

The Identity and Purpose of the Church

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[0:00] Good morning, church. The scripture passage today is Ephesians 3. At the conclusion of the reading, I will declare this is the word of the Lord.

! And the church in joyful response to his revelation given to us will together respond thanks be to God. For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have 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 have written briefly.

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 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.

[1:26] 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.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. For this reason I bow 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 the 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 the 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 could ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, Happy New Year, Church. Happy New Year.

Happy New Year. Welcome to 2025. As I put in the email, we're a quarter of a century in to the new millennium. It's wild. When the turn of the millennium happened, if you were alive then, we all were freaking out that the world was going to end.

[3:09] But here we are, 25 years in. You know, last week, Matt concluded for us a series, walking through Isaiah 40 to 55.

And as Matt already alluded multiple times so far, we're going to be going into... Is this thing working right? Seems like it's cutting out. Okay. Thank you, Josh.

We're jumping into next week the book of 1 Corinthians. And that's going to take us through the first half of... Most of the first half of 2025. And the reason that the elders have decided for our church to go through this book, Paul's letter to the Corinthians, is because our desire for us as a body is to gain a renewed vision for the local church.

Like, that's what we want this year. We want to regain a renewed, matured vision for what the church is, what the church does, and then work that out in our actual lives together.

We're actually now in our 10th year as a church body. I mean, praise the Lord. We're in our 10th year. In August, we'll hit year number 10 fully.

[4:22] And so we're asking, the elders are asking, what does it look like for us to walk forward in increasing faithfulness to Christ? Like, what does it look like for us to grow in holiness and spiritual maturity as a corporate body of believers?

What does it look like for us to be more like Jesus? Like, to more fully embody gospel culture? What does it look like for us to better fulfill our mission and the power of the Holy Spirit?

So we desire for all these things to happen. And I just want to ask, do you want those things too, church? Do you want them? I know that you do. I know that you all do.

We want these things together. And so this is why we've chosen the book of 1 Corinthians to walk through as a church. But before we get there, next week, we want to first set the stage by considering the big picture.

What is the church? What is the church? Why does the church exist? You know, it's easy for us to go through life with our heads down, right?

[5:25] Tackling one problem after another. A common vernacular, an electric boat in the Navy is putting out fires, right? Putting out fire, putting out a fire, putting out a fire, head down. And we lose sight of the actual big picture of, like, why we're doing what we're doing.

And what is it even that we're doing? My hope today is that God would fill our frame with the glorious, overarching, eternal purposes that God has for his church and for his glory.

So that's what we're doing today. Now, in the middle of, we're not going to be walking through Ephesians 3, but I had Nina read the whole chapter for some context. Right in the middle of Ephesians 3, Paul says that he was called to be a minister of the gospel, verse 10, 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. Do you realize what Paul is saying? Like, this is radical.

Paul is saying that the people of God, believers in Jesus, united to him and to one another, the church puts on display for not only the whole world, but also the whole universe, the wisdom and glory of the sovereign creator God.

[6:54] Now, that's going to be the main point of the sermon today. More succinctly, it's that the church is the focal point. If you can jump to the next slide, Caleb. The church is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe.

The church is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe. Now, we've just looked at Ephesians 3, and we're going to come back to that again at the end.

We're going to spend even more time, as Jordan mentioned, in 1 Peter 2, 9 and 10. And before we even get there, I want to start with a walkthrough of redemptive history of the Bible that leads us to these New Testament passages.

So I'm going to have you flipping around a bit in your Bibles today. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles available on the back table, bookmarked to the first text, Genesis 1. So feel free to grab one of those and to keep it as our gift to you.

And the sermon today is going to move in four parts. Okay, the first part, if you're taking notes, is background. And then we're going to get to gospel. And then identity. And then purpose.

[8:02] So background, gospel, identity, purpose. And before we dive in, let's pray one more time because we need help. Heavenly Father, we do. We need your help.

We need your help. We're here after spiritual goals. Spiritual goals that we cannot accomplish in the flesh. And so we're asking your spirit to move, to work.

We know that you're here where two or three are gathered. There you are, Jesus, in our midst, in the person of your Holy Spirit. And so you're here. And we would just ask that you would move and work in our hearts, shape our minds, and transform our hearts to be more like Jesus today.

