

# Ephesians 1.1-2

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## *Sanctified*

Amington Parish Church

Sunday 19 January 2020

### **London Eye**

A couple decided to go to Cyprus for the weekend, but because they both worked it was hard to coordinate their diaries. So they decided the husband would go a day early, and his wife would join him the following day. On arriving, the husband decided to email his wife, but he accidentally mistyped her email address.

A widow had just returned from her husband's funeral. He was a minister of many years who had been called home to glory following a heart attack.

The widow checked her e-mail, expecting to find messages from relatives and friends, but instead read this:

To: My Loving Wife

From: Your Departed Husband

Subject: I've Arrived!

Message: I've just arrived and have checked in. Everything is ready for your arrival tomorrow. Looking forward to seeing you then! Hope your journey is as uneventful as mine was.

All my love, your husband.

P.S. It sure is hot down here!

...

Does anyone recognise this **ſ**? It's the London Eye. Has anyone been on it? I've been on – once – several years ago. It's a hugely impressive structure, and is one of the most popular attractions in the UK, with nearly 4 million people visiting it every year. However its main purpose isn't to look good itself, but to give people a spectacular view of **ſ** the centre of London.

In some ways it's like Ephesians in the New Testament. Some have called it the 'Queen' or the 'crown' of the letters in the New Testament. It was John Calvin's favourite letter – and it's probably mine, too.

But more than that, like the London Eye, Ephesians helps us see the rest of the New Testament more clearly. It's different to Paul's other letters, because it doesn't contain any personal greetings – but why not?

## In Ephesus?

To answer that, I'm going to ask another question first. The question is this §:

Where did Paul send the letter – look in v1?

Ephesus? OK, so the next question is – does anyone know where Ephesus is on this map? We have various countries here, all of which were part of the Roman empire, from Britain, to Spain, to Egypt, to Mesopotamia – any clues?

Ephesus is... § ... or rather, Ephesus *was* a major port in Asia Minor. In fact, it was the capital city of that region, and one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Its population was somewhere around 200,000-250,000.

At four times the size of the Parthenon, its § temple, dedicated to the goddess Artemis, was the largest structure in the ancient world – in fact it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This is a drawing of the temple, based on the contemporary descriptions we have – it must have been pretty impressive.

That's a bit about Ephesus – § where Paul sent this letter. Yes? Actually, § nobody knows for certain.

You'll spot in our church Bibles there is a little footnote saying, 'Some early manuscripts do not have *in Ephesus*'. And, if we put that with Colossians 4.16, we have a rather intriguing idea §:

After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

*Colossians 4.16 (NIV)*

It seems that Paul encouraged his churches to share their letters with each other. Could it be that Paul intended *this* letter to be read throughout the § region of which Ephesus was the capital?

We also know Paul was in prison (3.1, 4.1) when he wrote this letter, giving him plenty of time – towards the end of his life – to think and reflect about what is most important.

Although we can't know for certain – and in the end it doesn't *really* matter – I think what we have in Ephesians is Paul writing a distilled version of some of his teachings, to be shared and distributed among the churches in this area.

That these are *Paul's* teachings is *not* seriously in doubt. Some have tried to argue that Paul didn't write this letter, but frankly there isn't any actual evidence that he *didn't*, and plenty that he *did*.

And, as *all* the manuscripts include Paul's name, most of the arguments that he *didn't* write Ephesians ultimately involve us sitting in judgement over what the Bible says, deciding which bits are right and wrong. But that won't do: these are God's words to us, so our attitude to the Bible should be *humble listening* to what it says – listening, and then doing, as James says.

So what *does* Ephesians say, for us to listen and to do?

## Who we are

Take a look with me at verse 1: **to God's holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.**

This verse tells us four things about **∫** who we are:

- (1) **∫** We are **God's**
- (2) **∫** We are a **holy people**
- (3) **∫** We are **faithful**
- (4) **∫** We are **in Christ Jesus**

The rest of the letter effectively unpacks those four things. Paul's whole theology revolves around what God has done, and what that means for who we are and how we must live.

## Already and not yet

Betty died and went to heaven. When she got to the pearly gates St Peter told her that new rules were in effect due to the advances of education on earth; to get into heaven she needed to answer correctly the following three questions:

- (1) Name two days that begin with “T”.
- (2) How many seconds are there in a year?
- (3) What is God’s first name?

Betty thought for a moment, then answered: ‘The two days that start with “T” are Today and Tomorrow. There are 12 seconds in a year, and God has two names: Andy and Howard.’

St Peter said, ‘Ok I’ll accept “Today” and “Tomorrow”, though they’re not the answers I was looking for. But how are there 12 seconds in a year?’

Betty answered, ‘2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2<sup>nd</sup> February...’

St Peter replied, ‘Ok, I’ll let you have that one too, but what about God’s first name? Where in heaven did you get ‘Andy’ and ‘Howard’ from?’

Betty answered, ‘Well, from the songs... “Andy shall reign forever”, “I am his, Andy is mine”, “Andy has compassion on all that he has made”. Plus there’s the prayer that says, “Our Father who art in heaven, Howard be thy name...”.’

St Peter let her in without another word.

