**A new creation** 5/12/21 dkm

Read: Isaiah 43:11-28, 2Corinthians 5

Text: 2Corinthians 5:16-18a

Psalms: 146:1-9, 5:1-7, 130, 116:1-9, 72old

One of the first verses I learnt from my Hindi Bible was 2Corinthians 5:17. I can still recite it in Hindi. Can anyone recite it in another language? It is somewhat strange to find this ‘gospel verse’ here in 2Corinthians, a letter written by the apostle Paul when he was defending himself against rebels and false teachers in the church at Corinth. Yet this is the beauty of the Bible! Pearls of wisdom, and indeed, the pearl of great price, is found in the context of defending the gospel from attack; the attacks on Paul were personal but were also attacks on the gospel that he preached. The books of other religions and sects are a confused list of the musings of some man claiming to have had a revelation from God. Some of these ‘holy men’ actually claim to be messiah. One sect of Islam claims as its leader, a messiah born in Pakistan.

The Jews were looking for Messiah, the anointed of God, because of the prophecies of the Bible. This expectation was heightened when they suffered under brutal Roman oppression. Despite Isaiah’s description of Messiah as a suffering servant, the Jews would not accept Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah - although there was a brief acceptance when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. A Messiah who allowed himself to be crucified was a complete contradiction to the Jews, among whom Paul was a young leader at the time (Acts 7:58).

This zealous young Jew however, was stopped in his tracks when the risen Jesus appeared to him in a powerful vision on the Damascus road. He refused to believe reports about Jesus being risen from the dead- until that day. A change of name from Saul to Paul symbolised the profound change that took place in the heart of this man. Jesus called this change being ‘born again’ (John 3:7). Paul describes this change as a ‘new creation’.

In this chapter Paul explained his motives as a preacher of the gospel; some in the church were saying his motives were selfish. He was motivated by a fear of the Lord, and by the love of Christ (5:11, 14). Mention of the love of Christ lead Paul to the cross where Jesus died, not for his own sin because he had none, but for our sin, the sin of the elect. Jesus suffered and died because he took our sin. This is what God intended, and what God saw. God showed his acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus by raising him from the dead on the third day.

Jesus died as our representative and our substitute. Because Jesus took our sins when he died, we in effect died with him; we died to sin and were raised to walk in newness of life (5:15, Rom 6:4). As we look at these verses today, we do so under three subheadings: ‘a new perspective’, ‘a new creation’, and ‘reconciled to God by God’.

**1. A new perspective**

God’s perspective on the cross is entirely different to that of Jews and Greeks, and to most people today (1Cor 1:23). Ghandi, the great Hindu teacher and leader, admired the Sermon on the Mount, and other teachings of Jesus, but did not understand the gospel preached by the apostle Paul. We had a Bengali neighbour who liked reading the Bible but did not understand the gospel. We had other neighbours coming to church and calling themselves Christians, who did not understand the gospel either.

Paul no longer regarded Jesus, or as he writes ‘Christ’, ‘according to the flesh’ (5:16). He saw Jesus as the promised Messiah, as the anointed of God, and as such as the One who delivers from sin and death all who believe in Him. Christ is a unique man, and his death is a unique death, being the death of one man for the sins of the world (1John 2:2, Rom 5:16). His death was not simply a tragic miscarriage of justice at the hands of Jews and Romans. It was God reconciling the world to himself (5:19).

Paul began this verse saying, ‘Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the ‘flesh’ (5:16); the ‘now’ refers to the event of the cross. Not only was the huge temple curtain torn in two, not only was the earth shaken and the sun blotted out for three hours, but the world of men and women was completely changed at that time. The world was divided between those who remain in their sin and walk by sight, and those whose sins are forgiven and who walk by faith (5:7).

God sees the world of men and women in this way. He does not see different races, or different languages, or whatever else the world sees as dividing people. God looks upon our hearts to see whether or not we believe in his Son, Jesus Christ; and we should do the same. In the next chapter he writes of not being ‘unequally yoked together with unbelievers’ (6:14). We do not interact with unbelievers in the same way we as do with believers. My wife met a man in the waiting room of a surgery the other day. He told her of his deep thankfulness to God for saving him from being electrocuted. The conversation became warm as she told him of her faith in Christ. I am sure you have had similar experiences- ‘O, you believe in Jesus also!’ Among my closest friends are people of different colour and culture, friends with whom I have little in common apart from being a new creation in Christ Jesus.