In whose name we pray. Amen. So the first thing is background. What humanity and Israel were meant to be. And as we walk through this, as we walk through this, I want you to think.

This is, if you're a believer in Jesus today, this is your origin story. Right? It's really cool for us to learn our own origin stories in life. If you're a Christian, this is your origin story.

[9:07] Okay? The big overarching origin story of our lives. And as we walk through this timeline of human history of redemption, think of it in moving through four stages here.

Creation, fall, Israel, fail. Creation, fall, Israel, fail. Okay? That's where we're going. So the first thing is creation. And I want you to look with me at Genesis chapter 1, verse 27 and 28.

Okay? So Genesis 1, first page of your Bibles. So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him.

Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. And have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

So here, right here at the beginning of human history, we see God's design intent for mankind.

Right? God's purpose for humanity was to image, to reflect, to put on display his nature and his character.

[10:16] Right? His likeness in the world around them. And then to spread that life-giving goodness. Right? The life-giving goodness of God. His character. To spread that to the ends of the earth.

Right? That was man's purpose. In short, man's purpose was to know God and make him known. To know God and make him known. That's a little phrase that you can easily remember.

We want you to remember. To know God and make him known. See, humanity is the crown of God's creation. Meant especially to reflect his glory. But God's purpose is actually for everything in all of creation to praise his name.

Right? From the largest galaxy to the smallest particle. It's all for the glory and the praise of his name. Amen? It's all for the glory and praise of his name.

And so he began the service with Psalm 148. And at the very end of Psalm 148, after exhorting, you know, all these individual things in creation to praise the Lord, it says, Let them praise the name of the Lord.

[11:21] For his name alone is exalted. His majesty is above earth and heaven. But what happened next in the book of Genesis?

Fall. Right? Fall. Sin entered the world. Adam and Eve decided that they wanted not just to be like God. Right?

They decided they wanted to be God. And this sin resulted in separation from God. Right? And the curse of God upon the world. Paul says in Romans 8, verse 20, that the creation was subjected to futility.

Right? And we all feel in our daily lives and in the news and in everything, we feel that futility. Right? It's the second law of thermodynamics. It's increasing entropy.

For the nerds out there that know that. It's things constantly breaking down. Chaos, disorder, always on the rise. That's life under a cursed world.

[12:20] Life after the fall. Now, certainly, creation continues to declare the praises of God. Right? But it's marred by sin. And humanity, while also by its very existence proving the creative power and glory of God.

Right? By its existence, reflecting the likeness of God to the world is marred by sin. So as a result, humanity can't fulfill its God-given creation purpose.

To bear God's image in the world. To know God and make him known. To spread his goodness to the world.

Man can no longer fulfill that purpose. Now, this reality is evidenced in Genesis 3 when God bars man's access into the garden. And if you've read the kids' book, The Garden, The Curtain, The Cross, there's a refrain that says, Because of your sin, you can't go in.

Because of your sin, you can't go in. Access to the garden. God's presence unveiled. Barred. But God. But God.

[13:27] So many glorious passages in the Bible start with, But God. See, from the very beginning, by his grace, God would provide a means for sinful humanity to enjoy fellowship with him by faith.

A way to know him and to make him known. Now, you can trace this thread all throughout the book of Genesis. And then God eventually called Abram.

Creation, fall, Israel. God called Abram to forsake his pagan life and to give himself wholly to the Lord. Right? And God promised to bless Abraham and to make his offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore.

And to bless all families of the earth through him. And God, the promise-keeping covenant God that we saw in our time in Isaiah especially, He would begin to bring these promises to fulfillment.

Right? Through Abraham's son Isaac. And then through Jacob. And then through the twelve tribes of Israel. And then through deliverance from bondage in Egypt under Moses.

[14:35] Now, just after the Exodus, the Lord declared to Israel, Exodus 19, 4-6, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. For all the earth is mine.

And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Do you see what God had done? He had delivered Israel from the enemy.

He had united her to himself. He had set her apart as a holy people that she might know him and make him known. That she might actually fulfill the purpose for which humanity was originally created.

Right? To display his goodness and glory to the world. I mean, amen. Right? And so, the crowd erupts in applause. Right? The curtain closes.

