

Does Church really matter?

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning and we're having a day in Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 3. Paul is preaching to us this morning and Terry will be taking up the second part of the chapter in the evening.

We're going to read the whole of chapter 3 now this morning. That's Ephesians 3. If you have one of our church visitors Bibles, it's page 977 and we're reading at Ephesians 3 and verse 1.

And it's one of those sections where Paul begins to say something and then goes off at a bit of a diversion to say something else before coming back at the end.

You'll see it begins with the words for this reason and then he comes back to the same words at verse 14, picking up what he was going to say after this great parenthesis. But a very important parenthesis it is that we'll be looking at this morning.

So Ephesians 3 at verse 1. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I've written briefly.

[1 : 17] When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power.

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 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 has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

[2 : 41] So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I buy my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Good morning.

Please do turn back to Ephesians chapter 3. Please do have that open as we spend a few moments now thinking about the first half of chapter 3 there. And as Willie said earlier, Terry will pick up the second half of chapter 3 this evening.

Church. Going to church, being a member of a church, coming to this particular church. I wonder what sorts of thoughts, ideas, feelings filter into your mind as I uttered those words about church.

[4 : 46] I guess if we're quite honest, a number of us might confess to feeling slightly lethargic when it comes to church. Just something to go to, something to endure, to get through.

Maybe we think church is a bit boring. Something to be attended when it suits us. Perhaps after a big Sunday lunch, as you think about heading to the evening church service, the couch beckons to you.

Come for a nap and you give in. Church quite often just feels very ordinary, doesn't it? Unexciting. For most of us, most of the time.

But Ephesians chapter 3 blows that way of thinking out of the water. Paul gives us here the true perspective on the church. And really, it could not be a bigger vision that he gives us here.

The church is God's showpiece. It's his glittering trophy that shows to all the world, to the entire universe, his great plan to bring everything together again one day in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 04] The ordinary church, just by existing, is front and center of God's plan for all of history.

The church is God's glittering trophy that shows to everyone what he is doing. I've got two key points this morning.

But before we delve into those, I want to first address this mystery that Paul mentions several times in our section. It crops up four times.

Take a look again at verse 3. How the mystery was made known to me. Verse 4. My insight into the mystery of Christ.

Verse 6. This mystery. And then again in verse 9. The plan of the mystery, hidden for ages in God. Mystery.

[7 : 06] Now, we need to be careful here that we don't just import our meaning of the word mystery into the text. We need to ask, what does Paul mean when he uses the word?

And he doesn't mean something that is difficult or impossible to explain. Not at all. The first time he uses the word mystery is back in chapter 1, verse 9.

Just take a look. There, he's talking about God's great plan. His all-inclusive purpose. Which has as an ultimate goal the uniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ.

That's the mystery. That's the plan. And here in chapter 3, he's speaking in a more focused way about the mystery. He's speaking about the uniting of things here on earth.

Paul states exactly what he means there in verse 6. Look down at me at verse 6 there. This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs. Members of the same body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

[8 : 16] Here in verse 6 is the heart of the mystery. Jewish believers and Gentile believers together are fellow heirs.

Together under Christ. This is what Paul has just spent all of chapter 2 looking at. This is what we heard about last Sunday evening. Jew.

Gentile. United with Christ. And united together in Christ through the gospel. Far from being mysterious.

This is an open secret. It's plain. It has now been revealed. And the truth is that God's eternal plan is already being fulfilled and exemplified in the church.

Right now. That's the mystery. It's an open secret. So two points then. First is Paul's proclamation of God's plan.

[9 : 21] And then second. The church's proclamation. The church's display of God's plan to all the worlds. Indeed to the heavenly places. So first.

Paul's proclamation of God's plan. Paul spends a lot of time and space on himself in these verses. And specifically he speaks about his ministry of the mystery.

We see what has been revealed to Paul. And how he in turn. Has made that known to the Gentiles. In fact to the entire world.

The mystery. That Jew and Gentile are now brought together in Christ. Through the gospel. Is a new revelation. It's been given to Paul. And it's to be proclaimed to the whole world.

