

Big and New!

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[0 : 0 0] Ephesians, I'm just going to say a little bit, speak for a few moments, because I'm excited about starting this new series, not how I envisaged it.

See, for you guys, you all kind of Sunday night you're pumping up for Monday for the rest of your week. From a Monday morning I'm pumping up for Sunday, because that's the highlight of everything that I do.

And so this isn't how I envisaged. We begin the series of Ephesians, but I hope and pray that it will be a blessed time for us today and in the months that I had. I hope it's like Job, our series in Job, that you will participate prayerfully, that you will prepare, that it will be part of the work that we do in our city groups as well, that God will speak powerfully to us.

And we remember when we come to Ephesians, as we come to any part of scripture, this is God-breathed scripture for us. It's God-breathed.

So Paul begins by setting that out. He says, Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. And he's doing what he does in a lot of his other letters. He's setting out his authority, his credentials to be able to do this, that he is not just self-appointed.

[1 : 1 3] He's not just a nutcase bringing some kind of fanciful ideas. He is sent by God. He is an official beginning to his letter, technical beginning to his letter.

He is saying, I am coming. I'm representing God. This is God-breathed scripture. And it is important truth. And it's important, those written to the Ephesians, it seems very much to be a letter that would be like a circular that would go maybe to around a lot of different churches, around Ephesus and around Asia Minor, that area.

But it's not like a circular that we would get in the post. We get circulars in the post every week and we throw them away. We go straight into the circular filing cabinet. We don't look at them, they happen.

They come all the time. Circulars generally are ignored. But it wasn't like that for this kind of circular. This was more like if you were part of a family and you got a lawyer's letter with a message of an inheritance.

You would all want to read that circular. You would all want to pass that round to family because it's some very important news. Just the kind of letter that we have here. Not a boring circular, but something of great significance and great importance.

[2 : 3 0] And he really introduces it with a welcome. And then I'm going to focus on just a couple of verses which are the theme of the whole book.

So if you remember these verses, it's really what the whole book is about. In verses 9 and 10. What we're making known to is that we have redemption through his blood with the riches of his grace, making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

So it's the uniting of everything under Christ. That's the purpose of the gospel. That's the purpose of God. That's the purpose of his will. That's what's going to happen in the future.

So I want to say two things briefly. First of all, Christians are part of something big. They're part of something important. That's what Paul wants to get across to the churches and also to us.

This is a pivotal verse. And he's saying that when we become Christians, we become part of something really big, something important. It's great to be part of something big, isn't it?

[3 : 39] We like the thought of that or to have been around when something big was happening. Could be anything really. But it's nice for us to say I was there.

I was part of that. Or I remember that well. I was around in 1985 when Livia had happened or when Kennedy was assassinated. The first person on the moon, these are illustrations from my generation, not yours.

Most of you weren't born. But we like to be involved with or around when something important is happening. And that is very true for the Christian.

We are part of something that's very important that God is doing. We've adopted into a cosmic event that's happening. And that's really great for us.

We are swept up into God's eternal purposes. And that's glorious. It's glorious that we are part of something really big, that He has planned, that He has done, that He is doing, that He will be doing.

[4 : 38] And as Christians we belong to that. And so we are part of something really big. So the reminder to us is that Christian life isn't something trivial for us.

It's not something insignificant. And it's not something unimportant. And Paul when he speaks here about these great truths of God and what he's doing and what he will do.

It's not fable that he's speaking. Paul isn't trying to make up something that would sound really good. Paul was in prison. But he's been given this unique message.

It's not that he's leading a great bunch of people to overturn the world with his message at some kind of human level. He's not making up something to make everyone else feel good about what they are.

This is truth that he's been given. There would be no reason to make up this truth. There would be no valid reason to make up the truth of God's eternal plan and God's future in Christ to unite everything in heaven and on earth under him.

[5 : 39] It doesn't make sense. I'm going to explain that a little bit more. Christians are part of something big. Christians then are also part of something new. Okay? Nuneous is an important emphasis in Ephesians.

The word new is used quite a lot. We have a new life. We have a new way of doing things with a new community. That's part of what Ephesians is trying to teach us.

Not only are we part of something big, we're part of something new. The Gospel is about as Christians as being reborn. We are new people.

Verse 1 reminds us of that. He says that we are saints and we are faithful. That's the description he gave of Christians. You like getting?

Maybe not. Sometimes. But it's nice sometimes, isn't it, to get someone else's description of us. You know, sometimes when I do the marriage course with people, I get the couples to not speak to one another and write down the things that they really like about the other person.

[6 : 47] Okay? That's always really interesting. And also the things that they find difficult about the other person. That's even more interesting. And I've been privy to some very interesting things.

But it's great because you see the reaction of the other person. I didn't know that's what you thought about me. Oh, that's tremendous. And we like being, in some cases, we like people describing us to us, what we're like.

Well this is a description of what we are like as Christians. We are servants. We are saints, sorry, and we are faithful. Okay, we're not people who are pious or deserving of sainthood, but it means that as Christians we're chosen.

We're set apart. Christ is chosen as, Christ's work is in us, we are called out. Everyone of us are called out to serve.