[15:41] The perfect ending to this riveting story. No, wait. The play is still going on, isn't it? And it takes an unwelcome turn. Creation fall.

Israel fail. God remains patient with and faithful towards Israel. Right? He gives her his law. He provides for her through her wilderness wanderings.

And then he brings conquest of the promised land under Joshua. To the point that it says in Joshua 21.45, Not one word. Not one word.

This is one of those verses you highlight in your Bible. Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed. All came to pass. God's faithfulness.

And yet, over and over and over again, Israel failed to be the kingdom of priests and holy nation that God desired her to be. Right?

[16:40] God would raise up judges to rescue Israel and call her back. And then she would inevitably wander off into sin again. God would send prophet after prophet after prophet to expose her sin.

To call her to repentance and faith. And to offer the hope of mercy and forgiveness in the God of steadfast love. But her sin was great. Her sin was great.

And so in judgment, God raised up nations. Assyria and then Babylon. To conquer Israel and to carry the people off into exile. Creation fall.

Israel fail. This was a hopeless situation. Or so it seemed. Right? Israel may have been faithless.

But God is endlessly faithful. That was another good spot for an amen. Let me just pause for a second. Here, I'm just going to back up here. You, saints, are authorized to respond verbally.

[17:42] Even during a sermon. I know this is like not some way people grew up. You can say things like amen. You can say things like yes, Lord. You can say things like hallelujah.

You can do things like that. Like if you agree with something that was said, you are free. I give you freedom to express that verbally. I find it encouraging as a preacher.

I find it encouraging when I'm sitting in the audience. Knowing that people are listening and engaged and responding. Not to me. This is to the. God is faithful. Right? To things like that.

Truth about God and his word. So I just want to say that as we go into New Year. You're welcome to do those things. Okay? Israel may have been faithless.

But God is endlessly faithful. God would not fail to uphold his ancient promises to Abraham. Right? And God would not allow the glory of his holy name to be marred in the world.

[18:42] And so God did something. Something entirely unthinkable. Right? Something glorious that no one had ever thought of. That no one had ever imagined in their minds.

You know what he did? He came. He came. Amen. And that leads us to the second part of this sermon. Gospel. Gospel. Redemption in Jesus.

See, in the midst of Israel's exile in Babylon. We saw this again in Isaiah. God promised that he would deliver and redeem the remnant of his chosen people. He would remove their heart of stone, Ezekiel says, and give them a heart of flesh.

He would give to them his spirit and cause them to know him and walk in his ways. He would again be their God and they would be his people. In short, they would know God.

It's not up there anymore. They would know God and make him known. And in order for this to happen, he came. God came to earth in the person of Jesus.

[19:45] The eternal word made flesh. The son of God and son of man who was born to die to save his people from their sins.

In Jesus, and by his sacrificial sin-bearing death on the cross, sinners could finally be forgiven of their sin once and for all.

Sinners could finally be born again as new creations. Right? As a new and redeemed humanity. Jesus was the most, I don't know if you thought about it this way, but Jesus was the most truly human person to ever walk the face of this earth.

Jesus lived the perfect life according to God's original creation design that we were intended to live. And through his death and his resurrection, Jesus became the firstborn among many brothers, Paul says in Romans 8.

The firstborn of all of those who would believe in his name, who have been predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

[20:51] Romans 8.29 In other words, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, sinful people are redeemed and made into the true humanity and the true Israel.

Like in Jesus, we are finally able again to know God and make him known. In Jesus, we are able again to rightfully bear God's image in the world, to put his glory on display, to spread his life-giving goodness to the world.

And this is why the church is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe. Friends, this is our creation purpose, renewed in Christ.

So I just want to ask, have you been renewed? Have you been redeemed? Have you been reborn by faith in Jesus' name? See, every person on this earth is searching, right, for meaning.

They're searching for meaning to their existence, looking to things like relationships or to sex or to career or to entertainment or to politics to find meaning and purpose.

[22:01] The way to find your ultimate purpose is by losing yourself in Jesus. So this is a call to put your faith and trust in him today if you have not done that.

In Shoreline, what this means for us is that Jesus Christ and his gospel must ever and always remain central to our lives, individual and corporate.

