

Heirs of God

Science facts seem to be more amazing than the science fiction which we remember from a few years ago. The massive questions of the age and size of the universe, how it all started and how it might end, have come into our living rooms through books, film and discussion. They are no longer subjects reserved for the scientist or the philosopher.

Who would have thought that a book about the physics of creation would become a popular best-seller? (Though some have argued that very few people who bought *A Brief History of Time* ever actually read it through to the end!) Popular prime-time TV programmes explore the same themes, not avoiding the strong possibility that the world might come to a sudden and disastrous end at very short notice. Even quirky 'sci-fi humour' such as *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* deals with these serious issues in a way that may make us think.

With so many people ready to think about these things, you would expect that Bible-believing Christians would take the opportunity to explain the message of Jesus in this cosmic context, but it doesn't seem to happen. Why not?

Perhaps we have missed the reality of the message, lost sight of it in old-fashioned jargon words, religious observances and routine 'services'? Perhaps we have not realised that the God of the Bible is the same one who created this massive universe, that the Jesus whose name we take was responsible for all of it coming into existence (**John 1:3**) and continues to sustain it, "*upholding all things by the word of his power*" (**Hebrews 1:3**).

If we try to keep the facts of the physical creation around us and the truth of the Bible in separate 'boxes', we are being dishonest with ourselves. If we try to communicate 'the Gospel' as something which is only based on 'spiritual experiences', we are in danger of producing a generation of unreal 'Christians'. On the other hand, once we are prepared to consider what the Bible teaches with the same degree of realism as we may now be learning to apply to astrophysics, we may find ourselves on the threshold of fresh revelation!

For example, have you ever asked yourself, "Why has God saved me?"? You may have given yourself the standard evangelical answer, based on **John 3:16**, that "God loves me so much that he did not want

me to die but have eternal life." If we go further and ask the question again, "Yes, but why? For what purpose?", we may have been pointed to **1 Peter 2:9**, ". . . so that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light . . .", but does that answer the question?

The New Testament makes it very clear that God does have a purpose in saving you and me, and that it is not just vague, sometime-in-the-future stuff. Let's just look at a few verses to illustrate this:-

In **1 Corinthians 10:11**, Paul writes, ". . . for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." He says that Christians are the people for the 'ends of the ages', inheriting all that has gone before in God's dealings with man.

In **Acts 15:14**, James says that God has started "*taking from among the Gentiles a people for his name*". For a Jew to say that was amazing! For centuries, the Jewish people had prided themselves on being God's own chosen people, special and set apart, not like the other nations. Now James (who was a bit strict in Jewish traditions) acknowledges that God is preparing a new chosen people.

Peter takes this further in **1 Peter 2:4-10**, where he takes Old Testament scriptures and applies them, first to Jesus and then to the church ("*You who believe*"). Particularly the references in **9 & 10** were originally applied exclusively to the Jews. He then goes on to say how the believers' lifestyle and behaviour need to show God's glory to others who, although they have nothing good to say about them, will have to acknowledge that their lives are good. This is exactly the same purpose as he had for the nation of Israel in the first place.

In the Old Testament, God was identified with his people. When they went away from following his ways, God's name was dragged through the mud in the eyes of all the rest of the world. (See **Ezekiel 36:20-28**, for example.)

In an even greater way, those who have trusted in Jesus are identified with him, and he with them. Jesus himself talked about it in **John 15:1-11** and **John 17:6-26**. In **Ephesians 1:7-14** and **Colossians 2:8-14**, Paul looks at some of the amazing facts of what we have been brought into. Try taking the time to look at these passages. They are at the heart of the reality of ongoing Christian experience, the key to living a life which is being transformed by the resurrection life of

Christ. Anything less than this is in grave danger of being just dead religion. Impressive, maybe, but dead.

It is only lives like this which can be effective in making a positive impression on the rest of the world in ordinary daily life. I am not talking about perfect lives, with no flaws or weaknesses - quite the opposite! People who know that their lives are far from perfect in themselves, have found forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, and have also found something of the reality of being dead to sin and alive to God through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament offers no other way of living in Christ!

If this is not real to you, you probably find yourself caught in the religious trap, trying to do good to impress other people, God or yourself.

But there is a whole greater dimension to this. To get back to our earlier question: **Why did God save me?** Yes, because of his love and compassion and his desire that I should share eternal life in his Son. But also because he plans to make a new beginning with these new 'chosen people'. Read **Romans 8:16-25**. Those who belong to Jesus Christ are children of God and fellow-heirs with the Lord Jesus to the coming glory, the new heavens and new earth! He has saved us in order to work on our lives so that we can be part of it. Amazing!

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So where are we going with all this? The sharp reality is that we need to face up to the facts, and not try to hold two different sets of values at the same time. We need to take the staggering realities of space, the size of the universe and the precarious future of this planet hand in hand with the equally staggering realities of God's love to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, his plan *"suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth."* (**Ephesians 1:10**) Both sets of realities deal with the same real creation in which we live. If Christianity is not as real as this, then I for one do not want to know.

But it is!

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2 Peter 3 seems to be about our present situation.

Verses 3-7 are about 'mockers', people who cast doubt on the impending return of Jesus. There are many (perhaps especially in Christian circles) who say by their actions (perhaps not by their words) that nothing is going to change, it's all going just as it always has done.

The Bible says otherwise; science says otherwise - do we dare to gamble?

Verses 8-10 basically say, 'Watch out, the day of the Lord will come suddenly.' Jesus said the same. All the familiar things which the mockers said would never change will go, in intense heat, very much as the scientists predict.

Verses 11-18 are the specially important ones for us. In view of all this 'unchangeable' creation being very temporary, it might seem logical to just live for the moment, as many do in the modern mood of despair. But for us it is different. Our future looks beyond the end to the new beginning. *"According to his promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."* Therefore, says Peter, our lives now need to be transformed, as we *"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."*

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A generation ago, it was only religious cranks and 'hellfire' preachers who said that the world was coming to an end. Now the scientists are saying it, and many of the things they say seem to fit with what was written in the Bible thousands of years ago.

We have some priorities to attend to. We need to see that our own lives are right with God, individually and corporately. It is only the 'sons of God' who will inherit with Jesus, not churchgoers and religious people! We need to be born again by the Spirit of God and transformed by that same Spirit, being trained and prepared for the fullness of our inheritance. Let us not be under any illusions. This is not some ethereal, unreal glory. It is the very real glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we who are the children of God will share in it.

"And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body."

Romans 8:23

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