

In Christ

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[0 : 00] Well folks, wherever you are today, whether you're here in the building or whether you're watching at home, let me encourage you to grab a Bible, or grab your Bible rather, and come with me to Ephesians chapter 1. So as I mentioned at the outset, we're beginning this new series this morning, studying this letter together.

And it's so timely, I think, as we plan these preaching schedules months, months in advance. We've got no idea what's going to happen. Certainly didn't see this coming. But what a timely reminder for us to think about what it means to be church.

Okay, what it means to be church. So as you're turning to Ephesians chapter 1, let me tell you what I learned really early on about my father-in-law. Right? Risky to put out online, but here's what I learned about him.

I learned that he was a massive, he is rather, he's a massive Doctor Who fan. Okay? And you can imagine his disappointment when he learns really early on from me that what I know about Doctor Who, I could write on the back of a postage stamp.

Okay? But since we're there, let me tell you, let me give you my postage stamp. Okay? Let me give you the one thing that I do know about Doctor Who. I know that there is this thing in Doctor Who called the TARDIS.

[1 : 02] Okay? You know that, the time travel machine that the doctor goes in and he travels somewhere. Okay? The only reason I know about it is because we used to live in this area of Edinburgh called the Newtown. And we just used to live around the corner from one of these old abandoned tatty looking police boxes.

And everybody who came to stay when we went on a walk made the same joke that never really got old. Okay? So they used to talk about the TARDIS. So I know what the TARDIS is. And here's the truth about the TARDIS.

If you looked at it from the outside, you would conclude that there is nothing to see there. Right? Nothing. Let's just move on with nothing to see when you look at it from the outside.

But see, if you step inside the thing, you realize that there's everything going on inside. Right? Everything going on inside. So here we are then at this letter to the Ephesians.

Written almost 2,000 years ago. Translated for us into English. Recorded for us in our Bibles. And it's all about what it means to be a Christian. And then it's all about what it means to collectively be the church.

[2 : 07] Right? And maybe you're watching this. I don't know today. Wherever you are. What you think about this Christianity thing. Maybe you're watching this thinking. Are you here? And you're thinking, actually, this thing called the church. You kidding me? A big deal?

You kidding me? I mean, sure, I enjoy a little bit of songs of praise on a Sunday night. Right? Occasionally. Better when it was Diane Louise Jordan. But I go with it. You know, I love it when they sing Jerusalem. I love songs of praise.

I even loved the Vicar of Dibley back in the day. But are you kidding me? That group of folks that meet in the dusty old church hall down the road. Are you kidding me? Not a chance I'd go there. Right?

And you're thinking to yourself. What is this thing called the church all about? Right? Looks nothing from the outside. But this invitation today in this book of Ephesians, this whole letter, is an invitation to step inside the TARDIS.

And see just how huge a deal the church is. Right? And here's, let me give you a little spiel. This is what I mean by that. Okay?

[3 : 05] So these Christians that this letter is written to are no doubt thinking that they are nothing special. Right? Two main reasons, I think. Firstly, because of the city of Ephesus.

Right? Where they live is dominated by this goddess called Artemis. Okay? She is one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And here's what you would see every day if you're living your life in this city.

You would see a huge temple dedicated to her. You would hear loud singing directed at her. And you would see people selling shrines of her.

And add to that, what happened when the Apostle Paul and the Gospel Roadshow kind of first came to Ephesus that we can read about in Acts chapter 19. What happened there as the Gospel goes forth is Jesus Christ is proclaimed.

There is a massive movement of God. Right? You can check it out in your own time. There are healings. There are signs and wonders. As God verifies Paul, puts his stamp of approval on him and his message in the eyes of the watching world.

[4 : 08] But now you're probably looking at five or ten, something in between there. Years after that episode in Acts 19. And not only is that sort of stuff most likely dried up completely.

But Paul finds himself in prison. Right? It's never a good look, is it, when your founder's in the clink. Okay? He's in prison. And people probably say, see, told you. Told you.