Christ and the gospel must be central. It's the gospel through the spirit that has made us into new creations, right? It's through this gospel that we will grow up into spiritual maturity.

And so we don't graduate from the gospel. We don't graduate from it. We only ever give ourselves increasingly to it. We don't get over Jesus.

Like we only ever grow in our love and our adoration and our obedience to him. So in 2025, church, in 2025, let's make our individual and our corporate lives all the more centered on Christ and the gospel.

[23:11] And as we do that, we're going to find that we become more human. We're becoming more like God originally made us to be, like Jesus, which he intends for us as the church.

So we're finally going to get in now to 1 Peter 2. So to help the church understand its blood-bought identity in Christ, Peter gives us in 1 Peter 2 three meaning-rich descriptions.

And so the next thing here is identity. Three descriptions of the church. So turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2 if you're not there.

1 Peter 2, verse 9. Peter says, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Peter is drawing back upon God's words to Israel, right?

[24:30] In Exodus 19 that we read before. And he's saying that what Israel was intended to be, but did not achieve because of their sin, the church now fulfills in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the church, Peter says, is first of all a chosen race. A chosen race. See, Israel was literally a race of people chosen by God to image his character and display his glory to the world.

And Peter is saying that now, through Jesus, the church is a chosen race of people. And this race is not physical. It's spiritual. Right?

The dividing line is not ethnicity. It's one of faith in Christ. So Peter is saying what we already said earlier, that the church is the new humanity, the new Israel, chosen and created by God through the gospel.

And I just want to stop and say, can you believe that God would choose sinners like you and me to be his chosen people? I mean, like, there's moments in our arrogance that we think, yeah, actually, I can.

[25:36] I can. I'm pretty cool. Like, I'm pretty smart. I've got a lot to offer. I got straight A's in school. I didn't. But you know what God's word says?

Yeah, actually, you had nothing to offer. That's what God's word says. You hated God, is what God's word tells us. You were his enemy. You were a follower of Satan. You were a follower of Satan.

You were a follower of Satan. Walking in your own sinful ways. A child of God's wrath. But God loved you anyway. But God sent Jesus to die for you and to call you into his family and his kingdom. What matchless grace. What matchless grace. We were once in darkness, but now we're in marvelous light. We were once not a people, but now we're a people.

We had once not received mercy, but now we've received God's mercy. So let's revel. Let's revel in this astonishing grace and in the God who has lavished it upon us.

[26:45] This chosen race is also, Peter says, a royal priesthood. Royal priesthood. Remember, God had told Israel that they would be to him a kingdom of priests.

Kingdom of priests. Now there was a specific office, right? An office of priests from the tribe of Levi. Men who had access to worship God in his presence, right?

And to fellowship with him in the tabernacle, in the temple. But God is telling Israel in this passage in Exodus 19, he's saying to Israel that all of them, right? Not just the Levitical priests.

All of them are called to serve him and to commune with him. And Peter is saying in 1 Peter 2 that through the gospel, all of those from every nation who call upon the name of Jesus become royal priests.

That through Christ's blood, we are given access to worship and fellowship with God. This is the Garden of Eden restored.

[27:50] That's what this is. It's what humanity was always created to be. It's who we are now in Christ and forevermore. Priests worshiping and fellowshiping with God through Christ.

So church, let's not settle for lesser things in 2025. Let's live this year in the conscious awareness of God's presence with us and in us.

Each of us. In 1 Corinthians, we're going to see this. Each of us is a temple of the Spirit, right? And then corporately, we are a temple of that same life-giving Spirit.

God's presence in us, with us. We are royal priests by the blood of Jesus. This is who we are, church.

A chosen race. Royal, of royal priesthood. And thirdly, Peter says, we are a holy nation. Holy nation.

[28:54] And to be holy is to be set apart, right? To be distinct from the world. And Israel was called to be a holy nation. A nation set apart, distinct from the pagan nations around them.

To bear God's holy likeness in the world. And Israel failed, right? They were unable to attain this identity. But Jesus, for our sake, consecrated himself through his death on the cross.

So that we might be sanctified. Made holy in the truth of the gospel. We're also going to see this even next week in 1 Corinthians.

