

Our Multiethnic Mission

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Tom, for that. And if you'd like to keep your Bibles open, that'd be brilliant. Ephesians 4, we'll get there eventually, but we're going to preach the rest of the Bible before we get to there.

And if you've got the St. Paul's app open, that would be also particularly helpful as we go through. Nearly 25 years ago, for those who...

One of the benefits of living longer is you see that so much of history sort of repeats itself in one way or another. And 25 years ago, there was another war raging in Europe.

It was in Kosovo between Serbs and ethnic Albanians. It went for really about 18 months, although the tensions were building much longer than that, 18 months.

But in that period, 13,500 people died and over 1 million people were displaced from their homes.

The conflict there came on the back of about 1,000 years of cultural tensions.

[1 : 03] And it was very deep cultural tensions, a very deep hatred culturally between the two groups. And the war itself in just 18 months resulted in terrible crimes against humanity on both sides of the conflict.

There were Christian churches on both sides of that conflict. And in the middle of that 18-month war, one pastor from an Albanian Baptist church in Pristina crossed over the racial-cultural divide and preached in a Serbian church for the enemy.

And against all that background and hatred and death, the pastor of that church in Belgrade took this pastor into his home.

He stayed with him for the weekend and didn't just welcome him into his home, but welcomed him into his church and welcomed him into his pulpit. After the war, reflecting on that moment, that particular pastor from Belgrade said, we don't really have much in common apart from Jesus.

Apart from Jesus. That there illustrates the entire point of this series. Apart from Jesus.

[2 : 36] Apart from Jesus. And it's the banner across this church, treasuring Jesus together for the joy of all people.

Now, the apostle Paul states God's grand goal, his worldview, if you like, of his goal of all things, at the beginning of Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 8, that 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 put into effect when the times reached their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

unity in all things under Christ. And what that means for us, if you're someone who's a Christian, is that the good news of the Christian faith isn't simply that God has forgiven you for your sin.

If it was just that, then it means the whole Christian gospel is just purely about sin management.

That's all it is. But that's not what it is.

The good news is that your sins have been given, that you are given a new resurrected life. You are gathered into God's new family, his body, his humanity, his people, to pursue the very thing that we were created to do.

[4 : 24] You remember from sermon one, maybe, to live for the glory of God. That's the gospel.

The trajectory of all things is everything gathered under Jesus Christ as the creator and Lord of all things, bringing glory to God joyfully as his people forever.

That's the trajectory. And so in the next two weeks, I want to look at how God's plan gets worked out in here as a church like this.

We're going to summarize what's already been said in this series in the next two weeks. And I'm intending on summarizing a chunk of that already today.

So if you've got the St. Paul's app open, you'll notice three points, God's multi-ethnic mission, our multi-ethnic mission, and my multi-ethnic mission. So firstly, we're going to go back to the beginning of God's plan, be reminded of why you and I were created and saved.

It's in the Garden of Eden, Genesis 1 and 2. There's a real sense that all things are gathered to God. He's the creator of all things. He made it. Everything is at peace. All things are ordered.

[5 : 42] And everything is in perfect relationship with each other, with God, as it should be. The first people are made in God's image for the purpose, as we saw in the first sermon, the purpose of displaying and magnifying God's glory.

They are to mirror to the world their creator. Then the first people make the decision to magnify themselves rather than God in Genesis 3.

They decide to live life their way, to make it all about them. And the Bible calls this attitude, which leads to action, sin. It's a rejection, a rebellion against God.

It's a coup against him. And the consequence of sin is that all the order of God's good creation becomes disordered. There is no more harmony and peace and relationship with God is broken. Where there was unity and closeness, because of sin, there is now distance and disunity. God then removes people from his presence.

[6 : 48] He judges their sin and by scattering them from himself. And that's the principle that you will see right through the Bible.

Whenever humanity sets itself up against God, he scatters them from him in judgment and from each other. There's not just a fractured relationship with God, but a fractured relationship with each other.

But when he saves them, he gathers them to himself and unites them together as his people and to him. We saw this principle worked out in ethnic and cultural terms several weeks ago with the Tower of Babel and the calling of Abraham in Genesis 11 and 12.

When God saves, he gathers people to himself. When they rebel against him, he scatters them from his presence and from each other. Isaiah 11 is looking forward to a day when everything will finally be ordered and harmonious and peaceful and in right relationship like it was in the beginning in the Garden of Eden.

And Isaiah there in chapter 11 refers to a particular person who will accomplish God's grand plan as the root of Jesse. This person is the Messiah.

[8 : 10] They are the son of King David. And in verse 12 of Isaiah 11, it says, He will raise a banner for the nations.

He will gather the exiles of Israel. He will assemble the scattered people from Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Then we read in Isaiah 56 verse 8, God declaring that he will expand his plan, his global plan beyond his people Israel. He says, I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered. And the climax of God's global plan is revealed at the end of the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 66, 18. And I am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages and they will come to me and see my glory.

God's plan is to gather people from all the nations, from tribes, peoples, languages, cultures to himself that they might see his glory for the displaying of his glory.

