



Sermon

In Christ to the praise of his Glory

Ephesians 1:9-15

19th July 2015

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Last week, we started this preaching series on the Epistle to the Ephesians. This is a beautiful letter. It was called "the Queen of the Epistles" by William Barclay.

What is it about? This is not a letter correcting some problem or heresy in the local church. It is a letter to build Christians up in understanding and faith. It is about God's purpose: his plan and his power. God has a plan and he has the power to bring it about. In today's reading Paul discloses the mystery of God's purpose. But in the following verses in this chapter he tells of the mighty power God has to bring it about.

The Epistle neatly splits at the halfway point. I heard David Pawson¹ characterise the two halves like this:

Chapters 1-3

Belief
Adoration
Experience of Christ
Worship & Witness
Saved by

Chapters 4-6

Behaviour
Application
Example to others
Walk & Warfare
Saved for

Peter Akester started us off last week. Remember Paul was writing from prison in Rome to the Church in Ephesus in 60AD. It was a church into which he had invested some considerable time and teaching.

Peter spoke on the first 8 verses, which are rich with the themes of grace and election. Paul is so full of his theme that it tumbles out of him. He writes long complicated sentences: Verses 3-10 are one long sentence in Greek!

In Christ:

There is a little word which is real key to understanding this chapter. It occurs again and again through these verses. What might that be?

It is the word "in!" "In Christ Jesus; in Christ; in Him; in the One he loves; in him; in Christ; in him; in Christ; in Christ; in him."

The idea behind those repeated expressions is crucial. It is the key to understanding our faith. To be a Christian is to be "in Christ." When we are baptised we put on Christ or as Paul puts in Galatians 3:27, we have clothed ourselves with Christ. I have given you before the analogy of an envelope. Put a letter in the envelope and where the envelope goes the letter goes. What does the observer know of the enveloped

¹ Series on Ephesians. Available from Inspirational Media Ltd.

letter? Just what is seen on the envelope! What does God see of us? When we are in Christ, he sees Christ and we are hidden in him.²

A Biblical metaphor is the Body of Christ. We are made members of the Body of Christ, when we are baptized into him. The lesser is part of the greater. We can get a bit confused on this. We speak of having Christ in our hearts or the Holy Spirit living within us. Those are expressions of intimacy rather than containment. It is not that you enclosed the Holy Spirit.

Think of the air around you. Are you in the air? Yes. Think of your lungs – is the air inside you? Yes. You are in the air and the air is in you. If you are in Christ, you are in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is in you.

Return to Eden

Paul now discloses the mystery of God's purpose. He uses the word mystery in the way we would when we finish a detective novel and say, "That was a good mystery." It is something that was hidden but is now made known.

We are able to come to the understanding of how things work but not why they work.

Mathematicians have probed into the logic of mathematics but not why it is so. Physicists have probed into the subatomic particles but cannot answer why this exists. Psychologists may describe human behaviour but not why humans exist.

Paul tells us the answer – can you see it in verse 10: God intends to unite all things together under one head - who is Christ. He intends to establish a Christian universe!

The Auckland Council has just established its 10 year plan – God has an eternal plan. Paul says that God is working out his purpose in history. We may look at history and fail to see any plan or pattern. The historian Herbert Fisher wrote, "In history there is no plot, no rhythm, no pattern only one emergency following another." To him it was a mystery. Alfred Lord Tennyson had a clearer view when he wrote:

*That one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.*³

What is this plan? "All things" normally means the universe which Christ created and sustains.⁴ What would it be like for all things in heaven and on earth to be united under Christ? Would it be a return to Eden? Imagine if there had been no fall – if mankind had multiplied without sin – then all things would have remained united under God. Is it then that the grand design is for salvation, redemption and restoration to be complete and bring everything back into harmony and obedience to the Creator? What a breath-taking plan!

But God will do it through Christ not through man's efforts. Godless man's efforts are exactly like building the tower of Babel to ascend to God. He will not have that. God will descend to us and rescue us and has done so in Christ.

Coming to Christ

We see here that we are chosen and hear the gospel. Everyone has to 'hear' the gospel to believe. Certainly, we might read it but it comes through words to us. Having heard the gospel, then we put our hope in Christ. Hope is future expectation - not wishes but expectancy. The Christian pins his hopes on Christ. We are saying, "You are the one who can fulfil my hope; you will get us out of this mess."

We have to believe and hope in Christ. It is not enough to have head knowledge. As James said in his Epistle, the devil believes in God but is not saved. No, we need trusting faith in Christ to be our Saviour. When I was around 19 years old, I knew some basic Christian theology but I was not sure if Jesus had even lived. Through my cousin's witness to me, it realised that if I did not believe in Jesus I could not call myself a

² Colossians 3:3

³ *In Memoriam*

⁴ John Stott, in B.S.T: Ephesians p44.

Christian. That was a frightening thought! Over the next year, I came to understand that I needed to trust Jesus to be the one who saved me from the consequences of my sins. It was not enough just to believe there was a God and try to be good. Still I had not put my trust in him, I was merely getting to the end of trusting in myself.

Finally the evening came when I went forward at a meeting to ask Jesus to save me. Finally, I put my trust in him. Finally my hopes were pinned on him to get me out the mess of this life and my wrong doing.

Have you done that – trusted Jesus to be the saviour and put your hope in him?

When we do Paul says we are appointed to a task – what is that task? Verse 12 tells us – to be for the praise of his glory.

David Pawson suggests that there are three ways of living:

1. You can live for yourself – self indulgent
2. You can live for others – many people do that and they are admired and praised. You don't need to be a Christian to do this. What's more it is no proof of being Christian to do it.
3. You can live for the praise of his glory. If you live like this people think about God when they think about you. If you live for the praise of God's glory, it will include the use of your lips so you can bring others into his plan for them. As you tell others, they hear, they can believe and they too can be brought into his purpose for them.

The Holy Spirit is a Seal

We hear the good news, we believe and put our hope in Christ. Then there is a third step. Look at verse 13:

... you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

I have spoken before about the Holy Spirit being a guarantee of salvation. You will remember it was a trading term for the proof of the quality of the goods to be received. But there is another term used alongside it. The Holy Spirit is a seal marking us. That is another trading image. If a man went to the market to buy something and he might arrange for it to be collected later. In that case, he would tie it up and put wax on it and make the impression of his seal. He marked it as his. Those goods had changed hands; they could not be sold any longer.

So Paul says we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. When we come to Christ, God seals us and says I will come and collect this one. This one has changed hands; this one is now mine. In Colossians 1:13-14 Paul writes,

... he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Finally, Paul says this belief and sealing is to the praise of God's glory. Why do Christians sing and praise God – it is an outworking of this salvation and sealing with the Spirit. When we come into divine life it becomes our nature to praise and thank God. That is included in the great plan of God that all creation should praise God the wonderful creator. Does your heart want to sing to God – let it, encourage it. Remember the Psalm 103 and the song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name"? That is good practice. We need sometimes to tell our soul, the seat of our will and emotions to bless the Lord. We need to tell all of our own being to bless him. That is our Spirit being in control of these souls and bodies.

I wonder where you are in all this? Do you have an assurance of being 'in Christ'? Have you known what it is to believe and put your hope in Christ? Do you know the seal of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Have you found your life change so you delight in praising God? Do you live to the praise of his glory?

These are important questions. Please don't ignore them. If you want to pray with someone about some aspect of this, come forward at the end of the service and someone will be glad to help you.

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