That's personal, but it's for every Christian you're a saint. But you're also faithful. Now that doesn't mean that you're reliable, that's not the meaning here, it's not that you're someone that's trustworthy at that level, although we ought to be in, we ought to be faithful.

[7 : 57] It's speaking more that we are people of faith, the faithful, the people of faith as opposed to the people who are faithless, who have no faith. We've experienced, as he says, this grace and this peace that's spoken of here.

We've been transformed by Christ. So whatever else you're described as a Christian, as a Christian you're someone who is a saint you're set apart, you've been called, you're part of something big, you belong and you're someone who is faith.

It's a gift from God. Okay? You're not faithless. It's set apart from people who don't have faith. You're faithful.

And that is whatever else should be what describes as a Christian. So we're new people because we are people of who are saints and we're people who are faithful, but we're also going to be part of this new creation that he's speaking about, where he's going to unite everything to him, things in heaven and things on earth.

That is part of God's plan. He says in verse 4 that this has been his plan before the foundation of the world. So this whole new creation that we are in Christ and that we're going to belong to when He unites everything to us in the new heavens and new earth has always been his plan.

[9 : 17] So what I'm talking about newness and Ephesians talks about newness, it's an old plan really. It's his only plan actually and there's never been another one and there's no plan being.

This has always been what he's doing. And so we're redeemed into this great new old saving purpose of God and we will be part of his new creation.

And this new creation is coming and will come and this plan that he has is set forth in Christ. It's the mystery of his will that's made known.

So Paul speaks a lot about mystery. 21 times he speaks about the mystery that's made known. So when he speaks about mystery he's just speaking about what was previously hidden that's now been revealed.

So what was hidden in the Old Testament that is now revealed in the new? It's a crucified God, a crucified Savior. It's Jesus Christ and the cross.

[10 : 18] You know 1 Corinthians 1, 18 speaks about that. It's the foolishness of the cross that is the revelation of God's great plan. So the cross which we would have celebrated today, the death of Jesus in the communion but we will do tonight, is at the very centre of all history.

It's the centre of his mystery. It's the centre of his plan. It's the centre of what will happen in the future. It's this place where there's a revelation of his infinite love and his infinite justice and his purpose for all of human.

That everything revolves around the cross of Jesus Christ. It's not insignificant. It's not an important. It's not a byproduct. Can we imagine that?

It's the very centre. It's the mystery that's revealed. The very centre point of all history is God the Son nailed to a tree.

You simply couldn't make that up. You simply wouldn't make that up. It is God's mystery that's revealed to us through the cross in Christ.

[11 : 30] It's set forth in Christ. Everything about Christ, his incarnation, his carpentry, his life, but his atoning death, his resurrection on the third day, his ascension.

All of that is God's great mystery. God's great plan. It's where we are redeemed. It's where we have hope. That's why we can crazily come out on a cold morning and sit in a miserable cold church and hear the gospel and worship Jesus Christ because of who He is and because of this mystery.

And this mystery reveals a cosmic unity. What a plan where He will unite all things in heaven and on earth under Him, restoring the original unity and deepening it.

Because what sin brought in was disunity, wasn't it? Disharmony, separation from ourselves in God and from ourselves in the environment and from ourselves in ourselves.

But the ultimate outworking of the cross is a cosmic unity where He restores the original unity in the universe and it deepens that.

[12 : 48] This is if the cross has drawn out like a sting, drawn out death and sin like a sting, drawn it into the public, into the reopen and in doing so, He has a land-stack, desperate evil on the cross.

And what is latent, kind of, He's made it very obvious and seen and active and He's dealt with it and He's destroyed it.

And the cross is if without the cross evil would never ultimately have been dealt with. It's a strange mystery but the reality is in so doing He's reversing the tyranny and the division and the friction and the tension and the brokenness of this planet and the environmental disasters and the tensions and the death and the sin and the hell and all that goes with rebellion against God and His final purpose is uniting all things in heaven and on earth in Him.

And new heavens and a new earth, unity and all that goes with that, all the promises of revelation, all the beauty, all the love, all the connectivity, all the worship, all the glory.

I'm just going to finish very briefly in four minutes. Why is that not obvious now? Okay, that's His plan. He set it forth in Christ.

[14 : 19] That unity, unity between ourselves and God, unity in the universe, unity between heaven and earth will all be His always plan. Why can't we see that now?

Paul's writing this from a stinking prison cell. Why? You know, in 2nd Corinthians 11, He gives that list, that litany of suffering, of nakedness, of peril, of shipwreck, of everything that He's experienced.

What good is this unity that He speaks of when His life is hellish and miserable and rotten? What's all about? Why isn't it obvious what Jesus is promising and what's supposed to be happening?

Why isn't there this unity in heaven and in earth? It seems worse than ever. Well, there is evidence of unity and accord.

And the first is, in this letter, it's spoken of in chapter 2, verse 14, He speaks about a new unity between Jew and Gentile.

[15 : 23] The New Testament church breaks down cultural divisions and the hatreds that there were. So there's unity in this New Testament church between Jew and Gentile in a way that could never have been envisaged.

