

FRISTON BAPTIST CHURCH

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To the church's neighbours in and around Friston, and also our personal neighbours in and about Aldeburgh, Leiston and Saxmundham.

Dear neighbours,

"Do you want the good news first or the bad news?" We say this sometimes, perhaps half jokingly, when we have mixed blessings to report. Perhaps people like the bad news first to get it over and done with. It only gets better after that. Perhaps they prefer to hear the good news first to fortify them for the bad.

When it comes to telling people about the gospel (it means good news) of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ the bad news definitely has to come first. When asked why He mixed with sinners Jesus replied, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." (Luke 5.31). You know what most of us are like. We put off and put off going to the doctor. Only when we feel so rotten and we can't avoid it do we go.

The same is true of sin-sick souls. Until it dawns on us that we're not going to get better without help then we don't turn to the Saviour.

So, here's the bad news first. Before we can be saved; before we will take any notice of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ we've got to know how God sees us. Not how we see ourselves, but how God sees us. "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Psalm 14. 2-3; repeated in Psalm 53 and Romans 3 just to make sure we get the message.)

Jesus said, "There is nothing from without (outside) a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear". (Mark 7.15-16)

All this is staggeringly bad news. Heredity not environment defines our character. That is to say nothing can enter to defile. Subsequent bad company can bring out whatever evil is there, but it always was there. And if it's there, it must have been there from birth; in our genes, our DNA. Passed on from Adam's first rebellion against God, as the Bible teaches. So all have sinned. No one is exempt. We are all "in Adam" – that is to say identified in his sinning against God. There is no exception to this rule. It is staggeringly bad news because some things may have been there within from birth but have laid low. We may say that a sudden flash of temper is not like us, but it was always lurking there awaiting its opportunity to show itself.

There is some good in us all. We are made in the image of God and it is not entirely defaced. But every part (especially our minds, wills and affections) are damaged to such an extent that we cannot will to be saved. Unless God takes the initiative and moves to help us we cannot be saved. New year's resolutions are notoriously unable to be kept. That's just one example of how embedded and deep rooted our habits, not to say evils, are.

Now it is only when we have a thorough realisation of our state before a holy God and how He sees us that we are ready for the good news. It is put brilliantly in the Bible, in Hebrews 9. 27-28, "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation". God has taken the initiative to help us.

Precisely because there is a judgment day (and that surely is bad news) Christ was sent to pay the price of our sin by His death. It was an atoning death; and He at the cross took the place and paid the penalty for sin (though He was sinless) for every sinner who believes. Those sins have been destroyed, so that when He returns and comes in glory, our sins will have vanished for ever. All who believe in Him shall enter with Him into the final state of heaven, which is everlasting life. Four times in John chapter 6 Jesus said, "I will raise him up (that is any individual believer) at the last day" (John 6. 39, 40, 44, 54). As for the judgment, it is written He will "present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). Now that is great news.

The most famous verse in the whole Bible is probably John 3.16. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That is supremely good news.

We must however **become** believers in Jesus Christ. How does that happen?

Through conviction of sin. It is a great step forward to being saved to be convicted of one's own sin in one's own heart; but it is not the whole story. In John 8 an event is related of a woman caught in the act of adultery and brought to Jesus by the scribes and Pharisees for Him to condemn. Jesus said to them, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (John 8.7). The story goes on, "they which heard it being convicted by their own conscience went out one by one" (John 8.9). They were convicted, but they did not repent. In fact, they were angrier than ever and resolved to put Jesus to death. For telling them the truth! But the woman was pardoned.

After conviction, repentance. A genuine sorrow over sin towards God. Paul writes, "I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance" (2 Corinthians 7.9). He had written the Corinthians a letter pointing out their sin, and after they had repented and made amends he declared that the aim wasn't to upset them but to put them right. The upsetting was only a means to a most glorious end. I don't want to upset anybody but I do desire that you should all be saved. Paul continued (verse 10) "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death". Most sorrows in life eat away at us. But sorrow over sin does not. It leads us into the best things we ever knew.

Upon repentance, the sure knowledge in our hearts, the Spirit witnessing with our spirits, that we are forgiven. Jesus said to the paralysed man, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee" and healed him as external evidence that this most invisible thing had actually happened, "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Matthew 9. 2,6). Of the woman which was a sinner Jesus said, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven" (John 7. 37,47). "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him" (Matthew 12.32). And why should you not be forgiven, man or woman, boy or girl, of whatever sort your sins? First conviction; then repentance; and then belief (faith) in the Lord Jesus Christ followed by assurance of sins forgiven.

A letter does not give much opportunity, even repeated letters, to reason with you from the scriptures. Weekly opportunities present themselves on Sunday afternoons at 2pm (our gospel service) and Sunday mornings at 10.45am at our church all the year round. Don't put off till tomorrow (so to speak) what you should do today!

Yours sincerely,