[9 : 34] I'm hoping you're seeing there's a worldview being unpacked here. Your purpose of life is being unpacked here. The plan is to recapture the original purpose for our creation that we saw in week one displaying the glory of God.

The plan is to recapture that purpose. God's plan gets worked out in history with the creation of the church in the Lord Jesus Christ. And Ephesians, we had Ephesians 4 read out to us.

Have you got Ephesians open? I really want to go Ephesians 1, 2, 3, 4 real quick. It will be quick, believe me, it will be quick.

Ephesians 1 and 2, Paul, the Apostle Paul highlights the massive division between Jews and Gentiles but also between all of humanity and God. Ephesians 2 verses 13 and 16, he shows us how God brings an end to all of that hostility.

So Ephesians chapter 2, if you've got to open there, verse 13, now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ for he himself is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

[11 : 01] his purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two thus making peace and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility.

Every one of the gospels declares that Jesus Christ is the Messiah that Isaiah was looking forward to. He is the Messiah who fulfills God's plan of gathering people from all four corners of the globe to himself for his glory.

He who is the perfect image of God Jesus Christ took on the image of humanity was scattered from God on the cross as he takes on our sin and he bears our judgment our punishment on the cross he calls out on the cross my God my God why have you forsaken me why have you pushed me away why have you turned your back on me why am I scattered from you so that we can be gathered to him and after his resurrection he ascends to heaven sends his Holy Spirit to unite us with him and his finished work and all of his people when the Holy Spirit comes on the day of Pentecost people from every nation and culture and language were there gathered to God as his new humanity his people in relationship with God and the purpose of

God's multi-ethnic mission is explicit in Ephesians 3 verse 10 his intent was that now through the church now through the church the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord manifold there the word manifold means literally multi-colored it means multi-faceted it's the same words used in the Old Testament as a description of Joseph's multi-colored coat the church is God's brightly colored neon sign to the universe of the glory of God how does God display his glory to the world now through the church as they proclaim the gospel of Christ to the world the church is the public advertisement of the wisdom and the magnificence and the glory of God in Christ the great and the glorious

God's great and glorious plan is to gather a very diverse people to each other and to himself in such a way that God's wisdom and his greatness and his majesty and his glory is made known to the heavenly realms and everything below it there is a sense when God right now possibly I don't want to put words in his mouth but right now he's calling over the rulers and the authorities of the heavenly realms and he says see some Paul's chastard down there have a look at that that is what I have been working towards for all of history that's why my son died my son made that possible he brought these diverse people together he broke down the dividing walls and he brought them to us to me for my glory and he says to the demons

[15 : 37] Satan over here you destroyer of order you scatterer of people you ruiner of lives and relationships see that not even the gates of hell are going to stop my son building his church out of every tribe and language of people for my glory so get this first point of application as we gather here today before church is about you before it's about me before it's about us it is about God it is about his glory it's about his majesty it's about his design it's about his plan we get included in God's grand plan for all things we become members of God's new family not by completing a membership course you don't even get included in it just by having to be taking up your regular spot in church for 50 years we become a member of God's new family by repenting of living independently of God by putting our trust in Jesus

Christ and receiving the Holy Spirit who unites us with God and all Christians as one people that is the fundamental first step of membership in God's eternal plan for his glory there will be plenty of people in heaven who have not not completed a membership course in a church but not one single person who has not bowed the knee to Jesus Christ and confessed him as Lord of all and potentially that's the first step you need to take today this brings me to our multi-ethnic mission here at St. Paul's how it's worked out God's grand multi-ethnic plan is what lies behind this church's call to maintain its unity in Jesus in Ephesians 4 so in verse 3 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 one Lord one faith one baptism one God and Father of all in other words in view of the unity that we have in Jesus in view of all the barriers that have been broken down in Jesus verse 3 it says make every effort that is we've got to work hard at being at peace with one another and if you were here last week forgiveness and repentance is hard it's very hard to search our own hearts it's much easier to search and judge someone else's heart we are God's new society where God's family a new creation a new humanity characterized not by walls of hostility and division but by unity and peace and so I think that it's more than just unfortunate more than just unfortunate when our worldly associations and identities and cultures are allowed to

determine the composition of local churches I believe in fact it works against the very nature of the Christian gospel and God's purposes so here's a quote from American theologian Michael Horton in his book *The Gospel Driven Life* he writes not that long ago evangelical missiologists were defending the separation of races based on the principle that people like to be with people who are like them South African theologians have in fact pointed out that this principle this principle in mission work laid the theological groundwork for apartheid in South

Africa now that racial segregation is less explicitly deployed as a church growth strategy we carve up Christ's body into socio-economic and generational segments he goes on to describe in America how there are cowboy churches where you ride your horse in for church and you go out I don't think it's singing blazing saddles it's something else that you go out singing rawhide or something like that as the departing song he's talking there writing there about the homogenous unit principle it has led churches to be planted with targeted specific demographics and segregation congregating congregations individual preferences traditional services family services youth services Australian born