There's a unity today in your heart and in my heart so that God's purpose of uniting us to Him is working its way through our testimony because we have a new heart and we have a love for Him where we hated Him or ignored Him before.

And the rest of, well, not the rest, but chapters 4 and 6 of Ephesians is all about the outworking of the unity that has been won by Jesus Christ in the ethics of our lives, in our marriages, in our homes, in our workplaces.

Everything is a reflection of the new unity that Christ has won so it can be seen in our hearts and then as a result in our lives. There's, you know, we shall pray to the Lord supper tonight and that's a visual demonstration of what Jesus has done.

Well, our lives also are a visual demonstration, are asked to be visual demonstration of what Jesus is doing. So in every believer there's evidence. In the church there should be evidence because this Book of Ephesians speaks about the new community that we are and it's a community of grace and of peace as he spoke of.

[16 : 48] And it's a community that's to reflect what this great new heavens and the new earth community will be like. So the Kingdom of Heaven is now as well as in the future.

So this little group of people here that we are as a community are to be part of God's great plan and were to reveal what God's purposes are in the love that we have for one another.

The church and Ephesians is all about the church is so essential because it's the community that reflects the work of Jesus Christ. Notice why division and disunity in the church is the most ugly thing of all because it most damns what Christ has done.

It most reflects badly on Jesus because Jesus came to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and on earth and the church is to be the first home of that.

So unity at church level with one another is not soft centred Christianity, it's absolutely the core and it's the way we deal with division and bitterness and hurt and pain and suffering and let down and all the things that we all experience as Christians together.

[18 : 10] That's how we deal with them in Christ because we are a new community. So there is to be evidence and Paul is speaking in this letter that there is to be evidence of God's great plan and I finish with this but the plan is not yet finished and fulfilled.

According to his purpose in verse 10 as a plan for the fullness of time. That means there is a time where it's right for it to be finally ushered in and revealed and made known when he returns.

So he's been here, he has lived and he's died, he has rose again, he's ascended, he said he will return and when he returns he will usher in in new heavens and in the fullness of time when his time is right.

We can question, we can argue, we can wish it were different but in the fullness of time he will return, he will judge the living and the dead and he will usher in the new heavens and the new earth.

The plan is not yet fulfilled. I think I've said this before but for many years I walked through the meadows to church to study and maybe eleven, twelve years ago there used to be the billboard at the quarter mile with the picture, with the drawings, beautiful drawings of the original royal infirmary, old stone building and beside it the beautiful glass buildings that they were going to build and you looked at it and the place was a building site and you thought there's no way that's going to fit in, it will look like that.

[19 : 54] It's amazing but it's almost otherworldly, it will never look like that and now when I walk through the meadows from Marchman and you look at the quarter mile and there is stone building, glass, stone building, glass, stone building, glass, glass, glass and this glorious picture that there was in a billboard is absolutely as the drawing now in reality and if you go out into that corridor before you freeze to death you will see architects drawings of the flat downstairs that we are turning into offices and into rooms for kids church, warm rooms, okay and they're architects drawings and they're flat on one page and they're full of measurements and details but it doesn't quite look cool or doesn't look like the drawings, like the pictures of the quarter mile but they're absolutely accurate and now going down into the flat I can begin to see it all taking shape beautifully and one day soon it's going to be finished but the drawings have been made, the foundation is already laid and we're absolutely assured it will come to its conclusion and it will look just as the plan says.

Now that is what's happening here, God is saying the plan is in place in the fullness of time, the foundation has been laid in Jesus Christ, every last detail is in place, is measured out, is going to happen and it's going to look glorious and beautiful, that place of no more tears, no more death, no more separation, all of these glorious pictures that were given will come to pass in the new heavens and the new earth and He will unite all things, He will unite creation, He will unite the environment, He will unite the angels and He will unite us all in Christ, we will be united, the foundations have been drawn, the artist's impressions have been made, this will happen because of what Jesus Christ has done.

You're a Christian today, you're part of something big, you're something new, never forget that, never minimise what you are, what you have as a Christian, never think that your Christianity is trivial and if you're not a believer, can I ask you why you're not a believer when this newness, this sainthood, this faith gift is offered to you?

Are you confident enough to remain outside of this plan, this glorious artist's impression which has been sealed in his blood as a resurrected, redeeming God, where the cross is the absolute centre of God and God's will and God's person and God's character?

Are you willing to cast aside for a few years of dubious freedom and self-autonomy? Please consider Jesus Christ over these days and weeks and months and may we be blessed and communion together this evening.

[23 : 14] Let's pray. Father God, help us, we ask to know you and to love you. We thank you for your message, we thank you for your word, take it, we pray, forgive the speed and the shallowness of our study of your word today, understand our weakness and bless our fellowship.

But may Christ be very real to us, very new to us, very big to us, may we rejoice in this amazing plan that you have chosen us to be part of by your grace simply because you have chosen us.

And Lord, help us to respond to your invitation and may the Holy Spirit be very real in our midst, very real in our church, very real in our community and may we reflect the newness that we ought to do.

And forgive us Lord for all our weakness and our failure at nursing and help us to be blessed by you. For Jesus' sake, amen.