This sanctification, it's both a one-time event, right? In which we become forever changed. Made holy at our conversion. Made like Christ. We often refer to that as justification.

We're made righteous. Given Christ's righteousness. And sanctification is also a lifelong process, right? In which we grow through the word, through the spirit, into spiritual maturity.

[29:57] Into the likeness of God. Church, this is God's design for us. Right? This is his design for the church. That we would increasingly become holy.

As he is holy. To grow up. To mature. Paul says in Ephesians 4. Into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

This is the kind of people that the gospel creates. A people holy like Jesus. The gospel creates a redeemed community of people who adorn gospel doctrine by embodying gospel culture.

Right? And in this way, heaven is brought forward. Heaven, right? Someday when we finally and fully live out the realities of the gospel by being the church. We bring that forward into the here and now.

And we live the gospel out before the world. That's amazing. Heaven brought forward. Culture of the kingdom. Of the gospel. How do we get there?

[31:07] There's a lot of ways we could answer that question. But Paul says, again in Ephesians 4. And this isn't easy. This is hard work.

But it's simple. Paul says, by speaking the truth in love, we grow up into Christ. Speaking the truth in love. Now this requires, saints, this requires that we are first spending time with Jesus.

Right? On our own. In his word. In his prayer. Individually. As families. As a body. Right? In other words, we're worshiping and fellowshiping with God as royal priests.

Right? Living in his presence. Communing with Christ. Christ. So, we sent out all those Bible reading plans.

Like, just means to get in the word of God. Get yourself in the word of God. You know, have a plan for each day. A time. A place. A passage. To help.

[32:10] Because we need help as humans. Help form healthy habits of being in the word. Being in prayer. Spending time with Jesus. And then talk to him all day.

He's with you. Talk to him all day. Carl's recommended before the book, Practicing the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence. I'm finally starting to read that book. That is a good book. He experienced the joy of being in the presence of God.

Okay. So, anyway. Speaking the truth in love. It requires first that we are with Christ as priests. And as we do that, we are then able to speak the truth to one another in love.

And you know what? This looks like a lot of things. This looks like intentional conversation before and after the service with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Ask things like, how is God speaking to you during the service?

Ask things like, how have you been experiencing the love of Jesus? Ask things like, how can I pray for you? And then do it right there on the spot.

[33:15] This looks like active participation in community groups and in various studies. This looks like ensuring gospel truth is ever present in your home.

Be it with a roommate or a spouse or a child. This looks like inviting people over to your home or over for coffee, for fellowship and discipleship. This looks like going on a walk or a hike or to the park with another person or family and talking about Jesus and talking about spiritual things. It can look like a million different things. Right? As diverse as the human experience. But at the core is a speaking the truth in love.

Speaking the truth in love. And in this way we grow up into the holy likeness of Christ and better bear his image in the world. So those are three different descriptions that God gives us through Peter to define the identity of the church.

A chosen race. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. And Peter goes on. But you are a people for his own possession. That you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

[34:32] So the fourth thing here is purpose. To display God's glory. To display God's glory. To display God's glory. So here we are.

Back where we started. Remember the main point I said at the beginning is this. The church is the focal point for the display of God's glory to the universe.

The great purpose of the church as Peter puts it in verse Peter 2 is to proclaim God's excellencies. Right? As Paul puts it in Ephesians 3.10.

To display the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Okay. So let's talk about these words. The wisdom and excellencies of God.

The wisdom and excellencies of God. What does this mean? Now Paul uses the term manifold. Saying it's the manifold wisdom of God that the church displays. So think of a diamond. Right?

[35:31] With all of its facets. A diamond. God's wisdom is like a diamond. Multi-faceted. Complex. Beautiful. And astounding. That's why Paul exclaims in Romans 11.33.

Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments. And how inscrutable his ways. God's manifold wisdom is an ocean that we could never fathom.

And at the same time. Something he puts on display through the church. Through the church. Now in the context of the book of Ephesians and the book of Romans.

This wisdom is talking about the same thing. It's talking about the wisdom of God in his unfolding eternal plan. Right? The plan that was ordained before the foundation of the world.