[21 : 06] Chinese services while Christians have led a bunch of the charge historically in pursuing racial justice at a societal level as well as in fact cross cultural mission on the other side of the world it appears in so many cases it does not trickle down into interpersonal behaviour on the local church level it is so much easier to pursue racial reconciliation and cross cultural ministry when it's at a distance from me when my preferences when I don't have to surrender comfort and my preferences so the church can be done my way locally I am convinced that homogenous circles of comfort are a hindrance to the gospel as we fail to display the beauty of the picture of God's plan worked out in the local church for his glory and in 2011 here at

St Paul's we structurally moved away from the homogenous unit principle in our congregations and as we pursue God's grand plan in our multi-ethnic mission here at Chatswood one of the key values for us to embrace deep in our hearts is the value of shared discomfort the value of surrendering power and comfort for the glory of God and the joy of others we value surrendering personal preferences sacrificing comfort for the sake of God's glory and the joy of others in other words what we're seeking to do here at St Paul's our multi-ethnic mission here is to build a gospel community another way of putting that is that what we're seeking to do is build a supernatural community rather than a natural community a natural community is where people feel connected really because of demographic connections

I feel connected to these people because they're just so much like me they grab people gravitate to each other find a sense of belonging because of similarities irrespective of whether the gospel is true or not now that's not such a bad thing don't leave me say that that's not a bad thing I share common interests amazingly with all of my friends that's one of the reasons we are friends because I share these common interests with them it's not a bad thing to have those connections and affinities here at St Paul's what I want to caution us about is not to think that that therefore is the sum of gospel community that somehow that is a supernatural community at the end of the day you can have natural community without Jesus and without pursuing his glory the heavenly realms look on and see the wisdom of God when they gaze at supernatural community at gospel community it's the kind of community that would not exist apart from

Jesus apart from Jesus and that's the point this is when people who would not gravitate to each other or people who are even in the middle of war and openly hostile to one another are drawn together in peace and love hospitality even share the pulpit all because of the reconciling work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross that's our mission to Chatswood let's get down a personal level down to my multi-ethnic mission when I say my yours and mine in Ephesians 4 we see that our unity does not equal uniformity that's Paul's point in verse 7 when he writes about apportioned grace but to each of us grace has been given as

Christ apportioned it after Jesus saved us through his death and his resurrection his Holy Spirit gave each of us gifts to use for his service and those gifts are used primarily for the building up of his church for his glory you can see why the gifts are given the use of the gifts of grace is how we make every effort to maintain the unity down in verse 11 Paul describes the way 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 to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ that is the church is

built on the foundation of different people faithfully serving each other in different and unique ways so that the glory of Christ might be promoted amongst us to the world and the heavenly realms that's why the gifts were given and God works with the differences and quite ironically as the differences come together he builds unity

[27 : 28] I've always got the image of an orchestra here no one wants to go and see 50 clarinets playing at one time or at least I don't okay but an orchestra all these different instruments work harmony beautiful God's design for us is to be different but when you put that difference together it comes up with a harmony that is absolutely impossible if we were all the same that is the genius of God and it's because we are different that we need each other it means that we are all involved in this ministry to prepare God's people for works of service that is when you use your gifts

God given gifts for his glory to strengthen me rather than to gratify yourself and when I use my God given gifts to strengthen you instead of gratifying myself then our diversity will build us up in truth and love rather than fragment us this is your multi ethnic mission you are here to be part of God's new humanity it's the reason he saved you to connect you as part of his new humanity for his glory we are here to actively worship God love his people and serve the world we are here to demonstrate to this world and the angels in the heavenly realms the wisdom and the wonder of God's plan being worked out in Christ forever 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 the world what that means is that if you declare yourself to be Christian but you are not using your gifts for that purpose you've got a way to grow there's a next step you need to take and that is understanding why you were saved so what would it look like for us to be captivated by Jesus more passionate more obsessed and consumed by him than every other hope and vision and dream and hostility in the world and identities in the world what Christianity proclaims and what I want it to be in increasing measure the banner over my life and the banner over this church is that there is something that is grander bigger far more fulfilling to be consumed by than secure retirement possessions health shopping travel books education sex socializing tradition ministry political movements justice or even this church or a thousand other passions in fact it's not something but it's someone and that is

Jesus Christ it's what you were created for his glory and so friends I'm not sure why you are here today or why you've tuned in today because reality is there's many things you could be doing right now but let me tell you if you haven't got it just let me just summarize it all you right here are now part of something that is immense something that began before you were born and something that will still exist after you have died and will continue on for all of eternity that is the fulfillment of God's plans for the creation of the world and the salvation of the world for his glory God has graciously gifted his family with time treasures talents and testimonies for his glory commit them to him the commitment card which is on your seats and was emailed to you if you can grab those this commitment card is about you taking your next step to be captivated by

Christ and his plan for all things God's rescue plan his eternal plan to rescue fallen scattered humanity gathering them to himself and progressively shaping that humanity into the likeness of his son the image of God for his eternal glory and for our eternal joy so what is your next step that you need to take that got the memory