Just let the circus roll into town, rolled out, and the guy's in prison. Game's over for Christianity. So there you are. This unimpressive looking church.

Full of unspectacular people living your life in the big bag city of Ephesus. Ephesus. Right? Thinking to yourself. And I wonder if you've ever asked this question in your head. Right?

As you follow Jesus. Have I backed the wrong horse? Right? Have I made the wrong decision? You know, I had something of this feeling last summer. You know, we went down to a family wedding down in London.

[5 : 06] Right? So we're walking about London in the days after it. And I went to meet a friend for lunch right in the city centre. And I remember walking. All of a sudden, turning the corner and vumpf, there's the shard.

Right? You've been to the shard? It's enormous. I just couldn't get over how big the thing is. And it screams at you. It's almost like everyone passing by. Your eyes are drawn there.

And this thing is screaming at you. Here is power. Right? This is where business is done. This is where deals are made. This is where money is made. Right here is the shard. So I'm thinking, wow, that seems impressive.

There's part of you that almost wants to bow down and worship the thing. I mean, it's massive. And then a few weeks later, fast forward, I find myself back in church, back in my room. In the office. Right? And I'm having a showdown with a mouse.

The thing's looking at me as if to say, oh, we had a big party when you were away. Right? Just looking at a mouse. In that moment, it occurs to me. See if you're having a straight shootout between the church and the world in terms of what looks impressive.

[6 : 06] Between Christianity and what the world has to offer. Friends, there's only one winner there. There's only one winner there. But we're not in the game of trying to out-cool the world. Right?

Here it is. The letter to the Ephesians. And this is all about how the God of the universe has made his wisdom and his power known to the watching world.

And do you know what it is? To be found precisely in that which looks unimpressive. So let me invite you then to come with me to the first 14 verses of chapter 1. And let's step inside the spiritual TARDIS.

Okay? If you've got it there. Here's what Paul writes. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

[7 : 20] In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will. To the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure.

Which he purposed in Christ. To be put into effect when the times reached their fulfillment. To bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. In him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

In order that we who were the first to put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth.

The gospel of your salvation. When you believed you were marked in him with a seal. The promised holy spirit. Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.

[8 : 33] Until the redemption of those who are God's possession. To the praise of his glory. Amen. And this is God's holy and inspired word. God's holy and God's holy and God's holy. Some very deep things going on in there.

Right. But let me give you a really simple structure. You're into football formations. Right. Which I kind of am. Right. Let me give you the formation of the sermon here. Here's the digits. Okay. One.

Two. One. Remember that? One. Two. One. Right. One phrase we need to see. Two truths that we need to grasp. And then one response that we need to make.

Got it? One. Two. One. Let's go for it. Okay. So here's the one phrase that we need to see. And it's Paul's favorite way of helping a Christian understand who they are. And you've noticed the repetition, I'm sure, as you looked at it there.

And it occurs nine times in this opening section. And here's the phrase. It's in Christ. Right. You see it? In Christ. Or in him. It's the same thing. In Christ.

[9 : 33] In him. You know, on my phone I've got this app called Find My Friends. Right. I don't know if you've got it on your phone. Find My Friends. I say friends. I've got one friend. Right. My wife Alex.

Just really helpful to know where she is when you're putting on a dinner or something like that. Here's what happens. I click on her name. And up comes this little blue dot. Like blue dot. And it's my, it's the app's way of saying this is where she is.

Right. This is where you'll find her. This is her location. And this is all about where the Christian is located. This phrase. Right. What Paul's saying here is that the life of the Christian believer.

Okay. You might be physically in Ephesus. You might be physically in Edinburgh. But spiritually where every single one of us who believes in Jesus is located. Is in Christ.

Okay. In Christ. Our lives are hidden in him. Our lives are bound to him. And our lives are caught up with him. It's what we were singing. If you think about it in that opening song.