The plan that was previously a mystery but has now been revealed in Jesus. His eternal plan to unite Jews and Gentiles. To unite men and women.

[36:37] To unite black and white. To unite people from every tribe and tongue and nation. To Christ. And to one another through the gospel. This unsearchable wisdom is on display by the church being the church united in Christ Jesus.

Now similarly Peter says. First Peter 2. That the purpose of the church. Which is God's possession. Is to proclaim his excellencies.

Now God's excellencies. Are his virtues. Peter is talking about. All the wonder. And beauty. And majesty.

And splendor. Of God's nature and character. In other words. His glory. His excellencies. And the only fitting response. For a people who were once in darkness.

But have been brought by grace. Into marvelous light. Is to proclaim the glory of the one who did that. The one who has brought them. Who has brought us into light.

[37:46] The only fitting response. Is to proclaim his glory. This is the purpose of the church. To proclaim God's wisdom. God's beauty.

God's excellencies. God's glory. Now this proclamation occurs in both word and works. It's a proclamation in word and works.

And when we talk about proclaiming. The first and most obvious application. It's proclaiming in word. Right. We the church. Proclaim the glory of God with our lips. By talking like Christians. Especially by sharing the good news of the gospel. And throughout the book of first Peter. We see that Peter especially has in mind a proclamation in works. See we not only proclaim God's excellencies with our lips.

But also our lives. Right. As they bear the holy likeness of Christ. We're proclaiming the excellencies of God.

[38:45] And that's why in the next two verses in first Peter two. Peter urges the church towards honorable conduct among the Gentiles. And he speaks in his letter. Not only of honorable conduct.

But also of loving one another earnestly from the heart. It's 122. He speaks of submitting to government authorities. In chapter two. He speaks of especially in this first letter of Peter. Suffering for the sake of Christ. Now in all of these ways and countless more. By living our lives as a new kind of humanity. Right. A people redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

By living our lives as the people of God. Who know him and make him known. We are proclaiming. We are putting on display.

The wisdom. The excellencies. The glory of God. Now who is the audience. Of this proclamation.

[39:42] Right. Who is seeing this display. Who is viewing this great drama. Of which the church of Jesus Christ is center stage. Third thing here is the universal audience.

Peter says in 1 Peter 2.12. To live honorably among the Gentiles. Non-Jews. In other words. The nations. That they might see and glorify God for themselves.

Now this has always been God's plan. Right. To draw the nations into his kingdom and family. Israel is meant to be her likeness to God.

A magnet. Attracting the world. To worship and serve God. Do you remember the great worldwide invitation.

Towards the end of Isaiah 45. God said turn to me and be saved. All the ends of the earth. For I am God. And there is no other.

[40:41] Well now. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That worldwide invitation is being received. Right. We have received it. We are the ends of the earth.

This worldwide impact foretold by the prophet Isaiah. And the other prophets. Is every day increasingly coming to pass. Right. As the wisdom and the glory of God.

Is put on display through the church. Now as if that were not a vast enough audience. The nations. Paul goes further. Right. Paul says that.

That the audience for this drama. Is not only the nations. But. The rulers and authorities. In the heavenly places. Paul is saying that something.

Far more significant is going on. Than you simply displaying God's glory. To your family and co-workers. Right. Or us simply displaying God's glory. To New London County.

[41:39] Vital and important as that is. The church. By its God breathed existence. By its Christ reflecting life. Is the actor in a cosmic drama.

On a cosmic stage. In which all of the heavenly hosts. Are looking on. Right. All of the angels. Are looking in amazement and wonder.

As they see the glory of God on display. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the church. And all of the hellish host of demons. Are looking on. In astonishment and horror.

As they behold. The wisdom of God. Through the church. Right. The church is constantly triumphing. The victory of Christ. And the ultimate defeat of Satan.

And all of the demonic host. Is seeing that. Through the church. This is amazing. Church. This is why we exist. This is why we exist. Christ. It's not so that we can.

[42:33] Simply have a community. With like-minded people. In an isolating world. Like that's good. And that's not primarily why we exist. It's not so that we can simply live moral lives.

That will cause people to applaud our virtue. It's not even ultimately. So that we can be a source of love and compassion. In a world of anger and hate. That's important.

