

The Wonderful Everyday (Introduction to Ephesians)

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- [0 : 00] Well, as we start in the book of Ephesians, or a bit further back than the book of Ephesians, I want to begin with a question. What if there was no church?
- What if there was no church? And I don't just mean what if there was no building like this, if we met in a school or something like that.
- I mean, what if there was no Bon Accord Free Church? What if there was no church? What if there was no Hebron or Gilch or Trinity? What if there was no Free Church of Scotland?
- What if there was no Anglican Communion? What if there were no independent Baptist or Pentecostal fellowships? Not just if there wasn't a church, but what if there was no church on earth?
- What would you miss? And what would be missing? I want to begin with that question to get us thinking, not just as an interesting thought experiment, but because it gets us ready for Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus.
- [1 : 15] Most obviously, because, of course, he's writing to a church, and this church is pretty new, perhaps only six or seven years old when he writes to them. Our readings from Acts 19 tell us how the church there began.
- For the first readers of this letter, they'd known pretty recently in their lives what it was to have no church, not just in their city, of course, but in the world.
- I think it was only about 30 years before that, that God had poured out his Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and the church on earth was born.
- So to put that in our terms, imagine, if we can, that the first ever church had begun in the late 90s, and that Bon Accord had started in the year 2018, how confident would you be in the church, in our church?
- I think it would feel like much less of a given, wouldn't it, that this really is God's great big project on earth, building little families like this.
- [2 : 37] Imagine little congregations meeting in people's homes scattered across the city. It's thought, I thought this was interesting, Ephesus had about a quarter of a million people in it, it's about the same size as Aberdeen today, and beyond Ephesus itself, a countryside, the province of Asia, which is today the western part of Turkey, and so beyond the city, a shire, with churches scattered throughout the towns and villages.
- Imagine Paul's letter being sent from little church to little church, and being read from start to finish. And think how powerful, and what an impact it would have had to read his words.
- Because the letter to the Ephesians is not only to a church, it is about the church. To a church, about the church.
- Now we today are so used to reading Paul's letters privately in our own personal devotions, that we're quick to see the personal impact of what he says. So, by grace you have been saved through faith.

And brilliant, we think, what good news! I was once dead in my sins. But out of the great love with which God loved me, in his great mercy, he has made me alive in Christ.

[4 : 00] By grace I have been saved through faith. That's brilliant news, if that's true of you today. Wonderful news. But, the you in that sentence is yous.

You guys. Plural. And so, brothers and sisters, everything that Paul says in his letter is unfolding something bigger than you. The huge, gigantic, cosmic implications of the fact that by grace, yous have been saved through faith.

See, if there's one big thing that he wants them to see about themselves and what God's doing in their lives, it's in chapter 3, verse 10. Where Paul writes, To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that...

What? So that what? What is the purpose of Paul preaching Christ to the world? So that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he realized in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Friends, what if there was no church?

[5 : 44] If there was no church, says Paul, God's eternal purpose would have failed. If there was no church, there would be no point in preaching the gospel of Christ.

If there was no church, Paul says not only the universe, but heaven itself would not be the same. Brothers and sisters to Christians for whom the church felt not only ordinary, but weak, and fragile, and small.

Paul says, no, the church that is brought into being by the preaching of the gospel is cosmic, eternal, and at the heart of God's plan for the universe.

On the surface of things, as we sit here, the church is such an everyday church, isn't it? But Paul wants them and us to know it is the wonderful everyday.

The wonderful everyday. And now if you're thinking you've heard that before, you have. It's the tagline of Ikea. I've shamelessly ripped it off because it is so good.

[6 : 56] Because Paul's going to say in this letter that God's big project in the universe is building a house and making that house a home for himself.

And guess what? His home is made of people. People of different backgrounds, Jews and Gentiles. Normal, everyday people, but brought together into Christ to become, chapter 2, verse 20, the household of God.

God built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him, he says, you are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. God is building a home.

And his home is a wonderful everyday church. You and me. Could there be anything more encouraging then, brothers and sisters, for us to spend our time dwelling upon as a church family at the beginning of a new year?

[8 : 10] Okay. And so what I want us to do with the rest of our time this morning is just set the scene for this letter by rooting us back in the context of Acts, chapter 19, to show us how Ephesians would have impacted its first readers and therefore how it ought to impact us.

