

The opening to Thunderbirds was an invitation to a seat of your pants, a matter of life and death adventure, and as a young boy I knew very well that if Thunderbirds didn't get there then people would die!! This tried and tested formula appeals to us all as we all love sitting on the edge of our seats to see what happens next whether it be in Midsomer Murders, to any Disney film, from the A-Team, to Star Trek or Star Wars and I could go on and on. Paul has finally moved from the big brush strokes of chapter One to now being very much in our faces. He's moved from giving us an overall town plan to setting us inside a mortuary with rows of coffins before us telling us that once we were like this so that we might go wow – 'But God...'

When you drive across a national or county border you are often welcomed with a sign and here, we have a massive welcome sign welcoming us all to resurrection land. Here everything is different from how previously you had thought, lived, hoped for, aimed in life and what love looked like. One thing we really need to be aware of, is that this is not like a holiday where you savour the difference from home yet you can't wait to get back for a proper cup of tea. Instead, we are to immerse ourselves in this place of resurrection so that we might come to live, think, speak and behave just like a native.

The land we've all come from is a land dominated by and defined by death. It is a land moulded and shaped by trespasses and sin, where the dark prince rules and whose way of death has completely shaped how we once lived. Paul's phrase for this is when we walked with our hearts, our minds and our very souls completely focussed on the world, the flesh and the devil. This walk perfectly describes all Gentiles, who had never had the Law, but now Paul has come to the shocking conclusion that this also includes his fellow Jews too because they too have rejected the life and way of Jesus and thus are idolaters and therefore dead too.

The result of this is wrath; as in Romans 3 verse 23. Now, this is an eschatological image describing their ultimate fate, but Paul's point is that this is also their current experience because their lives were empty, futile and pointless. Or in other words of a life lived, shaped and filled by the angst of death. Again, we need to realise that this describes how we used to think, feel, imagine, act, speak and dream. It is something which describes who we were in Adam and moulded us in a million different ways by our language, our customs, our culture and our society. Yet, I'd like to ask a question – what about the children and youth within our

church family? Is this true for them too and if it is, does this mean that a Christian upbringing has no value or worth? I'd like to suggest that our responsibility as parents and as a church is to teach them, to train them, to immerse them, to help them live and serve as if they belonged to the life of the church. At the same time, we encourage them to 'confirm' this for themselves by a public confession of faith and being baptised into the life of Jesus and the church.

The language of 'But God...' describes with awe and wonder all that has happened to us. Once I was coffin fodder 'But God...' lifted me out. Once I was enslaved to death 'But God...' has liberated me into life. Once I was shaped and moulded by the desires of the flesh 'But God...' lives in me and now moulds me by his Spirit. 'But God...' speaks of how our incredible God was moved by compassion and love for those who were, and for those who are still, enslaved to the enemy. 'But God...' tells us how God pursued those wandering in the wilderness of sin with no compass to guide them on their way that he may set their feet on the path of righteousness. 'But God...' tells the story of how when we were far from him and 'sons of wrath' Christ died for us that we might live and speak of all that has been done for us in Jesus. On Thursday our Leadership Team are meeting with members of our YBA Regional Team about how we may participate in what is called a Growth Collective. My prayer is that through this we may not only learn more of what 'But God...' means, but that we may as a church be better equipped to fulfil our strap line of 'Sharing God's Love' so that more in our town can come to know the life of Jesus for themselves.

The focus of Covenant Sunday is to remind ourselves of how we used to live as well as our intentionally and deliberately choosing how we want to live today and into the future. It is when we say that we no longer want to live like those who live in the land of the dead, as described in verses 1 – 3. Instead, we say we want to live like those who have crossed over from death to life as in verse 4, whose lives are filled with the Holy Spirit, as in chapter 1 verses 13 and 14, whose life is shaped and moulded by faith, hope and love. This is Jesus' desire for one of us, may this be our desire too.