

Earthbound yet Heavenbound

Ephesians 1:11-23

Many of you know that two weeks ago today I took part in Round the Bay in a Day, a cycle ride to raise money for the charity the Smith family. A number of other MAMILS, that is, Middle-Aged Men in Lycra, from St Paul's also rode.

Now it's many years since I've ridden anywhere near 210km in one day. Way back in 1987 I joined a team of 9 other cyclist in riding from Adelaide to Canberra via Geelong. The ride was Bike for Bibles, and we were raising money for the Bible Society to provide Scriptures in India.



The ride was over 12 days, 1700km in total, and each day we averaged just over 140km. I have no memory of any pain associated with the ride. I don't remember being sore, or waking up exhausted. I was only 21 mind you. But it was a different story two weeks ago. The last 30 kilometres were a world of pain, into the

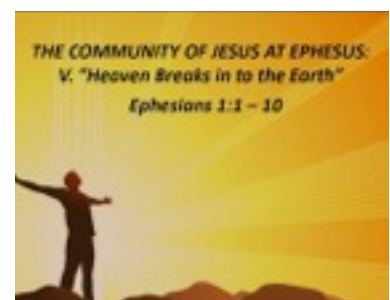
northerly wind from Mordialloc to the city. I was counting the finish down, kilometre by kilometre. I couldn't wait to tumble into bed early, even if Jodi's sister was visiting from Queensland. I can still feel the tightness in my legs.

A quarter of a century makes a lot of difference. Things don't come as easily as they used to. Even thinking clearly seems to be more of an effort too. I'm not complaining but just noticing the changes that accompany growing older. I'm becoming more conscious of being earthbound.

That's not a bad thing necessarily. What an immense privilege the gift of life is, the beauty of creation, the joy of relationships, the richness of experiences. I wake up every day and thank God that I'm alive. This God-created universe is a marvellous place. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."

But some aspects of being earthbound are more difficult. As we grow older, we become more conscious of our mortality. We also think of the ambitions and aspirations that we've held for our lives. How many of them have come to pass? How many of them will have to be shelved? There's also a clear sense that there is much with the world that is in a mess. Our society is fixated on more and more on having more stuff. There has been a loss of civility and generosity of spirit. There's is much ugliness in our culture, much that is disheartening.

When we feel thoroughly earthbound, we need to re-examine and re-affirm our identity as God's holy people. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a profound exploration of the way that God has radically reshaped our lives through his Son, Jesus Christ. We are earthbound creatures but we are heaven-bound, and heaven breaks into earth in and through our lives.

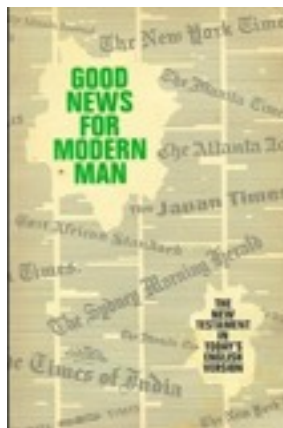


“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” God has held nothing back in recreating us through his Son. We have been adopted as his sons and daughters. We have been brought back into God’s fold through the blood of Jesus. God has lavished the riches of his grace upon us. Paul can’t find enough ways to speak about the incredible generous love and grace of God. Heaven has come down to us, and we are heaven bound.

This is a healthy corrective to lives which can become so weighed down by the burdens and battles of this life that we struggle to see the blessing of God in our lives, and to be the people of God from day to day. It is so easy to lurch into cynicism over the way we see the world heading, and this cynicism, which is really a lack of hope in the future, is corrosive to building and maintaining healthy relationships.

Paul prays for God’s saints, that God may give us “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we may know him better.” The heart of the Christian life is an intimate relationship with God our Father. This intimacy is maintained and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, Paul writes, is a “downpayment of our inheritance” as God’s children, the fullness of which we will receive when we pass through death to eternal life.

The Holy Spirit works to bring heaven to earth in our lives. Our earthboundness is the proper arena where we bring heaven to bear on people and circumstances. We are heavenly minded so that we can be of some earthly use. To be a saint is to reflect the love of our heavenly Father to other people. The role of the Holy Spirit is to direct us, influence us, prompt us to speak to someone or to follow some particular course of action, and to pray for us when we struggle with our earthbound existence.



Paul also speaks of another way that God reveals his wisdom to us: through “the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.”

The word of God is so much more than information about God, but the power of God to transform and direct our lives each day. Paul prays that we would know “the hope to which God has called [us], the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

A constant diet of news and information and the overload of social media tend to fill us with a sense of hopelessness about the state of the world, and helplessness about what we can do to make a positive difference, as we know we should. God’s word, Paul reminds Timothy is “God-breathed”, and “able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.” His word “teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains us in righteousness.” His word grows us as saints, in word and action.

We pray in the Lord’s Prayer. “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven.” I realise I’ve often prayed this petition as if it only applied to the political power and authorities in this world, in other words, the ideological conflicts between God and human power and philosophy. But of course it’s a whole lot more personal. Luther says that “God’s kingdom comes when our Heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word and live a godly life on earth now and in heaven forever.”



As God's saints, his holy people, we live in the intersection between heaven and earth. It's not a particularly comfortable place. To deal with this conflict, we fall into one of two errors. Most often, we choose to assimilate to the values of the culture in which we live. We call our faith personal, and consciously or not, we don't allow it to direct and guide our lives. It's a fallback position when things get too hard. Or, more rarely, we become so heavenly minded that what we say and how we live has no practical relevance because we're too busy protecting ourselves from the fallen world and railing against all its evils.

Neither of these extremes is what God has called us to. We are earthbound, that is true. And we live among other earthbound people. This means that we understand their lives and have sympathy for the situations that they face, and the mistakes that they make.



We are earthbound, but not bound to this earth. We've been given the power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is the power to speak a word of grace and guidance into the lives of the broken and despairing. This is the power to live according to kingdom values: to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Because we are heaven-bound, we bring heaven to each word and action we speak. We have the power to pray, to bless, to pronounce forgiveness, to bring healing.

The people in my life who have most

profoundly influenced me are the quiet, gentle saints who have gone about this business of heaven in the most unassuming way. The values of the kingdom have sat on their shoulders so comfortably, so naturally. They were simply being true to themselves, being the people that God had remade them to be. I'm sure that you know and admire people like that. They have enriched your life. They have given you something to aim for: a gentle, sacrificial life where faith in Jesus is fully integrated into every aspect of their being. We thank God for their faithful service, their humble example. We seek to emulate them in the power of Christ: to live simply and profoundly "to the praise of God's glory." Earthbound, but heaven-bound, here and now. Amen.

