

EPHESIANS 1:3-14
GOD'S BIG STORY

It is both exciting and daunting, standing at the start of a new year. It always is! When we wonder what 2010 will bring, it is both exciting and daunting. We know it will bring good things, things that we will enjoy and celebrate; a special birthday, an anniversary, a graduation, a new job, promotion, getting married, and we look forward to all of these things and lots of others and get quite excited by them. It is also daunting because we know that 2010 will bring its traumas and stresses with it; sometimes these are the same events! But there are also others, difficult things to face: exams, a new school, leaving home, a trip overseas, illness, hospital and some of these we know about and can predict and others will creep up on us when we're not looking! It is both exciting and daunting and life is like that all of time.

Sometimes all of this and the world we live in, just seems to bewilder us; life is just so complicated that we struggle with it. The world we live in is just so complex and the questions and issues we have to deal with are so big, and too difficult to overcome (it would seem) that we wonder how to cope with it all. The Bible tells us that God has the world in His hands, that God is working out His plan and purpose for the world and for us and that this big story helps us to deal with the smaller stories of our lives. Ephesians 1:3-14 introduces us to something of this big story that God is working out in our world. There is another version in the vestibule from Church Wednesday 3 weeks ago, when I tried to sum up the whole Bible on a single A4 sheet!

We love stories; people of all ages love stories. I think my favourite story of all time is *Treasure Island*. A good story has got some great characters in it: *Treasure Island* introduces the wonderfully complex character that is Long John Silver and you wonder for most of the story which side is he on! Again, a good story must have a beginning, middle and an ending; you read some books that simply meander along, seemingly going nowhere and they leave you wondering at end what actually happened to the characters. Finally, a good story has a thread all way through it that holds the whole thing together: *Treasure Island* has the character of Jim Hawkins, who appears on page one and is there all way through to the end.

God's big story has its characters; it has a beginning, middle and end; and it has a thread all the way through it.

God chose His characters we are the characters in God's big story. "*In Him...*" (v11a) and that's just one place; "*He chose us... He chose us... we were chosen...*" It seems amazing, but it is true; the characters in God's big story for the world are you and me and people like us. Look at the Bible story: the plan includes an old man and his childless wife (Abram and Sara), a hot-headed murderer (Moses), a wayward King and his son who was bewitched by his wives (David and Solomon), a few fishermen and a tax collector, a teacher of religion and all kinds of other people. We don't have to audition for the part; we don't have to prove our worth; we have a part in the story because of God's grace, accepting us as we are and blessing us and changing us as we go. We are the characters in God's story; we are the players in God's story to bless the world.

The beginning of the story: "*He chose...*" (1:4) There was a beginning to the story in mind of God and that formed before the world was even created. The mind boggles at the scale of things, when we try to understand these words and what this means. We live from minute to minute, day to day, so often, God sees a much bigger picture. It does mean that God has the whole of time and eternity in His hands; yet the God whose story began before the creation of the world is interested in us and

concerned for us. The story began generations ago and we follow on from people of faith who have gone before us and we follow on from them and keep faith alive for people still to come.

The middle of the story the here and now of story is at the heart of Paul's writing to the Ephesians; it is not the easiest passage in the Bible to read or understand; it is a great list of blessings with which God has blessed us and the blessing at the heart of that list is 'forgiveness': "*In Him,...*" (1:7) 'We have' this blessing now; it is ours here and now; it is not something only for people in the past; it is not something we wait for in the future, but is the blessing of God for us now; the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is treating people who have done something wrong as if they hadn't! It doesn't mean that God ignores our faults and mistakes, but He treats us as if we are perfect! He does it for two reasons: first of all, Jesus died to take away our sins; and secondly, God is full of grace and lavishes His grace upon us; He loves us even though we don't deserve to be loved. God does this for us every day.

The end of the story The story will, one day, come to an end; we don't know what this means, but Paul tells us that God's plan is "*to be...*" (v10) The whole universe belongs to God and one day God will make a new world, a new heaven and a new earth and Christ will stand at its centre as its great King and everyone will see Him for who He really is, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Then the story as we know it will come to an end and it will all be for the praise of God's glory. The whole of heaven and earth, the whole of creation will celebrate the glory of God and give Him the praise of which He is truly worthy.

The Thread! Christ. 12 times the little phrase 'in Christ' occurs here. It was God's plan from the start to send His Son to be the Saviour of the world; the blessings we have and enjoy today are result of work Jesus did and especially His death on the cross; the end of the story is centred on Christ and His coming again to the world as King! This is not a plan that is only for one small group of people, Israel in the first century; or Christians in the UK in 21st century, but it is for all people everywhere to know and be part of; and people in every generation. We become part of this story through faith in Jesus; God's story becomes ours through faith; forgiveness is ours in Christ; we are part of God's family through faith; we have a place as part of a renewed and unified creation through faith in Jesus.

At the start of 2010, a new year, we come to another step, another stage in God's big story; if we are confused or perplexed by the world, then have a look at the big picture and look at the world and life as God sees it, as He works out His purpose for the world, for us.

Have you made any New Year resolutions? In the BBC's wonderfully funny sitcom *Outnumbered*, 5-year old Karen had made a list of resolutions, the first three of which were for her; the other 45 were for her mother and included "Mummy will not feed me cabbage!" They say that most resolutions last for five days before we give up and go back to the old ways. God has had enough resolve to keep His plan going for centuries and will keep it going till end. We praise Him for that! Our resolve has to reflect that and has to be to live out our faith in every day of 2010, to live our life to praise of His glory. Here are some suggestions:

- to trust God more, for the things we can see and for the things we can't;
- to pray more and read the Bible more so that our faith will be stronger and more able to shape the way we live our life;
- to follow Jesus more closely – in the kind of people we are, to have life shaped by Jesus' teachings and values, to become more and more like Him;

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- to love other people more and play our part in building a sense of community in the Church and in place we live, to build people up more than to criticise and knock them down;
- to be the kind of people that make God happy and that make people think more highly of Jesus..

These are great resolutions; will these shape our story in 2010?