[10 : 34] I am his and he is mine. Okay. Meaning that everything he has achieved is now ours. And what we've hit here. And we've only got so much time to deal with this here.

Is this wonderful doctrine of our union with Jesus Christ. Right. Our union with Jesus Christ. And you know when you think about it. You read in the gospels.

You read in John 15. Jesus trying to explain to his disciples their relationship with him. And how does he describe it? He talks about how he is the vine. And they are the branches. Isn't that a wonderful metaphor?

You know we discovered. In the last kind of three months during lockdown. That our house. Our garden. Has an apple tree. Right. Never discovered this before. Never put it in the fine print. But discovered it's got an apple tree.

And trying to explain to our girls. How did those apples come? Well. It's because the branches are connected to the vine of the tree. And the sap just runs right through it. And there's life in the tree. Connected.

[11 : 31] Do you see it? Our lives. We're in Edinburgh. But our lives. Spiritually speaking. Are in Jesus Christ. And so flowing from that one phrase that we need to see.

Here are the two truths that we need to grasp. Okay. Firstly. That we've been given a better identity. Okay. You know a few weeks ago I found myself browsing.

In the charity shops and morning sites. Right. I love a charity shop. Going around this charity shop. And do you know what I found right at the back? It was guess who. Okay. Loved that game when I was young.

And I thought I'll buy that. And I'll teach it to the girls. Okay. Our two little girls. And we've loved it playing this game. You know what it's like if you've played it before. They're asking their questions. Does your person have any hair?

Right. No. Okay. Is your person old? Yes. Okay. You're old and you're bald. That's the Scottish version. But eventually what is it?

[12 : 28] You get down to one person don't you? You get down to one person. And you scream at it. You're Kyle. Right. You're Anita. You're Hans. This is who you are. You know let me ask you. If you were the last person.

On guess who. This was your card. What would be the things that identify you? Right. What is true of you? Right. I'm an accountant. I'm a doctor.

Right. I'm married. I'm single. I'm a student. I'm African. I'm European. All these different things in our lives that can identify us. Right. But if you're a Christian.

Here is what's true of you. Okay. Spiritually speaking. Verse 4 and 5. And there's three of these that come up in this section. Here's the first one that's true. You are chosen by God the Father.

Okay. Do you see it? Because of his great love for you. Now stop and think about that. His great love for us. This is what's driving all of this. His great love for us.

[13 : 23] That God put his hand on our lives. And determined that at a certain point in time. Which was verse 13. When we heard and responded with belief in the gospel message.

We would be his. And when did God make that choice? Did he make it when you and I first picked up our Bibles? Did he make it when you and I clocked up enough time doing good deeds?

Did it come when you and I spent enough time in the pews in church? No. When did God love us? He loved us. And get this. Before the foundation of the world.

Before or the creation. Some of your translations might say. Before the creation of the world. Get that. Is that not mind blowing? And you think to yourself.

But I don't. Understand exactly how that works. And friends I take it. There is a wonderfully. Profound mystery to how this works. I know it's so important.

[14 : 23] That we don't take our limited. Ability to comprehend the mind of God. And superimpose that in the text. And say how does this fit with my understanding of how life works? But actually we do it the other way around.

That we come to the text with humility. And we allow it to inform and reform our minds. Now think of these two interplays. How do these work?

How does the sovereignty of God. And human responsibility. How do these work? I think of Charles Spurgeon who was once asked by somebody. How do these two things work? How do you reconcile these truths?

And Charles Spurgeon simply replied. Dear friend I've got no need to reconcile friends. I believe it because it's true.

And here's the thing. These Ephesian believers. He doesn't write this. So that they can go off and have a theological discussion. As to how this works. He writes this for their assurance. That this God has loved them.

[15 : 20] Will never stop loving them. And that Christ has them. It's for their assurance that he writes this. I think this song we sometimes sing here. Stuart Townend. Loved before the dawn of time.

