal truth in a series of six examples, starting in v.25 and continuing to Ch 5:4 which result from this change of heart.

So, I want to say to us clearly that the Christian viewpoint is not one of condemnation. It recognises the deep problem of the human heart. The Christian viewpoint recognises that the world and society is broken and in need of radical reform. The Christian, with Paul, must recognise the reality of the fall and sin, humanity's rebellion against God and his separation from God, and the awful consequences within the hearts and minds of every individual from every nation, in every age and the consequence of the need of a deep and radical change of heart, through the gospel becoming a new creation in Christ. This is the Christian explanation for the behaviour of the world and it is our only hope.

I. You must no longer live as the Gentiles do (vv.17-19)

Paul locates the problem within the human heart and mind. Their thinking is futile, darkened, ignorant in understanding, and that is in their thinking about God. They do not know God, they do not understand God, they are ignorant of His ways. So, they may think God doesn't exist, God is brutal, God will not punish me, God is not in control, God is of no consequence. This is not simply an intellectual ascent, or reasoning. It is because their hearts are hardened (v.18). In their inner self they reject God, rebel against God and His rule in their lives and therefore set themselves up in opposition to Him. They ignore what He says in His word, they deny His involvement in the world or control over it, and with impunity they live by their own rules, on their own terms. In doing so, they lose all sensitivity to Him and increasingly walk away and live so that they can feel good, feel free. And it's those feelings that lead them, because of the brokenness of their nature, to impurity in God's eyes. But after time, they experience that what once satisfied them now no longer does, and so they

need more which leads to patterns, which leads to disappointment and dissatisfaction and even destruction of the life God, in His mercy, gave them (v.19).

Being separated from God *is serious*, having a heart hardened to God has consequences, having a mind that ignores God is sadly futile. It leads in a direction that ignores the mind and will, and moves us to be controlled by our feelings. It prefers dark rather than light, lust rather than love. It mitigates against thankfulness and being satisfied with what we have with a continual desire for more without real satisfaction. It moves us from life to death, it moves us from God and His mercy and grace and fullness of life to the consequences of sin and judgement. It moves us into the presence of Satan who is neither merciful or kind. Such people, Paul tells us in Ch. 2:12, are “without hope and without God in the world.” It is a devastating critique of our world. The messy reality of our lives and the world and all the symptoms of disappointment, hurt pain and destruction are simply symptoms of a deeper heart and mind problem of sin and rebellion against God.

Do you hear Paul’s heart here? This is not condemnation. Do you hear his pastoring heart? *I tell you this, I insist on it in the Lord that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do.* He wants them to live for God, with God in the light, for His glory and for all that is good. He insists on it with the authority of an apostle. If we are to sort out the problems in the world, we need to deal with the reality of the problem of our own hearts and the hearts of everyone else around us.

## II. Put on the new self, created to be like God (vv.20-24)

I think a helpful way to understand Paul's point here is to focus in v.22 on the reference to the “old self”, what we were before knowing Christ (v.20). Paul is reminding them of how they became these “new selves”, literally these “new persons”, and that was NOT through following your own feelings or your own thoughts about God. “I think God is this. I believe God says this.” That is not how you come to know Christ. How you come to know Christ, he says, is because you were taught in Him. You heard the truth revealed. We understand that we know about God by revelation, by hearing the truth proclaimed. Paul “preached to them the unsearchable riches of Christ” (3:8).

Paul is reminding the church in Ephesus how they became Christians. He’s also reminding them what they are as Christians and how they are to continue as Christians, and what the goal of their Christian life is, how they are to live. What is true for them is also true for us as Christians in Dublin in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We become Christians through hearing the gospel (vv.20-21). Paul travelled to Ephesus, he spoke about Jesus in the synagogue, and then in the lecture Hall of Tyrannus for two whole years “so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). As these people heard the gospel they came to know Jesus. Knowing is not just intellectual, in your head, but it is not less than that. We must understand what the Gospel is. But it’s about a relationship, knowing in that old-fashioned sense of intimacy, and they knew Christ. They had a relationship with Christ through the Gospel, and that is how they began to understand who Jesus is, by hearing the Gospel. He says, *Continue in that way.* How do we understand in any relationship? By talking, by revealing more and more of each other. That’s what happens as Christians. Whenever that happens, that initial coming to the Lord and that ongoing knowing of the Lord, that’s what it means to be a Christian. And

ultimately, it's incredibly radical. Paul says it elsewhere, "if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come." (2 Cor. 5:17). That's what he means by putting off the "old self" and putting on the "new self". It is a radical nature and reality change of being in Christ: being saved, redeemed, renewed, sanctified. Our hearts are changed because Christ dwells there and our minds are renewed.