Again and again. Paul emphasizes the fact that this message about the mystery. Has been given to him. It's not something he's cooked up.

[10 : 25] It's not something he's imagined or made up himself. It's not something he's gone searching for. No. It was given to him. And it was given in spectacular fashion.

Think back to Paul's conversion. Literally. Floored on the way to Damascus. The risen Lord Jesus. Appeared to him. Later.

It was revealed by the Lord. That Paul was to carry his name. Before the Gentiles. And kings and children of Israel. This was a message that had been given to Paul.

Look again down at verse 2. Given to me. For you. Verse 3. The mystery was made known to me by revelation.

Verse 5. The mystery. Has now been revealed. To his holy apostles. And verse 7. Of this gospel. I was made a minister.

[11:25] According. To the gift of God's grace. Which was given to me. Paul repeatedly mentions the fact. That this gospel. Was given to him. And he mentions it.

In order to reassure his readers. Paul's message was a radical message. It's huge. The Gentiles are now included in God's plan.

The Gentiles he was writing to there in Ephesus. Were once far off. Aliens to the Commonwealth of Israel. But now they've been included. They are part of Christ's body.

The church. They've left behind the cults and religions of Ephesus. Imagine the pressure put on them. From friends. Family. To return.

To come back. To those false religions. They needed to know. Didn't they? That what Paul had told them. This gospel. Was a reliable.

[12:25] And true message. And Paul gives them grounds of confidence here. It's not his message. He's been given it. I remember on a number of occasions.

Back in my school days. I had to go to other classes. With a message. For another pupil. I would go. And deliver the message. Now. If I just made up that message.

If I just. Concocted some plan in my mind. The other pupil. Wouldn't need to do anything at all about it. Would they? I was there on my own authority. If I did that. But the messages weren't.

Something I made up. They've been given to me. By my teacher. They came with authority.

Because. I've been given the message. And I've been sent.

By the teacher. To go to the other people. So it is with Paul. He has authority. Because his message. Has been given by the Lord himself.

[13:23] And he's been sent. To the Gentiles. This is God's gospel. And therefore. It's something to be trusted. And that gives. His readers. It gives us.

Great confidence. Doesn't it? I'm sure. If you're honest with yourself. That there are many times. When your confidence. In the gospel.

Is shaken. Those Ephesian Christians. Must have felt shaken. On a weekly basis. The big. Impressive temple of Artemis. Filled capacity.

Week by week. And there they were. This band of Christians. Hostility from those. Still. Committed to the false religions.

Of the day. The pressure to conform. You feel it too. Don't you? The common consensus. Pushed by the media. About. Sexual ethics.

[14:18] About. The source of the universe. About all sorts of things. The question rings. In the back of your mind. Is this gospel. Really true?

Yes. Is Paul's message. To the Ephesians. And to you. It's solid. It's reliable. Not because your favorite preacher.

Is witty and intelligent. Not because. Your church is perfect. The gospel is solid. And reliable.

Because of the source.

Of the message. And it's given by God himself. The gospel is not a man. A man made phenomena. It's given. By God.

That was Paul's message. And it's ours. And it was Paul's message. To be proclaimed. To the Gentiles. And the whole world. That was his mission. Look again at verse 8.

[15:17] Where Paul sets out clearly. His purpose. His mission. In life. To me. Though I am. The very least of all the saints.

This grace. Was given. To preach 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. What a privilege it was. For Paul. To be the one. Who brought that wonderful news. Of grace.

And inclusion. To the Gentiles. Remember how we saw the Gentiles. Described last Sunday evening. Chapter 2. Verse 12. They were separated from Christ.

Alienated from the Commonwealth of Israel. Strangers to the covenant. Gentiles were without hope. Lost. But the great truth.

[16:13] That Paul had. The privilege to proclaim. Was this. The Gentiles could now be included. Fellow heirs. With the true Israel. Members of the same body.

Partakers. Of the promise. In Christ. It was a gospel. That Paul. Would suffer for. The start of our section.

Speaks of him being a prisoner. He's in chains. But such. Is the wonder. And glory. Of the gospel message. Such is the scale of it.

