

# Living as Leaders

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Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[ 0 : 0 0 ] We're going to look at Ephesians chapter 1, at the end of that chapter especially. We read there a short while ago.

I'm going to reread verses 22 and 23. So this is Ephesians chapter 1, page 22, 23. It's on page 1173.

And it reads like this. It says, God placed all things under his feet, that's Christ's feet, and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

And we really just want to think together about what these verses are saying to us about the church. The church is the body of Jesus, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

A few years ago I went on holiday to a little village in West Cork called Ballet de Hobb. And Ballet de Hobb has a population of 400 people and it's got 14 pubs, which I make to be about one pub for 28 people.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] And I was to my friend there who's a church of Ireland vicar in Ballet de Hobb at the time. So he didn't really frequent any of these pubs, but I was convinced that I had to visit a genuine Irish pub.

So he took me along to one of these 14 pubs and it was just, it just looked like a little house on the main street.

And so we walked through the door into the pub and indeed it was just a little house. And the house owner had the ingenuity to divide her front room.

So you walked in the door straight into the lounge, she divide it in two and put a bar down one side and some benches on the other and she served beer there. I thought she'd be impressed to have a glamorous guest like me, but Leonardo DiCaprio had been there two weeks before.

So I didn't really get that great reception. But anyway, there we were. My friend decided he had to go to the toilet and to go to the toilet in this pub, you had to go out of the living room through the corridor, through the kitchen and use the family toilet.

[ 2 : 2 6 ] So it was a genuine, authentic Irish pub. A few weeks ago I was in New York and New York is full of Irish pubs.

So anyway you go, there are Irish pubs, but none of them were like the real Irish pub in Baladahob. But it is amazing to think how strong an impact Irish culture and Irish pubs and so on have had in some North American cities.

There is still a really strong Irish sense amongst some of these communities. The Irish had a big impact and a lot of influence, especially in some of these North American cities in the Northern States.

And that's an interesting thing to think about is how one place, one nation, one culture can have a big impact in a different nation, in different cities, in other cultures.

I used to live in Kirkcaldy and Fife and we had a Polish club and that's where the Polish people in our community got together and their presence was felt in the town in different ways.

[ 3 : 38 ] If you travel around the world you'll find football supporters clubs for English football teams all around the world. So one culture having a presence in another culture.

And I'm talking about this because what I want us to understand is this, the church is the way in which God has a presence in this world. God who lives, reigns and rules in heaven makes his presence felt most particularly in this world through the church.

Somebody once called the church the colony of heaven if you get that idea. But God dwells in the church and through the church he makes himself felt and known in this world.

God impacts this world most powerfully through the church. Now if we want a strong gospel presence in our cities then the best way to do that is to have more and more churches which love and live and preach the gospel.

That's why we want to multiply churches, that's why we want to plant new churches because the more churches there are that are gathered around the gospel then the more the presence of God will be known and will impact the culture and the society in which we live.

[ 5 : 14 ] And Paul was trying to reassure these Christians in Ephesus that he's writing to that God was making his presence in this world known through them and they were saying that to them because they probably doubted it very much.

They were a very small group, they were socially, politically insignificant, right on the margins of society and they probably felt quite overwhelmed.

And Paul was writing this letter to them to say, listen, you may seem to be insignificant in many ways, sociologically and politically and so on. But in God's eyes you are absolutely critical and in God's eyes you have great significance because through you God is making his presence known in this world.

You matter to God in the church, you have great purpose. And as we think about what it is to be the church and to start new churches then we need to understand why it is that God places such significance on the church when for most people in our society the church is marginal, it is insignificant, it doesn't really matter.

So two or three things we're going to pick out about the church from this passage and from these couple of verses and one of them is to say that the church is about people. The church is all about people.

[ 6 : 44 ] The church is a community. If you're new to church then you're probably a bit confused and in the dark about what church is really all about.

And if that's the way you are then don't feel embarrassed because most Christians are confused and a little bit in the dark about what church is about also.

There's a lot of confusion in the way that we think about church. I think I said earlier on that we were having a church cleaning next Saturday.

Well if I meant that biblically then you would all be getting a shower because you see we talk about church and we mean the building very often, a structure.

But nowhere in the New Testament is that how the church is described. So when we speak about the church in that way we're actually speaking unbiblically.