What are we meant to be listening out for as we read the book of Ephesians? Four points, then, which we'll move through fairly quickly to give us a handle on this letter. So, firstly, it's written in the context of Paul's extraordinary ministry.

And now, of course, all Paul's ministry is pretty special, but Acts 19 tells us Paul's work in Ephesus was extra special. Firstly, for the length of time that he spent there.

Verse 10 tells us after he moved from the synagogue to the hall of Tyrannus, he taught there every day for the next two years. And then after those two years, verse 22 says he spent a bit longer in Asia, which is the province where Ephesus was.

So, you know, most people think that Paul was in and around Ephesus for about three years, which is a decent length of time, isn't it? I've only been here for just over three years.

[9 : 26] Think how close this church would have been to Pastor Paul during that time. But fair to say Paul's three years were a bit more special than mine.

Just have a look at verses 11 and 12, which say, And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. What extraordinary miracles? So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them, and evil spirits came out of them.

There are lots of miracles in Acts. So when it says these are extraordinary miracles, we should sit up and take notice. And they are extraordinary, aren't they?

Earlier in Acts, people brought the sick onto the street so that even Peter's shadow might fall upon them, and they would get better. Well, now people are just simply bringing their tea towels and napkins that they might brush against Paul and take them home, and the people there got better, and the spirits left them.

Even by New Testament standards, it is absolutely sensational. Can you imagine the reputation Paul must have had in this city and in this region?

[10 : 47] They were three very special years. And we didn't read it, but at the end of the next chapter, Paul says goodbye to the elders of the church in Ephesus, and it says there was much weeping on the part of all.

They embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. Three such extraordinary years of ministry that these men break down when they realize that they will not see Paul again.

It's hard to overstate the impact that Paul's ministry had in this city and this church, but by the time he writes to them, Paul is in prison in Rome, and the church is unsettled by his suffering.

You think about it, if a preacher turned up in Aberdeen today and had a sensational impact, started the church and then went away and sometime later got arrested, you might wonder, wouldn't you, if it was all real?

Was God at work or was it just party tricks? It's sometimes said Ephesians isn't a very personal letter compared to some of Paul's other letters, but in two places, actually we see that their relationship with Paul is at the very heart of the reason the letter was written.

[12 : 17] So after he's unpacked the glorious work of God in building a home for himself in the church through the preaching of the gospel, he says, chapter 3, verse 13, So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

In the whole of the first half of the letter, Paul only asked the church to do two things, and this is one of them. So let me ask you, how much did Paul care about their discouragement over his suffering?

His burden of care for them is on the surface of the letter. In fact, right at the end, in chapter 6, verse 21, he says, So that you also may know how I am and what I'm doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything.

I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. It's the bit of the letter we don't really care about, isn't it?

But do you see the pastoral concern behind this letter? Friends, Pastor Paul wrote this letter so that the church would not lose heart over his suffering, that seemed to cast doubt on how authentic or how genuine his ministry, and therefore their church really was.

[13 : 44] So that by hearing from him again, their hearts would be encouraged. So what does Paul want us to take away from his letter to the Ephesians?

Well, there's lots, Lord willing, that we'll take away from this letter. But if we don't come away from it deeply encouraged and confirmed in our God-given identity and purpose as a church, then we've missed the point.

Because Paul's desire for them and for us in every age, faced with doubts, setbacks, scandals, suffering, is that we would not lose heart, but be deeply encouraged that it is Christ who is building his church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Which leads us nicely onto our second point, Paul's extraordinary ministry, which was carried out in overt spiritual warfare. Again, spiritual warfare is always rumbling on in the background of our lives and of the Bible, but in Paul's ministry in Ephesus, it is firmly in the foreground.

Paul meets some believers, who another guy, presumably Apollos, had evangelized at the beginning of the chapter, but they hadn't been properly baptized or received the Holy Spirit.

[15 : 14] Paul explains, he baptizes them, and verse 6, the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they begin speaking in tongues. Now, we've seen in our Wednesday night series in Acts, that's not just random, but happens at key turning points in the book.

And this is one of them. The entrance of the Holy Spirit into the ring brings Paul up against great spiritual darkness. Some Jewish exorcists come and try to borrow Paul's authority by saying to an evil spirit, verse 13, I adjure you by the Jesus who Paul proclaims.

But evil spirits have hardly spoken more significant words than in verse 15. This spirit says, Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are ye?

Do you see that? Paul's ministry in Ephesus has sent ripples, not only throughout the region of Asia, but throughout the spiritual realm. He is feared by evil spirits as Jesus was feared by evil spirits.