That he's able to press on. Despite the difficult circumstances. And he wants his Ephesian readers. Not to be concerned. Look at the end of our section. Verse 13. So I ask you not to lose heart.

Over what I'm suffering for you. Which is. Your glory. This is a great gospel. And this is the gospel. That you and I. Hold out. To our city of Glasgow.

[17:11] This is the gospel. We hold out. To our neighbors. To the guy. That sits across the desk. From you at work. To your dear. Family member. Who's resisted.

For years. It is a wonderful message. And if you're a Christian here. You know that. Think of Paul's description. Of life before and after.

Knowing Christ. It couldn't be more stark. Once dead in sin. Now alive. With Christ. No longer strangers and aliens. But fellow citizens.

With the saints. And members of the household of God. Paul's gospel. Is a glorious gospel. And it's not one to be ashamed of.

And Paul. Is not a man to be ashamed of either. You might hear folks. Seeking to malign him. To write him off. As being a bit hardline. A bit extreme. But Ephesians chapter 3.

[18:10] Dismisses any such criticism of Paul. Paul's gospel. Is given to him. And it's to be proclaimed. To the Gentiles. To the whole world.

And what is staggering. Is the purpose. Of Paul's. Proclamation. And this is our second point. Paul's proclamation.

Of that gospel. Equips. The church. To display. To proclaim. God's plan. To the heavenly rulers. And authorities.

Just look again. At verses 8 to 10. And particularly verse 10. Which really is an astonishing verse. It speaks. Of what the church is about. And it's something. That we don't tend to think of.

Let me read from verse 8. 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.

[19:12] 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. Through the church.

The manifold wisdom of God. Might now be made known. To the rulers. And authorities. In the heavenly places. The church.

Proclaims. To the heavenly. Rulers and authorities. The wonderful plans of God. What's all this. About rulers.

And authorities. In the heavenly places. Sounds a bit odd. Doesn't it? But this mention of rulers. And authorities. Ought to ring. A few Ephesian bells.

For us. Flick over the page. Chapter 6. Verses 11 to 12. Paul says this.

[20:12] Put on. The whole armor of God. That you may be with. May be able to stand against. The schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle 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. We see here. What Paul is talking about. When he mentions the rulers. And authorities. In the heavenly places.

It's the unseen. Spiritual realm. It's the cosmic powers. It's Satan. Himself. Paul.

Is equipping his readers. For spiritual battle. In this letter. And here. Back in chapter 3. Verse 10. He speaks to the church. As it were.

[21:07] On the stage. He throws back the curtain. And we catch a glimpse. Of the unseen reality. The unseen realm. The church.

There on the stage. Proclaims to the rest of the theater. God's eternal plan. The church. Displays. For everyone to see.

What God is doing. And it's a plan. That speaks. Bad news. For the devil. And it gives great. Confidence. And comfort. To his readers. And to us. Those. First readers. Those Ephesians. They were.

They were a group of people. Who would have been. All too aware. Of the powers. And authorities. They lived in a city. That was steeped. In. The powers. Of dark arts.

[22 : 01] Of dark magic. Everywhere they looked. They would have seen. Evidence. Of the heavenly powers. At work. They needed to hear. Didn't they?

That what they were. A very ordinary. Looking church. Spoke. To those powers. Those authorities. About Christ. And his certain victory.

The mundane. Looking church. Far from being ordinary. Is extraordinary. The church. To them. Probably seemed. Very unimpressive looking. But in fact. The church. Was God's. Megaphone. Directed. At the heavenly powers.

Declaring. What he was ultimately. Going to do in the end. You see. The church. Speaks of God's. Uniting things together. Here on earth. Two groups of people.

[22 : 59] That were once. Separated. Are now. Brought together. Through the gospel. They are the church. And this. Uniting together. Of things on earth.

Speaks of what God. Is ultimately. Going to do in the end. It's where history. Is going. And that's the plan. That Paul tells us. Of in chapter 1. Verse 9 and 10. It's the plan.