[ 7 : 41 ] We've got a problem with the language of church here because the church is never a building. And then sometimes we talk about church as if church is something that we go to.

So I'm going to go to church on Sunday or would you like to come to church on Sunday? Would you like to come along and so on. And by that what we really mean is a meeting, you know, it's an event that we can attend.

Now that's kind of getting closer to accuracy because the word for church means gathering. It's a gathering. But of course the emphasis is really on who gathers, who's gathering.

And the church are the ones who gather in the name of Jesus Christ. The church is the ones who gather because they are God's people.

And so when we talk about church what we mean or what we ought to mean and what's most important to understand is that the church is a community of people who share the same faith in Jesus Christ.

[ 8 : 54 ] And that's what Paul means when he writes here about the church. He's not talking about buildings. He's not talking about meetings. He's talking about a community of people.

And so when we talk about church that's got to be really where our thoughts go. And so as you think about church I don't know what kind of habits you've got in the way you think about church.

But I hope that you don't just think of church as a place you go. And I hope you don't just think of church as something that you attend on a Sunday morning.

But I hope that you understand that church is a people of which you are a part. And that you are here in church not to attend a meeting but to gather with your people.

You are singing in Psalm 122 about tribes and that referred to the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament. But you know this is your tribe I hope you understand that or your clan.

[ 9 : 57 ] This is your people. This is your family. This is your community. And to be part of the church is to be part of a community of people where we love each other, serve each other and care for each other.

Look how Paul speaks in his prayer in verse 15. He says for this reason ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. You see what was this community like?

It was well the saints are the people of God and these Christians this church they love the saints. They love God's people. That's a characteristic of what it is to be part of the church.

You love the saints. Look at Paul's attitude to them. I've not stopped giving thanks for you. There's a great appreciation of the other people within this community.

I keep praying for you asking that God the Father will give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. So please see church as a community not as an event.

[ 10 : 56 ] And it's not a box ticking exercise. I must turn up on Sunday morning and there you go. I've scored that off the list again. I've done my duty. I've shown up at church.

But I want you to really think of church as the people that you could see sitting around you right now. And God wants you to love these people to serve these people to care for these people to pray for these people to fellowship with these people to be their friends.

One of the reasons that we promote city groups or small groups or house groups within the church is because we want everyone in the church to really feel part of a family to really feel a great sense of personal belonging to feel that they're been loved looked after and cared for and blessed by being part of God's people in this place.

So I really encourage you if you're not involved in city group think how can I be involved in the community life of the church at that level. And if you're new to church I want to say we're not about religion really primarily.

We're not about rituals primarily. We're not about meetings and events primarily. We are about relationships. We are a people. And what defines us first of all of course is our vertical relationship our relationship upwards towards God.

[ 12 : 18 ] That's what connects us as a community and defines us. And then of course our horizontal relationships with each other. And so as I would ask you if you're not a Christian as I would plead with you to think about putting your faith in Jesus Christ.

We're talking about a relationship. I'm saying God is inviting you into relationship with himself through Jesus Christ that you would know him know his power his love his goodness his forgiveness his freedom his joy and peace in your life.

And as God invites you into that relationship with himself he is inviting you into a relationship with many others. So the churches are people. Primarily the head of the church the one in charge is Jesus.

God we read in verse 22 placed all things under his head and appointed under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church. So first of all the church is a community it's a people secondly this community the church has as its head the one who rules over it the one who's in charge is Jesus.

That means all of us as Christians together and individually depend on Jesus Christ. It's a relationship of dependence.

[ 13 : 35 ] It's a relationship where we serve Jesus Christ and it's a relationship because he is the head where we in our lives daily prioritise Jesus Christ and put him first above everything else.

The thing that matters more to the believer than anything else and as we prioritise our lives and sort out what's important is to worship Jesus.

He's the head of the church we want to give him all honour glory and praise. We want to exalt him we want to lift up his name we want to praise him and thank him for all that he has done for him.

So in the church we're really all about Jesus and in the church it's our intention and our purpose to make much of Jesus Christ. In our singing and our praying and our preaching and our chatting and our lifestyles and our friendships it's all about Jesus and so we should always in everything we do want to make much of Jesus Christ and to emphasise him and to celebrate him.

He's got this great place of a universal authority doesn't he? All things are under his feet and Paul has painted a picture of majesty for us.