Chosen by my maker. Hidden in my saviour. I am his. And he is mine. Cherished for eternity. We've been adopted. Do you notice as sons? Okay verse 5.

It's not a sexist comment. It's just true in this day. That the sons are the ones who inherited everything from their father. That's his point. We've been chosen by God the father. Verse 7. We've been redeemed by God the son.

So he flips the language here. Now it's the slave market. God the son sought us out. And bought us for himself. Bought us for himself. Do you see it? Redeemed from sin who was our master.

Sin has no hold on us. Now. What was the price? His precious blood. On the cross. Such a big theme as you go through this letter. What did he say? He said my life for his.

[16 : 17] He's mine. She's mine. And forgiveness is what we know. From our sins. She would have been redeemed by God the son.

In verse 13. We've been sealed by God the spirit. Okay. God put his mark on us. As the spirit indwells us. It's what your parents used to do at school. Right. I remember we did this recently.

Our little girl started primary school. Somebody gave us this little tip. Right. Put her name on everything that you find. Everything that's hers. Get the name on it. Okay. So jumpers. Lunchbox. School shoes.

Get her name on the inside of it. Right. Mark it as hers. Because you want to identify her stuff from all the rest that look like it. And that's what God has done here. He's stamped.

Obviously like his name on us. We're his. The seal of the spirit. The very presence of God living in us. Who is the guarantee. And I know there's a lot of big concepts we're rattling through here.

[17 : 15] But stick with me. The guarantee. Verse 14. Of our heavenly inheritance. In other words. God is going to do the job. You know. With the experience recently. We went to buy a car. Put down a deposit for it.

Okay. But it wasn't ours yet. It was only ours. When we went to the garage. Paid the rest of the deposit. And all of a sudden. I'm not looking at the car on the website. I'm driving the car for myself. That's what God has done.

The spirit is ours. And it's God's way of saying. I will finish the job. I will get you home. It's the presence of the spirit in our lives.

He guarantees our inheritance. Folks. Bring those three together. Chosen by God the Father. This is your identity. If you're a believer this morning in Jesus. Chosen by God the Father. Redeemed by God the Son.

And sealed with God the Spirit. And do you see how the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Do you see how God could not be more committed to you and I? Do you see it? Praise. Praise the Father.

[18 : 10] Praise the Son. Praise the Spirit. Three in one. Oh, praise Him. This is Paul's point. God is committed to you. I've been given a better identity.

Secondly, we have. We are now part of, rather, a bigger story. Okay. What is it? That Robert Burns phrase that we all use. You know, the best made plans of mice and men.

It's what we always say, isn't it? The best made plans. And boy, are we living that just now. In this season of life, it doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter if you're a plumber. It doesn't matter if you're a politician. Right?

Your plans are all over the place. You feel like that little niche illustration here. But that little character in Mario Kart. You're driving along going full clappers. And all of a sudden, you've hit the banana skin. And you're spinning off.

That's what it feels like, doesn't it? But here's what Paul wants these Christians to see when it comes to plans. Okay? God's got a plan. God's got a plan. Do you see it? Verse 10. A plan that all of history is moving towards.

[19 : 12] And it's a plan to one day unite all things in heaven and on earth in Jesus Christ. In other words, God has eternally been working towards gathering for himself a people who will praise his name, who will enjoy and worship him in a renewed creation.

Okay? As Vaughan Roberts, who's a wonderful Anglican minister down south, puts it, this is God's people living in God's place, living under God's rule and enjoying God's blessing.

This is where the story is going. And how is God bringing that about in Christ? We're back to that phrase again. Right? Through his life, through his death on the cross, through his resurrection.

God is accomplishing this grand purpose to what to the world look like foolishness. Right? And as Jesus has proclaimed and as people come to trust Jesus for himself.

Now, here's what I want us to know. It may look like, friends, you and I's plans are all over the place at the minute. But what we've got to understand is that God's plan is bang on track.