And in light of that, we're told, verse 18, many of those who are now believers came confessing and divulging their practices. They know that they cannot remain hidden. And a number of those who practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.

[16 : 44] They counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. These books are extremely expensive. They may have been passed down through families for generations, but in a day, nearly five million pounds worth of occult textbooks go up in flames in the town square, not because they have been told to do that, but because they want rid of them, because of Paul's gospel preaching.

Paul's preaching is confronting deep-rooted spiritual darkness and winning resounding victories. And finally, of course, when the rioting starts, it's started by artisans who fit out the pagan temple.

Not only, they say, because of the impact on their own personal finances, but because the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, at which the crowd begins chanting, great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

And it goes on later for about two hours. You think this church service is long. You try chanting, great is Artemis of the Ephesians for two hours.

That is how passionately they felt about the great goddess Artemis in their midst. And that battle is very much on the surface of Paul's letter.

[18 : 11] We're never allowed to forget in Ephesians that God's work in building his church is being carried out against the cosmic backdrop of spiritual warfare.

In 1 verse 21, Paul wants the church to trust in a Jesus who, listen, has been seated in heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion.

That is, who has all other spiritual powers firmly under his feet. In 2 verse 2, Paul reminds us that we once were following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

We were once part of a realm of spiritual darkness. And again, he says that God's purpose, his great purpose in preaching the gospel is, 3 verse 10, that through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Of course, the bit that we all know comes at the end in 6 verse 11. What does he tell the church to do? Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

[19 : 36] For we do not wrestle, he says, against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Do you see the soundtrack that's playing all through this letter as a soundtrack of explosives and gunfire? But here's the thing, we can't hear those sounds.

The church knew very well that they were immersed in spiritual warfare. They'd seen Paul in battle, but the situation in their church was causing them to forget what was really going on.

What they could see and hear in front of them was pushing what they couldn't see and hear out of the picture. But Paul wants to bring that unseen reality back into the foreground for them again.

Brothers and sisters, what we think the real problem is that we have will determine the kind of solutions that we reach for.

[20 : 45] When our perspective on the church shrinks, so does our spiritual life. How many churches have gone wrong or grown weak because people in the church thought that these other people in the church are the problem and they need to be put in their place?

Or that group in society is the problem and we need to fight against them. Or that plan is the problem and we need to push back against it. And the spiritual forces of evil have run riot while the church is busy fighting against flesh and blood.

flesh and blood. Friends, Paul wants us to see again that the battle we fight is a spiritual one and that on that battlefield Christ has already conquered and we are here together in his strength to resist what's left of the devil's schemes and through the life of our church to beam God's victory out to the cosmos.

the message that through his wisdom he has won. Because when our perspective on the church grows so does our spiritual life.

And he wants that thirdly for a mixed church of totally ordinary Christians. We've seen who the letter's from it's from Paul and the setting spiritual warfare but who is it to? Who's part of the church he's writing to?

[22 : 16] Well as Paul preached in different places different sorts of churches began some like in Philippi were made up mainly if not exclusively of Gentiles Romans and Greeks but hardly any Jews whereas some were mixed so Jews and Gentiles together and Ephesus is one of those we're told that the gospel spread until all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord both Jews and Greeks so that as the gospel goes out in power God was bringing Jews and Gentiles together into Christ and into his church and that again is a really important part of the grain of Ephesians in chapter 2 Paul says to the Gentile Christians that they were once far off but Christ came and preached peace to those who were far off that is Gentiles and peace to those who were near that is the Jews because part of Christ's work was to create in himself one new person one new man in place of the two so making peace so that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross thereby killing the hostility so that part of Paul's message is that we have peace with God and peace with each other through the death of

Christ that's actually part of the manifold or the multicolored wisdom of God in the church that in Christ God is creating something that the world cannot imitate where on earth do you find such a wildly mixed and diverse group of people men and women all ages and stages of life different languages places in the world cultures backgrounds personalities and interests between us our experience of life is so so varied and it's only Christ who holds us together because he's all we actually have in common unity in diversity is something that our world says that it wants isn't it but it cannot make it happen in fact the harder people have tried the more they've forced us apart 2025 our society is more divided than ever along the lines of identity isn't it race gender sexuality but in the church says Paul as Christians we share one new identity look around and see

