

Gods Technicolour Plan

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[0 : 00] So why are you here today? Why are you here in church? I wonder why you're not down at the movies.

I wonder why you're not at home winding down in front of the TV or sleeping in. I wonder why you're not at a cafe having coffee, morning tea, brunch, whatever it is.

I wonder why you're not at the gym, why you're not walking the dog, visiting friends and family, why you're not playing a board game. I wonder why you're here.

Is it because there's nothing better to do? Maybe that's it. If there was something better to do or something more pressing, then in fact you wouldn't be here.

After all, it's only church, isn't it? I wonder if you're comfortable with the way that those words connect together.

[1 : 11] Only church. I wonder if meeting as a church fits in around everything else that's going on and we fit it in when it's convenient.

And other things are not too pressing. Maybe it's not an afterthought, but still you wouldn't make too much of a deal about church.

If you're comfortable with the words, it's only church. And if you're comfortable not making too much of a deal about church, then I want to invite you to look with me at Ephesians 3 and 4.

You'll notice that church is mentioned twice in chapter 3 as it was read out. And I want you to notice the wording. First of all, in verse 10 of chapter 3, Manifold means literally multicolored.

It means multifaceted. It's the same words that's used in the Old Testament for Joseph's fancy multicolored coat that stood out from everyone else's.

[2 : 49] That is, the church is God's brightly colored neon sign to the universe. The church is the public advertisement, the public display of the wisdom of God.

So it would seem strange to glibly refer to it as only church. Secondly, notice in verses 20 and 21, Paul says, Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Follow the wording. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or even imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

See, when God gathers together his church, it is a beacon of his glory to the universe.

Now while your experience of church might have been disappointment or something slightly boring or relationships have been less than what could have been, we are here today in this moment to catch a glimpse of God's intentions and recommit ourselves to it this year.

[4 : 44] And God's plan, his eternal plan, if you want to know what the will of God is, if you want to know what his will is, his plan is, it is devastatingly simple and disarmingly beautiful.

And Paul's language here bubbles with greatness and beauty. He refers to the unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 8. The manifold wisdom of God in verse 10.

The glorious riches of the Father in verse 16. And the love of God that surpasses knowledge in verse 19. Wonderful rich language that all talk about the very same thing.

The eternal plan of God to bring a new society together under the lordship of Christ from all kinds of people who are bound together in love.

That's his plan. And in chapters 1 and 2 of Ephesians, Paul says that the great inheritance, the great promises of God, that the people of Israel had, the great hope of the coming king that the Jews had held on for generations, had finally arrived in the coming of the lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 12] And Jesus' death on the cross brought forgiveness of sins. His resurrection and return to the father brought the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

But the big surprise in chapters 1 and 2 is that the Gentiles are sharing with it. Jew and Gentile are being brought together into one new humanity in the local church.

And that's exactly the idea that Paul now continues in chapter 3. And that's why he's praying that the church, and this church in Ephesus and every church from there, will be a beacon of unity and love.

Now, Ephesians 3 is one of those chapters that's kind of messy when you read through it.

And Paul picks up the thought at the end of chapter 2, which says, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.

[7 : 29] And he begins chapter 3 by sort of like, I'm going to pray that that is going to be true for you, Ephesians.

So he starts in chapter 3, verse 1, for this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles. And then he stops.

He breaks his thought and he goes on a detour in verse 2. And it's a detour that lasts until verse 14, when he comes back on track again, where he says, for this reason, I knew before the Father.

And so you've got to kind of hold his train of thought together while you travel this detour with Paul in verses 2 to 13. And he starts in chapter 3, continuing the thought of chapter 2, but he sort of says, he gets to verse 2 and goes, just hang on a bit.

Let me just remind you of the theory again. Let me remind you of God's plan. Let me remind you of why I'm here in prison and why the Gentiles, like you, find yourselves part of God's eternal family.

[8 : 52] It's all because of the mystery. It's no longer a mystery. It's because of the plan that's finally come together. And as you run down, you get your eyes and you run down verses 2 to 13, you'll see what Paul does in those verses is he makes the same point again and again and again and again.