To unite. All things. In Christ. Things in heaven. Things on earth. This is the great. Reversal. Of the great.

Divide. That happened at the fall. This is a plan. That spells. Curtains for Satan. Because this. Plan. Speaks of Christ's. Ultimate victory. His bringing together.

Things that are now. Divided. He's bringing them together. Again. And this is a plan. That is proclaimed. By the very existence. Of the church.

[23 : 57] Just by existing. We proclaim these things. To the heavenly powers. And authorities. The church. Is therefore. Of huge significance. For the church.

That carries on. In Paul's pattern. Of gospel proclamation. That declaration. Of God's eternal plan. That sort of church. Is going to be ruffling.

Serious feathers. In the heavenly places. Satan. And his minions. Will not like it. One bit. Why? Because. That church. Will be demonstrating. And proclaiming. His demise. His end. And Satan. Will seek. To attack. That sort of church. So let's not. Be surprised. If we. As a church.

[24 : 52] Face. Tough circumstances. When we. Do the work. Of gospel proclamation. Our new building. Is about to open. A building. That speaks.

Unashamedly. Of our gospel witness. In this city. That provides. A new home. For Corn Hill. Which seeks. To send out. Year after year. Gospel workers. Satan.

Will disrupt it. If he can. So be aware. But do not fear. Remember. The great truth. That the church. Proclaims. It proclaims. Christ's victory. The evil powers. And authorities. Will lose. In the end.

That's been guaranteed. Christ's death.

On the cross. Achieved it. But if. After a few months. When the excitement. About the new building. Fades. And we find ourselves.

[25 : 47] Falling into the old patterns. Of how we think. About church. We need to remind. Ourselves. That. The ordinary. Looking. Church. Is. Extraordinary.

The ordinary. Work. Of equipping. Christians. For the work. Of ministry. For building up. The body. Of Christ. That is extraordinary. Because of what. That proclaims. To the world.

And to the heavenly. Places. For the temptation. To skip. One. Or both services. On Sunday. Will pull hard. The thought.

That my small group. Won't really miss. My absence. Will crop into our thinking again. Let's think in line. With Paul's teaching. About the church. The church.

What we do. Week by week. In release the word. In small groups. In ladies bible study. In ladies fellowship. In mainly music. In farce at four.

[26 : 42] In tron at two. Speaking to each other over coffee. Sharing tears. Over hardship. Joy over good news. All that.

Proclaims to the devil. To the whole cosmos. To the world. The wonderful plan of God. To bring everything together. One day.

In Christ Jesus. Everything that was destroyed. And broken at the fall. He's bringing together again. That is what the church does. The church is God's trophy.

His showpiece. And it proclaims these things. To everyone. Including the heavenly authorities. Some implications then.

That flow from this. In terms of. How we think about church. And how we contribute. To the unity of the church. So some implications. About how we think about church.

[27 : 44] Paul's vision. Of what the church is about. Could hardly be bigger. Could it? Couldn't be more. More explosive. More significant. The church. Is God's prototype.

Of what is going to happen. In the end. It's the foretaste. Of his great plan. To unite everything. In Jesus Christ. As those. Who are part. Of the church.

We are caught up. In the eternal purposes. Of God. Right here and now. The church. Isn't some side interest. Of God's. It is front.

And center. Of his plans. For all of history. Now. I wonder. If that's how you think. About church. Paul gives us. The cosmic perspective.

On what the church. Is all about. And it's mind blowing. Isn't it? We can barely. Take it in. The church. The church. Is right there. At the front. And center. Of his plans. For all of history.

[28 : 40] The church. Is where history. Is headed. The church. Is not. Some sort of. Quaint hangover. From the past. But rather.

It is a picture. Of the future. The church. Is going somewhere. The church. Is worth. Investing in. Nothing. Is of more. Lasting. Significance.

And value. Than Christ's. Own body. The church. As we look around. We probably think. The church. Looks.

Very unimpressive. Indeed. Indeed. But that is why. Paul writes. What he writes. He wants us. To see. The church. What it really is.