[20 : 22] And that's the plan that you and I are now caught up in. Right? We're part of this bigger story. Let me just give you two quick examples of this. Right? And then we're almost done. Right?

I heard a story this week about a pastor in Tehran. Right? In Asia. He didn't know what to do when the virus hit. Right? I didn't have a clue what to do when the virus hit as a pastor. But what he did is he started scrolling through his phone.

Right? Looking for people in his congregation. He started ringing people. Right? Can I pray with you? How can I help you? Anyway, after a while of doing that, he gets in touch with a friend of a friend. Who's in, I think he was in almost an intensive care in a hospital.

So, pastor goes to go with him. Goes to see him. Prays with him. Tells him about Jesus. And leaves. A couple of days later, this guy makes a full recovery. Right? He's healed.

Gives his life to Jesus. Gets up out of the bed. Starts telling everyone else in the world about Jesus. They become Christians too. God is at work, friends.

[21 : 21] We don't understand it. Our plans are all over the place. His plan is bang on track. You know, second illustration. When I lived in Aberdeen. Okay? Right at the bottom of our street was a church called King's Church.

Maybe 150 people or so. Right? Nothing really spectacular when you look to them. Lovely people. All of a sudden, 12 years after I've left. Heard this week in the news. You might have seen it on the BBC News website this week.

That church has mushroomed. Right? I think they're well over a thousand people now. And while the economy up there is dipping, they are increasing in their resources.

What people are giving. Okay? And what they bought this week, because they outgrew their premises, they bought the exhibition centre up there. Right? Which, when I was there, was the biggest event centre up there.

Right? Concerts. Big names were there. How incredible is that, that in God's purposes, there's a church now there. Worshipping Jesus. Friends, our plans might be all over the place.

[22 : 19] But God's plan is bang on track. It's bang on track. This is what he's doing. And this is the story that by sheer grace, friends, that we are now part of.

We've got a better identity. And we're part of a bigger story. And in light of all that, finally, really quickly, there's one response that we need to make. Okay?

Verse 3. How does he open this? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Right? This gloriously good God. This is what he's done. This gloriously good God.

And it's one of praise to see this reaction. Right? Verse 3. To the praise of his glorious grace. Sorry. Verse 6. To the praise of his glorious grace. Verse 12. That our lives might be for the praise of his glory.

Verse 14. To the praise of his glory. Almost like one for the Father, one for the Son, one for the Spirit. Praise. Praise. Praise him. And that's the response, friends, that we're meant to make to this.

[23 : 19] As we marvel at what he's done for this, the response that our hearts, of course, the one that they're designed to make, is to praise him. Praise my soul, the King of heaven.

To his feet your tribute bring. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven. Evermore his praises sing. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him. Praise him. And praise the everlasting King.

And so this church, here they are. This group of unspectacular looking Christians. Who think they are nothing in their city of Ephesus. Look at them from the outside and you'd conclude that there's nothing to see here.

But come with me inside the spiritual TARDIS, says Paul. And let me show that because God is this kind of God, there's everything going on here. So why don't we pray.

And let me just take a moment, wherever we are with the Lord. And let's just spend some time with him. Maybe just in the quiet.

[24 : 23] And then I'll close us in prayer. And so, Father, we thank you.

And praise you. And praise you. That you are this kind of God. You are the God of all grace. Father, thank you for your precious word.

Lord, where would we be without this? We wouldn't know who you are. We wouldn't know what you've done. And yet, Father, thank you that this screams at us this morning. That you are a God who has given everything for us. You are committed to us, your people.

And so, Father, we do praise you for who you are. Just pray for people this morning, Lord. Whatever they're at, whether they're at home, whether they're here, Father. In each of our hearts, that you would be at work by your spirit.

Helping us to understand more of this in our lives. Lord, we pray in Jesus' precious and in his worthy name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[25 : 37] Amen.