**2. A new creation**

Why does Paul use the term ‘new creation’ when referring to a person who is born again of the Spirit of God? Being born again is something radical, and indeed incomprehensible until a person experiences new birth in Christ. A new creation is even more radical! God is the God of creation, having made out of nothing the earth and the heavens and everything that exists, and in the space of six days. This creation is also attributed to Jesus Christ, as the second person of the Trinity (Col 1:15). Jesus’ death on the cross was the beginning of a new creation- ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself’, the world that had become separated from God because of sin. He reconciles ‘us’ first, and through us the world, to himself (5:18, 19).

Personal salvation is at the centre of God reconciling the world to himself for his glory. Anyone who believes in Jesus and becomes an ‘in Christ’ person is a new creation. This term ‘in Christ’ is found twenty-five times in Paul’s letters, and refers to the intimate fellowship believers enjoy with their Lord and Saviour. Such fellowship and oneness with Christ requires such a complete transformation that it is called ‘a new creation’.

Through the preached word, and the working of the Holy Spirit, those who believe undergo this transformation of the inner man (4:16). We see and know Christ with eyes of faith. We are the beginning of a cosmic transformation, with the whole creation waiting for the sons of God to be revealed. Isaiah wrote, ‘Behold, I will do a new thing’. ‘Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old’ (Isa 43:18, 19). In this context he speaks about rivers and beasts. Moreover, Paul writes of Christ as the head of the body, the church, and of the church making known to the whole creation the manifold wisdom of God (Col 1:18, Eph 3:10).

‘Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new’ (5:17). Paul is speaking about you, if you have died to sin and self, and been raised in newness of life. You are no longer the same person who was known as Bruce or Betty. You are now, Bruce who is in Christ or, Betty who is in Christ. Moreover, being in Christ you are in the body of Christ or the church, the church through which God is revealing himself to the world, and through which the whole creation will be delivered from bondage, to the glory of God (Rom 8:21). You will agree that this is a very different view of the creation to that which the pagan world is promoting.

I like to contrast the old creation of Genesis 1 with the new creation spoken of here in 2Corinthians 5:17. Do you remember how God created this planet, and all the other planets, and everything that exists on planet earth? I was listening to an astronomer postulating on the origin of water. He realised that this simple molecule is basic to life but did not know where it came from. I was driving in my car so just said, ‘God made the water, so stop wasting your time’.

God made everything out of nothing. He did so by simply speaking a word. This is the old creation. What about the new creation? Again the word is involved, but it is the living Word. And the living Word had to die on the cross and rise again for this new creation to begin. This new creation began with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and continues in us who are ‘a new creation in Christ Jesus’. It will be fully and finally revealed in the new heavens and new earth, the home of righteousness.

**3. Reconciliation with God by God**

Sin had, and has, the effect of separation, separation from other people and above all, separation from God. ‘Your sin has hidden his face from you’ (Isa 59:2). We have offended God, and by rights we should make reparations and seek reconciliation, or at least call upon a mediator. But what can we do when we are dead in our sins, and who qualifies as a mediator. Amazingly, it is God who reached out to us in our sin and provided a mediator. ‘Now all things are of God’ is a very inclusive statement referring not just to the creation but to the new creation (5:18). God is instrumental in both.

Our being born again to become a new creation in Christ is through the initiative and the ordering of the God against whom we have sinned. ‘While we were yet sinners Christ died for us’ (Rom 5:8). We had no strength; we could do nothing even if we wanted to be reconciled with God. ‘In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins’ (1John 4:10). It is through God sending his only begotten and beloved Son into this world to die on the cross as our substitute that we are reconciled to God. This realization comes after we have heard the call of Jesus, repented of our sin, and believed in Him.

Many people, and maybe you are one of them, are still trying to save themselves, still trying to get right with God without humbling themselves and confessing their sin. Or maybe you think God has no reason to be angry at you and your sin, and that reconciliation is not necessary. Do you know what reconciliation means? Between human beings, reconciliation means acknowledging fault on both sides, but with God there is no fault on his part. Which is why his move to reconcile us to himself is so amazing. He did not have to reach out to us but he did, because of his love.

And see how much our reconciliation with God cost- cost God. The cost was the precious blood of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. He no longer ‘imputes’ or reckons your ‘trespasses’ or sins to you but to Christ- which is why he died on the cross of course, and why you now live in Christ (5:19). This was the only way we could be reconciled to God, the only way we can be born again to become a new creation in Christ Jesus. This is why we are here today, to worship God, to thank him and sing praises to his holy name. It is why we go from here to live in Christ and for Christ, seeking to please him in all we do and say.