So allow. Your thinking. To be shaped. By Ephesians. Chapter 3. When it comes. To thinking. About church. And then. Implications.

[29 : 34] About. Our contribution. To the unity. Of the church. As we've seen. The church. Is a bringing. Together. Of people. Who are once. Separated. Once. Aliens.

From Christ. Being brought. Together. And church. Is a bringing. Together. Of all sorts. Of people. From all sorts. Of backgrounds. And that is.

To be celebrated. And encouraged. Let's give thanks. That we have people. From America. Australia. India. Iran. Singapore. Malaysia. China. Here this morning.

People from. All over the world. Here in this. Small church. In Glasgow. Even people. People from England. Let us. Then. Make every effort.

To treat. Each other. In the way. That speaks. Of the reality. Of what we really are. No matter. Where we're from. We are united. In Christ.

[30 : 29] We are brothers. And sisters. You express. That by. Speaking. To one another. Getting to know. Each other. Sticking around.

After the services. To speak to people. Speak to people. Who don't share. Your mother tongue. Speak to people. You've got nothing. In common with. We are all brothers. And sisters.

And that's where we're going. When Christ returns. We'll see people. From every tongue. Tribe and nation. Gathering together. Together. And what we have here. And now.

Is a foretaste. Of that. And this sort of thing. This being. Brothers and sisters. Together in Christ. Being the church. That sort of thing.

Preaches. To the devil. And all his minions. It preaches. About God's. Eternal plan. So let's be people. That care. For one another.

[31 : 24] That build. One another up. In the church. Church. Paul applies this for us. In the second half. Of his letter. This truth. About unity. He urges them.

And us. In chapter four. To walk. In a manner. Worthy of the calling. To which you have been called. With all humility. And gentleness. With patience. Bearing with one another. In love.

Eager to maintain. The unity of the spirit. In the bond of peace. That's Paul's. Headline application. In the second half. Of the letter. Be united.

Bear with one another. Walk in a way. Worthy of your calling. Be who you are. And then a bit later. A bit later. In the letter. He says this.

Therefore. Having putting away. Falsehood. Let each one of you. Speak the truth. With his neighbor. For we are members. Of one another. Be angry.

[32 : 22] And do not sin. Do not let the devil. Do not let the sun go down. In your anger. And give no opportunity. To the devil. You see.

Left unchecked. Full speech. Will breed disunity. Left to fester. Anger. Gives the devil.

That foothold. He is desperate for. In a congregation. So let us. As a congregation. Continually. Strive for unity. Unity. Unity.

Unity. In the wonderful. Glorious. Gospel of Christ. Unity. Unity. Unity. As a church. That is where the future is going. And it speaks. To the devil. Of his ultimate destruction.

It speaks. To our world. Beautifully. Of what God is doing. He is. Bringing together. One day. Everything that was divided. The church.

[33 : 17] Is God's trophy. To the world. That displays. His glorious plan. So if you are tempted. To think. And behave.

As if the church. Is very ordinary. Don't buy it. For a second. Listen. To Paul. Hold to his gospel. Humbly hold out.

The good news. To those around us. Understand. That the church. Is where the future. Is headed. Invest. In it. Strive.

To build it up. Contribute. To the unity. Of the church. We can do this. Enabled. Only. Only. By his. Power. At work. Within us. And that's what the second half. Of chapter three. Is about. We need his help.

[34 : 12] So let us pray. For his help now. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Heavenly Father.

We. Thank you so much. For your word. And for the vision. Of your church. These verses. Have set out. For us. Thank you. That.

The church. Is a uniting together. Of people. Who once. Were far off. Strangers. Dead. In sin. But in Christ. Those who trust in you.

Are brought to life. Are included in Christ's body. The church. The church proclaims. To the whole cosmos. Your great. And eternal plans.

So we ask. For your help. Father. To understand these things. Strengthen us. With power. Through your spirit. Enable us. To understand. The hugeness. Of Christ's love.

[35 : 10] For his church. So that we might follow. Paul's example. Proclaim his gospel. And stand united. In our triumphant.

Ever reigning king. Jesus Christ. Amen.