[ 15 : 00 ] He tells us in verse 20 that Christ has been raised from the dead seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavenly realms far above all rule authority power and dominion in every title that can be given.

Not only in the present age but also in the one to come and God placed all things under his feet. So this is a picture of an ancient king and he is enthroned and as he is enthroned he is seated and the fact that he's seated means that he's at rest.

All his enemies are defeated and in fact the picture is of his enemies sort of paraded in front of him. These far above them we read every other authority, every other power, every other dominion is now shackled and chained and humiliated and humbled before the authority, the power and the dominion of Jesus Christ.

All the powers of this age, all the spiritual powers of this age, all the powers of the age to come. All the spiritual powers of the age to come are under the authority and the dominion of Jesus Christ.

They stand way below him, their heads hung in defeat, shackled.

[ 16 : 31 ] Christ's glory on our power are unchallenged. How did Jesus defeat them? How has Jesus conquered all the powers natural and supernatural of this universe?

Well we're told that it happened when God raised him from the dead, when God wrenched Christ from the grave and raised him up and broke all the power of death and sin and seated him at his right hand, then that's when all the powers of darkness and death were broken.

And that means because Christ is seated in power and victory that he can break the power of death and the power of sin in your life, because God has raised Jesus to a new life.

Then what Paul says in the first few verses of chapter 2 is that God can raise you to a new life and that he will seat you at the right hand in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

You may feel trapped today, trapped in all kinds of behaviours, addictions, thought patterns, in all kinds of greed and selfishness or bitterness or anger, you may feel trapped by the past or trapped by the future.

[ 18 : 13 ] And you know what, there is one person who has the power to set you free and he is here and he has come to break the chains, to set you free, to give you a life like no other life.

And that's what he is offering us today in Jesus Christ. And often people make the mistake of thinking that they will stumble on a little longer in the darkness, stumble on a little longer in the chains.

God says, why wait? Christ is here, he has risen, he is alive, he is enthroned and he is here to heal, to help, to save, to give peace, to give joy, to set you free.

So Christ is head over the church, reigning in this amazing power, gathering of people that he has freed through his death and resurrection and bringing them into his family.

One of the great Christian doctrines is the doctrine of adoption and by that we just mean that when you become a Christian, God not only sets you free, he makes you part of his family.

[ 19 : 50 ] He adopts you and so in verse 5 of chapter 1 we read, in love, in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will.

He wants you not to be an orphan but to be one of his children, to be part of his family. I've been reading a biography of Charles Dickens the last few weeks.

Well I got it from my birthday in July so it's more than a few weeks but anyway, I've been reading this thing and Dickens was really interested in the poor of London and the fate especially of orphaned children and those children that he saw living in the streets and so on.

And what did he do? Well he did everything he could to persuade the wealthy and powerful people in his society to take an interest in these orphans, to provide for them and to give homes for them where they could become part of a family.

And what has God done? Well, in God he exercises all his power to create a family for you.

[ 21 : 08 ] All the power of heaven has been exercised in your behalf. All the wealth of heaven has been spent for you so that you can have a home because spiritually we're orphaned.

We don't know our Father in heaven. And so that's what's going on here that we've been brought into the family of God living under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's an amazing turnaround. God has given you a new life and a new identity. Sometimes we think of ourselves and our identity as you know, I'm a minister, I'm a doctor, I'm a lawyer, I'm a gardener, I'm a carpenter, I'm a housewife.

We think that's what defines us. But if you're a Christian, you're defined by one thing that you belong to God as His child.

That's who you are. A lot of our doubt and fear in life comes from having a wrong identity because we place our identity and our confidence in things that don't last in our career, in our family, in money and other things.

[ 22 : 20 ] But your identity is to be found in Christ and in Him alone. So what are we reading? We're reading that He appointed Him to be head over everything for the church.

You see, He's in charge of everything and He rules over everything for the benefit of the church. Dickens tried to persuade the wealthy and the powerful to use their power on behalf of the vulnerable in the weak.

And what happens is this, that Jesus Christ uses His power, His wealth, His riches, His glory on the behalf of His people.

God is on your side. Our confidence in life doesn't come from our abilities. It comes from God's gracious care and His great promises to us.