But the question is – would you pass the *real* test? To get into heaven we must be **holy**: **∫ without holiness no one will see the Lord** (Hebrews 12.14). To win the crown of life we must be **faithful**: Jesus says, **∫ ‘Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown’** (Revelation 2.10).

Good job, then, that Paul says we are **holy** and **faithful**.

Except – are we? Are you *really*? If you could score yourself – or perhaps ask a close friend or spouse to score you – what would you get out of 10 for being **holy**? On a good day I might scrape a 6.

So what’s going on? Is Paul talking out of his... you know?

What’s the point in saying we *are* **holy** and **faithful**, if we aren’t?

But if we *are*, why don’t we *look* like we are?

Is Paul just plain *wrong*?

Well, no! If we ever feel or hear ourselves saying, ‘Paul is wrong’, then we need to take a moment. We might not always *like* what he says, but that doesn’t mean it’s not true. We might not always *understand* what he says, but that doesn’t mean we can ignore it.

This is the Bible, God’s Word to us, through which he speaks to us by the power of the Holy Spirit – so we need to be humble and listen to what he is saying to us through it, instead of deciding for ourselves which bits we listen to and which bits we don’t.

So – *are* we **holy** and **faithful**, or not?

This next bit is really important, so you all need to wake up. In Paul’s thinking we live in what is sometimes called ‘already-and-not-yet’ time.

Jesus has **∫** *already* died on the cross, risen to new life, ascended to heaven, and sent the Holy Spirit. These things have happened, they cannot un-happen, they are the solid ground on which all Christians must stand.

But Jesus has **∫** *not yet* returned to take us home, he has *not yet* destroyed death, even though he has *already* defeated it.

Hence, **∫** we live in ‘already-and-not-yet’ time, in-between what has *already* happened, and what has *not yet* happened.

To be honest that's pretty obvious – it's like saying yesterday is the past, tomorrow is the future, and we live in the middle.

But what's important, and amazing about this, is that the time of not yet, when death *will* be destroyed, when all *will* be healed, when we *will* see God face-to-face – that power is breaking into our lives *now*, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In God's eyes we are *already* **holy** and **faithful**, because of what Jesus has *already* done. We no longer have to pay the price for our sins, we no longer have to face God's wrath, we no longer have hearts stained by sin. Instead of God's enemies we have become his children – look in verse 2 how Paul calls God **our Father**.

But because Jesus has *not yet* destroyed sin and death completely, we still do battle every day with temptation. We still struggle and fail and fall short. We are not yet completely **holy** all the way through, like a stick of rock; we are not yet completely **faithful** all the way through, like a stick of rock.

So in the meantime, God sends his Holy Spirit to work within us *now*, making who we *are* go *all the way through*, so **J**

**what we do matches who we are repeat**

In Ephesians 4 Paul puts it like this **J**:

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

*Ephesians 4.1 (NIV)*

## Sanctification

Now I know some of you will be disappointed that I haven't shared the best Christmas joke I heard this year yet... so here goes...

Did you hear about the group of chess enthusiasts who were kicked out of a hotel reception for discussing how well they play? The manager can't stand chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.

The new life, the **calling** of God's people – they come *first* and they are a *gift*. When we become a follower of Jesus, we become a loved and adopted child of God, through no work of our own, but entirely because of what Jesus has done for us.

Everything we do is in response to that: becoming what God has *already* made us, working out the salvation he has *already* given us, living a life worthy of what we have *already* received – becoming more and more like a stick of rock: **holy** and **faithful** all the way through.

This is called *sanctification*, which is really just a poncey word for what we pray in our Church Family Prayer: **maturing in holiness**.

We might also call it growing up – growing up, but in *God's* family, becoming like Jesus. Like a child growing up we don't notice some of it as it happens – but other things take a *lot* of effort.

I wonder where you think you are on the scale of faith growing up? Perhaps you're very new to all this: § you feel like a faith-baby?

Perhaps § you feel like a faith-toddler, learning to crawl or walk, exploring faith, testing boundaries?

Perhaps § you feel like you're at school for the first time, maybe a bit overwhelmed with it all, but keen to learn more?

Perhaps you are at § secondary school, digging into what it means to live the Christian life, but facing with some tough choices?

Maybe you're in a rebellious phase – struggling to own your faith for yourself, not really sure about who you are?

Maybe you feel § weary – you've heard it all before – and have lost the sense of joy and wonder you once had.

Where do you think you are on the scale of faith growing up, or **maturing in holiness**?

To be honest, it doesn't really matter *where* you are on the scale; what matters is this:

1. you are aware of where you're at, in terms of your maturity,
2. you are joining in with God's work within you, listening to his prompting, following his leading, as the Holy Spirit works within you, making you more like Jesus.

You see, sanctification – **maturing in holiness** – is not something we can do in our own strength. Living **a life worthy of the calling we have received** – it's hard work, just like growing up!

God knows that. He made us, he loves us, he knows our weakness, and so he gives us his Holy Spirit to help – our part is joining in with what he is already doing within us.

So the question is: *are you?* *Are you* joining in?

If your answer is 'yes' – keep it up! If I can help, let me know!

If you aren't sure, or if the honest answer is 'no', but you *want* to grow in maturity, please *please* come and talk to me. I'd love to explore that together with you. Friends, we are not in this alone – we have each other, and we have the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So let's make the most of both.