And the point is this. The plan that wasn't known is now known. It's now clear.

The mystery has been made known. What's the mystery? Verse 6. This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and share us together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

But that doesn't seem particularly mysterious at all until we remember that he's talking about the crossing of the biggest ethnic dividing walls that you could ever imagine.

Centuries of hatred and hostility between these two groups. people are not how do you cross a dividing wall like that?

[10 : 23] Paul says that's the mystery and the mystery is this. No matter where you come from, no matter what your colour is, no matter what your ethnic background, no matter how long you've been in the family, if you've put your faith in Jesus, you're all part of the same body, the same family.

the church according to verse 10 is meant to be the display of that in full technicolour.

And there's nothing that Paul wants more than to see this Ephesian church live out that reality. And he comes back from his detour in verse 14.

And that is the very thing that he has moved to pray for. And verse 14 to 21 is a long and pretty complex thought.

But in the end it breaks down to a very simple prayer. A prayer to the Father that the Ephesian church might really be a diverse and united family.

[11 : 43] And the prayer that boils down to this in verse 17, so that Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith and I pray that you being rooted and established in love.

Now remember he's talking about a church made up of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians and he prays that Jesus might so fill their hearts that they might treasure Jesus together that they will know what true love looks like from each other.

Paul says in the middle of verse 17 I'm praying that you being rooted and established in love may have power you Gentiles along with the Jewish saints to comprehend what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the love of Christ and to know the love of Christ that goes way beyond all comprehension.

What he's saying there it doesn't make sense. The world looks at it it doesn't make sense. the love of Christ encompasses all kinds of people and he says I'm praying that you will together both Jews and Gentiles will catch on to how big the love of Jesus is and be so filled with the fullness of God he

prays it because the church is God's great advertising campaign to the world of his glory and yet friends ever since this letter is written and when it was written we forget it we still are so tribal in our thinking we draw lines who sits with who and who won't sit with who which family which tribe which generation people who have been part of the local church for 50 or 60 years and those who are brand new lines that often won't be crossed and the reason is because we have not absorbed how big the love of Christ is for us 20 years ago some of you will remember that there was a war raging in

Kosovo between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians it came on the back of cultural hatred that ran back a thousand years and resulted in terrible crimes against humanity on both sides and there were Christian churches sitting on both sides of that conflict and in the middle of the conflict one pastor of an Albanian Baptist church in Pristina crossed over the racial divide and preached in a Serbian church on the other side of the conflict and against the background of all the hatred the pastor of that church in Belgrade invited him to preach in his church and took him into his home and that pastor says we don't have anything in common except for

[15 : 21] Christ but that's enough that's enough that's the point of this passage if you really catch on to the breadth and the depth and the height and the width of the love of Christ then you've started down the path of loving one another against the odds against the generations across the cultural dividing lines in a way that only astounds the world around us when they see the way that we love one another but if you see Ephesians 3 the spiritual powers as well it's enough to make the angels sing and rejoice at the wisdom of God and the demons just hang their heads it's like the angels appearing over looking at the local church going that is amazing

God you thought of this Paul says God's intent God's design God's plan verse 10 is that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and the authorities of the heavenly places imagine that a vision for St.

Paul's for the angels to look down on us and marvel at God's eternal purposes being worked out in us imagine that marveling at the love that is shown in small ways but a thousand ways marveling at the work of Christ as the boundaries that the world puts up are torn down between us so why are you here today nothing better to do we're part of God's church and we're here to display his glory and to actively love one another we're here to demonstrate to this world the angels in the heavenly realms the wisdom and the wonder of God's plan being worked out in the Lord Jesus we're here to reveal to the world that alienation and self centeredness and hatred and division don't have the final word we're here to work together to display