But that's not the end. Right. That's the means. The end. Our great end as the church. Is that we would put on display. For the nations and the whole cosmos.

The wisdom. And the glory of God. In Christ. The church. Is the focal point. For the display of God's glory. To the universe.

The universe. Now you say. Mike. That sounds really great in theory. But that's just a bunch of theological speak. Right. Like what am I supposed to even do with that?

[43:29] I'm just a normal person. Trying to live a normal life. I'm just your average Christian. Trying to survive the next day. And I hear that. I hear that. You know what you need to know.

And we all need to know. That it is in the ordinary lives. Of ordinary saints. And ordinary churches. That God displays his glory.

To the universe. And it's anything but ordinary. Anything but ordinary. You know in this body of believers. When we come together.

Despite differences of race. Ethnicity. Gender. Socioeconomic status. Career. Choice of public school. Versus private school.

Versus home school. Whatever it is. And we unite around Christ. And the gospel. And we give our attention to the word of God. And we sing songs of praise. And we share in the Lord's Supper together.

[44:25] And we encourage and pray for one another. That ordinary corporate gathering. Is anything but ordinary. It is shouting. The glory of God. To unite us in Christ.

His glory to redeem us. His glory to transform us. Into a new kind of humanity. And it's shouting that glory. To the world. And to every being in the spiritual realm.

Husbands. Wives. Siblings. Coworkers. Fellow church members. When we choose. In the midst of relational conflict.

In the midst of being offended. Or mistreated. To deny self. To extend forgiveness. To lay aside our interests.

For the interests of others. When we choose to embody. The selfless. Sacrificial love. Of Christ. In these ordinary. Difficult moments.

[45:24] Of our everyday lives. That. Is anything. But ordinary. That. Is putting on display. For the universe. To behold. The breathtaking.

Wonder. And glory. Of almighty God. That's what's going on. You know. It's in these ordinary ways. Loving someone. Who is different than us.

Right. Showing hospitality. To those in the church. Caring to get to know our neighbors. And coworkers. And taking an interest in them. Meeting a rebellious child.

With grace. And gentleness. Even in discipline. It's in ordinary ways. Like these. That the extraordinary glory of God. Is put on display. Through the church.

This isn't just theory. Guys. This is reality. This is ultimate reality. The church is. Is center stage. In this cosmic drama.

[46:21] By its existence. And its life. Displaying God's glory. To the universe. Now we could. Go on to talk about. The great commission. Right. The church's mission. To make disciples of Christ.

And we must. And we do regularly. From this pulpit. But I want you to see today. That fundamentally. The church. By simply being. The church. By being.

A new and redeemed. Humanity. That bears God's image. That knows him. And makes him known. The church. Puts on display. His glory. For all to see. And that.

Is our ultimate purpose. Have you ever listened. To an orchestra. Perform some great symphony. Maybe you've gone.

To a Coast Guard band concert. Because Tyler's not here. But would watch Tyler perform. Or Megan. When she was singing for them. Maybe you've gone. To see the Boston Symphony Orchestra. And you sit there.

[47:15] And you listen. Right. And it's mesmerizing. When all of the. Musical parts. Dozens of parts. Are playing in perfect harmony. Following along. Into the conductor. And the music in front of them.

And music has this way. Of just transporting us. Sometimes. Into another world. And when you sit there. And the audience applauds. Who is. Who ultimately ought to get the glory.

Of that. Like who should receive. The praise. It's not the soloist. Right. It's not. Even the conductor. It's the composer.

Right. The composer. Who brilliantly. Determined. Note. After note. Part. After part. Imagining how all of it. Would perfectly come together. To wow human audiences.

The composer. Gets. The glory. And so it is. With the composer. Of the greatest symphony. Ever created. The church of Jesus Christ. The Lord God almighty.

[48:13] Who by his wisdom. Brought the church. Into existence. The Lord Jesus Christ. Who through the selfless sacrifice. Of his own life. Created a new.

And redeemed. Humanity. He gets all the glory. He gets all the glory. And he has made us holy. As he is holy.

So that we might know him. And make him known. To the universe. For the display of his glory. That church. Is our glorious identity.

And glorious purpose. So God help us in 2025. To realize that. For his glory. Please pray with me.