Because He's for us. He's ruling over everything for our benefit. The last thing very briefly that I want to say is this, the church is not only a community, it's not only ruled over with Christ as head, but it is His body.

[ 23 : 24 ] That emphasizes the unity of the church. And this body, as we've alluded to already, is the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. We find His presence, His fullness in the church.

His presence, His power, His grace, His truth, His glory, His gifts, they're all found in the church. That's how God is making Himself known in the world. That's the truth that Paul is teaching here through the church.

Jesus permeates this world with His rule. So the church must reflect God. I heard somebody speaking recently and they were talking about two different kinds of authority.

And they described this as external authority and internal authority. And by external authority, what they meant was the kind of authority that you can be given by virtue of your position in life.

So a politician has a certain kind of authority. A judge has a certain kind of authority. A priest or a teacher might have a certain kind of authority.

[ 24 : 34 ] So those are external sources of authority given to you by some institution or another. And he wanted to compare that with what he called internal authority.

And he spoke of that as the kind of authority that comes from who you are as a person, from your inner life, from your moral and your spiritual integrity.

So think of somebody like Martin Luther King, somebody who's, they didn't have a lot of power socially initially, but they had great authority because of their character.

And too often the church has chased after the first kind of power, external authority.

But has lacked the second kind of power, moral and spiritual authority, the authority of the inner life.

[ 25 : 39 ] And that authority comes from the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives. That authority comes with the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

And so if the church is to be the presence of Christ in this world, it needs that inner authority that comes through Christ's presence.

So does my life, your life, have that kind of moral, spiritual authority?

That integrity that comes in the presence of Jesus Christ? A lot of Christians think holiness doesn't matter, you can treat it as a second rate issue or a secondary issue.

A lot of Christians get themselves to a place where they think that purity doesn't matter or consistency or honesty or goodness of speech, and yet if we lack these God-given qualities, these fruits of the Spirit, our lives will lack authority.

[ 27 : 05 ] People will not take us or our faith seriously. And so holiness and purity, integrity and honesty are vital things.

God loves holiness and God hates sin. And our lives will have no authority unless we love holiness and hate what is sinful.

The church is called to be a light in the darkness. We'll write about this later on in Ephesians 5. What we want to do is see lots of churches that are full of the presence and the power of Jesus Christ that will serve as lights around our city.

And it's like, imagine a city with no street lamps. Before street lights are invented, there's darkness in the city at night, and then some genius invents the gas lamp or whatever it was, and they start putting up street lights all around the city, all around the city, all around it, and it transforms the city, and it transforms the darkness.

And that's what we want to do. We want to create churches all around the city that will bring light into the back streets and the dark alleys and the cracks and crevices of society and light up these places with the gospel.

[ 28 : 32 ] We want to reach people who are far away from Jesus Christ, hostile to Jesus, alienated from the church. The last thing I want to say about the church is this, that Jesus loves the church so much.

He says that in chapter 5. Jesus loved the church and gave himself for it. So much that he died for her. It's amazing to know that we are loved in this way.

You can never overestimate God's love for you. It's so much greater than you can begin to know. I know that sometimes in the here and now, it's hard for us to always be convinced of the great depths of God's love for us.

So many shadows and so many sorrows and a lot of pain haunts the children of God.

But over all of that, God points to the cross and says, see how I love you. See how I love you.

[ 29 : 40 ] And that's what our job is as a church, is to point the world to the cross and say, see how he loves you.

And I want to say to those of you who are finding it hard to be a Christian, he loves you.

He will keep you because he died for you. He won't let you go. And he has a home prepared for you, where you will know that love perfectly and where there is no more pain or sorrow or struggle.

Let's conclude and sing our last song in a moment. Before I pray, I'm going to give you a moment just to pray in your own heart, just to, if you want to, to respond to what we've said in the sermon, especially if you're not a Christian, if you're far away from God, then that you might take this moment just to speak to God yourself.

Thank you Lord God that you love the church. Thank you that you gave your son Jesus and that the church has been created through his death and resurrection. By that he gathers a new people for himself.

[ 31 : 29 ] We pray that we would all want to know Jesus Christ, to experience the new life that he gives and to be part of his people, his community.

And may we as a church have that integrity and authority that comes from the presence of Christ in our lives.

May we love Jesus, may we love holiness and goodness and truth. And may we know that we are secure in his love also.

Amen.