Christ's love in real ways to this world there's work to do to make the reality measure up to that but there's the challenge friends be here the starting point be here week by week and be part of it look for ways to love one another to build bridges with each other every way you can don't wait for the opportunity for the invitations come looking for the opportunities keep looking at the love of Jesus as you see it at the cross and look for ways to imitate his sacrifice and there's a great reminder at the end of Paul's prayer that the potential of the church to be what it should be goes way beyond than I could ever strategize or vision for or imagine or dream of Paul prays in verse 20 now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than we could ever ask him to do or even imagine that he could do according to his power that is at work within us he prays that God will be glorified as people see his church being what his church is called to be

God's neon sign of his glory to the universe now that plan in chapter three is what lies behind Paul's call for the church to maintain its unity in chapter four notice verse three of chapter four make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace there is one body and one spirit just as you were called to one hope when you were called and one Lord and one faith and one baptism and one God and Father of all notice that what Paul urges us to do in view of the unity that we have in Jesus he says verse three make every effort to keep the unity in other words we've got to work hard at being at peace with one another and that's going to require every effort it requires sweat sacrifice hard work and our unity in

[20 : 42] Christ should smother our differences like a blanket should smother a fame we are God's new society we are God's new family a new creation a new humanity characterized not by walls of personal preference and hostility and differences and division but by unity and peace and Paul goes on and he says yes there is this amazing unity but we're not clones yes there is one faith and there is one baptism but our unity does not equal uniformity and that's what he goes on to talk about in verse seven when he starts to talk about apportioned grace he says but to each of us grace has

been given as Christ apportioned it in other words after Jesus saved us through his death he gave us gifts to use in his service to display his glory that is the use of the gifts of grace that

God has apportioned to us is how we make every effort at maintaining the unity you get that unity is not maintained by not engaging standing back and going well if I don't cause any problems I'm maintaining the unity unity is maintained by engaging with the gifts that God's given me that's how we make every effort and down in verse 11 Paul describes the way that these gifts are to be used it was he who gave some to be apostles some to be prophets some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ and so throughout history the church has been built on the foundation of diversity foundation different people faithfully serving each other in different and unique ways so that

Christ might be promoted amongst us and displayed to the world in other words diversity is the way that God works God works with differences and quite ironically he uses those differences to build unity diversity and why so much diversity why so many different gifts verse 12 to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ might be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature so the picture I have here is of an orchestra a collection of a bunch of different instruments playing all of their different parts but played together because there's a conductor pulling us together and making a sound that no individual instrument by itself would be able to make and God

God's design is for us to be different but when we get put together we come up with a harmony that is absolutely impossible if we are all the same that is the genius of God in fact it's because we are different that we need each other we're all involved in this ministry of as it says to prepare God's people for works of service and Paul is saying that when we get together we ought to be doing those works of service so that Christ's body in fact might be built up in such a way that it displays his wisdom we get together to pray for each other to share with each other to encourage and spur each other on in the faith when we get together the reality of heaven and hell should be so sharp in our focus that any bickering there might be amongst us just seems to be just so trivial the building up of our brothers and sisters in

Christ the glory of the Lord Jesus and his promotion to the world has to transcend the differences and the disputes and when you use your God-given gifts to strengthen me instead of gratifying yourself and when I use my God-given gifts to strengthen you instead of gratifying myself then what happens is all of our diversity works together to build us up in truth and love rather than fragment us it's when we use our gifts to gratify myself that's what fragments us Paul then leaves us with a wonderful picture of the outcome of each part doing its work verse 14 then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming instead speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up into him who is the head that is

[26 : 35] Christ from him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work see the picture he leaves us with here is of a stable loving mature church that is working together and growing together in Christ friends that is my vision for St Paul's and it's certainly my vision for us at St Paul's this year which is why we've made this change to our current corporate worship gatherings and as we finish what has been prayer week this past week as we finish that and look forward to this year of ministry ahead will you join with me and make Ephesians 3 20 our prayer that this would be our prayer this year this is what you would plead for

God to do amongst us to pray that God's reputation in this world will be increased by St Paul's what a prayer that God's reputation would be increased by us pray that the way that we love the way that we care for one another the way that we are united will bear the sort of fruit that we could not even imagine possible 12 months ago will you join with me and make Ephesians 3 20 your prayer for us this year amen begin thank you