God's wisdom in uniting different people together without erasing our differences differences in the church God has begun a completely new family a new humanity neither Jew nor Gentile but uniquely Christian where no one takes priority because of their background or where they come from but we are all one in Christ and friends as our church grows and Christ adds to our number by definition that's going to add to our difference because people are different and we praise God for that don't we his wisdom in creation in making people different but we can underestimate how that challenges our sinful nature because in our pride we assume that everyone will think and interact and behave like us but guess what God brings into his church people who don't think and behave and interact like us precisely because he wants to showcase his divine wisdom in making such different people into one new family as the letter goes on it becomes clear that the church was having difficulty in their life together and he has to remind them that there is only one body and one spirit be kind to one another tender hearted forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you he says these were ordinary people normal

Christians who were part of the same church and therefore needed to forgive and be forgiven and friends don't we have plenty to learn about being ordinary Christians in a mixed church church not to ask the question which comes naturally to us which is how can I make church as easy as it can be for me but rather the question Paul puts to us here how can I showcase the supernatural wisdom of God in the way that I relate to my brothers and sisters in the church how can I play my part so that the powers and principalities are left speechless and in awe of God's wisdom in building a new home for himself brothers and sisters we together are the temple of the living God gathered from across many divides to be built on the one foundation which is Jesus Christ and in this letter

Paul is going to teach us how we put that one glorious new identity on display together because finally Paul's extraordinary ministry carried out in overt spiritual warfare for a mixed church of totally ordinary Christians results in God's eternal purpose being realized we started with a question what if there was no church I hope by now you can see that that's a non starter the church has been God's plan for eternity and his purpose for the church is literally out of this world and there's a huge irony at the end of chapter 19 of Acts where the proconsul says to the rioters men of Ephesus who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky seeing that these things cannot be denied you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash see what he's saying this temple is not going anywhere don't worry about it calm down indeed it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world now the ruins of it are still there but the only people who go there today go not to worship

[29 : 15] Artemis but to take pictures of the rubble meanwhile the temple of the living God has grown to fill the entire earth because the gospel which Paul preached has continued to increase and prevail mightily because the church is God's eternal purpose being realized in history the church on earth is God's show home of the new creation the new humanity the church is the blueprint of God's plan for the fullness of time to unite all things in Christ things in heaven and on earth and brothers and sisters we have the immense privilege and joy of being part of it and my prayer for us together is that we as we go through this book and we learn as we go through it that above all that it will help us to take in this fact that there is nothing better on this earth nothing more precious nothing more valuable nothing more amazing than the church of

Jesus that there is no greater or higher calling or privilege in life than to belong to the church of Christ and I hope together it will help us to see why it's not enough just to send a preacher or start a service or do an outreach in a new place but why you must send a church because the church is not a means to an end it is the plan we're sending a unit into enemy territory we're building God a new home for him to live in God's plan is nothing less than his church multiplying and filling the earth with his glory and I pray that this letter will root us then in our identity and our purpose as a church friends if the life of our church is anything like what Paul writes about here and it is then sending people away will be difficult for us and it will take all of us those who go with the plant those who stay to serve and love and stretch across divisions to gather in build up reach out and send out and we need a great big vision of the church to encourage and equip us all to do that when it feels ever so weak weaker than it ever has fragile at breaking points and when it looks like nothing special so ordinary and everyday and we wonder if this really is God's big plan for the world we need to be able to say with full conviction yes it is that this is the wonderful everyday of God's new home and we are living in it to know that God's eternal purpose is being realized through the gospel witness of a mixed up church of ordinary

Christians in the northeast of Scotland because we are God's new home being built on the foundation who is Jesus Christ so let's pray for that together let's pray gracious father we are beyond words in awe of ye that your eternal purpose would be to bring us into Christ heavenly father we thank you so much for him who is our cornerstone him who gave his life to purchase us for a kingdom that cannot end we thank you for him who is raised and seated above all power and authority we thank you that it is him who builds his church and we thank you so much that we can belong to it because of your grace father we pray as we begin this study in this new letter in Ephesians

Lord that you would open the eyes of our hearts to see what is the power that is at work in us the power that raised Christ even from the dead and to see the glory of your inheritance in your people that we would love your church and that we would love the world that is outside of the church so much Lord that we would want all people to see our witness to know Christ and to be part of his family Lord teach us we pray increase our love and give us solid foundations for our work we pray in Jesus name Amen Amen we're going to