If you see an orange jumpsuit, what do you think? That person is a prisoner. *Prisoner* - that's what we were. But you would never wear that suit or those chains walking down the street. We are to put on civilian clothes - white clothes in this instance. It's a picture of a radical change. You live a certain way in a prison, but you don't live that way when you're not in that prison.

That's what Paul is saying, and it happens because of the Gospel. So you continue to grow as Christians, to grow in Christ as we hear and understand (v.23), to be made new in the attitude of our minds. We're always growing. I was reminded this week reading the book of Daniel that God is in control. The most powerful man in the nation at that time was Nebuchadnezzar and God controlled him. And it's written down so that the exiles who are going through a tough time will realise that God is still in control, even when it doesn't seem to be the case. God keeps teaching us, keeps reminding us, because we are in relationship with Him.

So, what is the goal? The goal of our life in Christ is to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (v.24). We should note the contrast Paul uses to highlight the radical difference between pre-Christ and post-Christ. Before Christ, we were "living corrupted by deceitful desires" (v.22), but living in Christ and by the truth of His Word and Spirit means we have "true righteousness and holiness" (v.24). I watched a drama this week, and there was a little incident in it (it's set in a Christian community), and the non-Christians think that the Christians are boring. Righteousness and holiness are seen as dull and boring. But that is a lie, a deceit. We need to appreciate this, we need to consider the examples Paul gives and see how good life in Christ is. We will see that true righteousness and holiness is about relationships and fosters unity, is about putting off something negative and embracing something positive (often, we forget the later), and there is always a good reason for living the way that we do, a theological reason.

III. The worked example: Do not lie, but speak the truth. (v25)

Jesus is the truth, He spoke the truth and we are to do the same. It echoes the instruction given in v.15 "to speak the truth in love." Relationships are always going to be broken if there is no honesty. It is true in marriage, the Church, business, in any personal relationship: if trust is going to be built, if problems are to be addressed, if we recognise the importance of the other, then we will not lie but speak the truth to everyone.

Sadly, I think we believe the opposite. We often say in relationships I cannot speak the truth, because I might hurt them. That's not loving. We fudge, ignore, lie; we say "honestly, I'm fine" when really we're not; we deceive, hide and so our relationships remain superficial. We remain uninvolved, uncommitted to each other and that is not loving. Paul says, *don't do it. Put off falsehood. Put on the truth.* Sometimes, we are afraid to upset others. I understand that and there's wisdom to different approaches, but sometimes issues fester and are never dealt with, and we live such distant and miserable lives. You see, *true* righteousness and

holiness always loves and respects the unity of the body, and desires that relationships would be good and right and work.

This is radical stuff, and I believe the only way we will see changes in our own hearts and changes in the world. What is the problem with the world? As G.K. Chesterton wrote in the Times, "I am. Yours, G.K. Chesterton." Paul agrees; he recognises the problem as sin in our hearts and the solution as the gospel of forgiveness and of being in Christ. In Christ, he says you are new creations, you have to put off the old self and put on the new self, and he insists on it in the Lord. It has to be practical, and we can start by speaking the truth to one another. May we do so to God's honour and glory.

**Hymn of Reflection:** Let us now reflect on the message from God's word this morning. The song we will use is *May The Mind Of Christ My Saviour* live in me from day to day, by His love and power controlling all I do and say. We are responding to God, inviting Him to dwell with us in love and control us for our good and for the good of others.

**Prayers for Others:** Rev. Sam Mawhinney

**Closing Praise:** As we said at the beginning, Jesus Christ is our eternal King. He guards us and keeps us in the freedom He has won for us at the cross, freedom from self and our sinful nature. Let us worship God as we hear *King of Kings, Majesty*.

#### **Announcements:**

Thank you to everyone who helped in any way today and may God bless you and keep you safe as we serve Him this week.

Some of you may have come prepared to give your tithes and offerings: there is a collection point at the back of the church for you to do this. As it looks like this may be the new normal for a while, we want to encourage everyone to continue giving in accordance with the Scriptures. It does make it easier for us if you can give by standing order and further details can be gained speaking to our treasurer, Stuart, or on the website.

If you have any feedback about these services or other things, please let us know as we have said we will learn as we go. If you would like to be present in the Church building next week you must register again. The new week begins at 3pm today.

Now I need to encourage you to remain seated, those towards the back should leave first, and then everyone else filing outside through the front doors. You should not stop within the building and once outside do feel free to chat with each other at the correct social distance and masks can be removed if desired.

**Benediction:** And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now, and for evermore. Amen.