

# The church Tim from CMS

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want to thank you for this opportunity to come and visit you. How about we pray? Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would give us insight, understanding and conviction as we read your word and pray that you would open up this to our hearts.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. We recently came to Australia again about three months ago and we went through passport control at the airport, but it's no longer called passport control. That department is now called border force and only those who are allowed were permitted to enter. And there's a great emphasis on borders and securing borders.

It's not just Australia that is keen on securing borders, but where we are in the Middle East, refugees flow through in their thousands and tens of thousands.

Governments are scared of these immigrants and sometimes they start up more checkpoints and more borders and more barriers.

[ 1 : 06 ] But it's not just governments either. I think we too in our families and in our lives are also interested in barriers. We bought a new desk for our youngest two boys, aged four and seven.

And the first thing our four-year-old did was to get a piece of masking tape straight down the middle of the desk and said, this is my side and this is your side. If you're familiar with the storyline of the Bible, you'll know that borders are also a fair amount, there's also a fair amount of them in the Old Testament.

What is it, for example, that made Samson, you know, the strong guy, such a celebrated leader? Or what was it about Deborah or Joshua or King David?

What made them such great celebrated leaders? It was because they defended the borders of Israel and killed the enemies of God's people.

You see, borders define privilege. Now, although we see a lot of that in the Old Testament, especially with the Israelites as they enter the promised land and secure its borders from the Philistines and others, you may recall, we also get hints throughout the Old Testament, made clearer in the New, about another way of thinking of borders, where the borders do not function to keep people out, but instead attract people in.

[ 2 : 56 ] You might recall, for example, Abram, later named Abraham. And he was promised by God, not only that he would be blessed, but that as he was blessed, he would bring blessing to many other peoples and nations.

Again, this privilege would not be something that he would keep to himself, but would flow out in blessing to others. There are many other hints of this in the Old Testament, but I'm going to focus a little bit on the Queen of Sheba, whom we read about earlier.

My son just asked me, what does Almogwood mean? And I have no idea. Sorry. But apparently there was a lot of it that Queen of Sheba brought. Anyway, she comes to Solomon, and as something of the first for the kings of Israel, he doesn't try to kill her.

Instead, Solomon welcomes her, invites her into his kingdom to see all of the things that God has given him.

It's as if he were to say, come and share in the greatness that God has given to us. And so the borders of Israel are no longer threatening borders, like electric fences, but instead they broadcast a welcome to foreigners.

[ 4 : 21 ] Come and see what God has done, how he has blessed us. And this episode with the Queen of Sheba was just a hint of what was later to come.

Because when Jesus came and fulfilled all of these hints in the Old Testament, we see that through his death, he offered forgiveness to all people.

All people were offered new life. The Holy Spirit. It was a new kingdom. And it wasn't one that killed people to protect its privileges.

But it was more like Solomon's kingdom. One which attracted foreigners in by the greatness that God had given it.

And its borders were not defensive, but they were more like a welcome doormat. Please wipe your souls and come in. Frequently in advertising, we hear the word exclusive.

[ 5 : 32 ] And it's supposed to attract us. You know, this is exclusively for you. This is exclusive membership. Maybe a house in an exclusive suburb.

Just a couple of weeks ago, when I was reading the newspaper on the weekend, there was an exclusive offer just for me. But then I realised, of course, that most of Australians would be receiving this same exclusive offer that was printed and delivered to almost every home.

We like the idea of exclusivity. I want you now to turn to Ephesians, if you have it open.

Because in verse 6, Paul says three words together, which he just completely makes up, that refer to the exact opposite of exclusivity.

He says that foreigners, or the Gentiles, are now no longer separated from God's people without those privileges, but now they are, and he has three words here, co-heirs, co-sharers, and co-members of this new kingdom.

[ 6 : 50 ] So there's no exclusivity left at all. There is only co-membership, co-sharing, co-inheritance.

And Paul emphasises that because of Jesus' death, our forgiveness comes by grace, and it's granted to everyone, Jews, Greeks, Romans, Americans, Australians, Arabs, all kinds.

We're all reconciled to God on that same basis. And therefore, as we're all friends with God now, reconciled by Jesus' death, there is nothing more that separates us from each other.

You can no longer say, like you could in the olden days, in the times of Israel, they are God's blessed people, and we are on the outside. They are higher than us. Paul says, no, there is only now co-membership, co-sharing, co-inheritance.

Both groups, Jews, and the rest of the world, are saved, so that they can be saved together. In fact, you're either saved together, or you can't be saved at all.

[ 8 : 07 ] Now, this is, according to Paul, a great secret that God has only revealed in his preaching and since the time of Jesus. It was not made known to widely in the Old Testament.

As I said, there were hints about it, but it wasn't, if you like, the norm. And even in Paul's time, it wasn't as if this idea was common.

The Jews, up until the time of Jesus, never expected that God would invite everybody in to share their privileges. No, they expected that God would raise them up victorious over the Romans and other filthy foreigners.

But that's not what God did. If you would have asked the Romans what they thought their gods would do, well, they thought that these strange Jews who regarded themselves so highly would simply perish away and fade.

But that didn't happen either. You see, with Jesus, God's secret plan only hinted at before, but since the time of Jesus made clear, a new thing happened.

[ 9 : 28 ] A church was established, a new community where Jews were saved, foreigners were saved, and both came together as a result.

They would be co-heirs, co-members, co-sharers in all of these privileges. There would be no exclusivity. And the church was a big surprise and no one expected it.

I want you now to have a look at verse 10. Paul says that God's intent was that now, through the church, the mighty wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

Now, Paul and his readers knew that there was evil in this world. They didn't know much about it in details and they spoke of it as belonging to the heavenly realm behind the scenes.

It's not something you could put in front of you or see with a magnifying glass. It was their way of speaking about those things that we cannot see, the spirits of evil.

[ 10 : 42 ] If you would have asked them, what is it that caused nation to go to war against nation? What causes families to struggle and relationships to break?

What causes diseases and grief? And partly, they would say, it is these spiritual forces in the heavenly realms, these darker powers that work against God.

And Paul says of them that they are the ones who need to hear this message about the church. That through the church, this mighty new wisdom of God of bringing people together should first of all be announced to those guys out there in the heavenly realms.

It's as if God is playing a mighty game of cards and nobody knows what he's doing and he's surrounded by these other evil forces.

But in the end, God lays down his last card which makes clear his strategy from all along and his wisdom is now apparent for everybody to see. And God says, I will not vindicate the Jews against the Romans or vice versa.

[11:58] I will make the two one. Forgiveness for all and therefore creating a new community, a church. and so as Jew meets Roman or as Australian meets Arab or as Australian meets Australian, they both receive grace in Christ and this is something that those heavenly powers would never have wanted and never have guessed.

Christ. You see, as we meet in church every week, we recognise in each other that we are receivers of grace.

We are not privileged more than some other race but we are co-sharers, recipients of grace. There is so much in the news, you know, that goads us to the old ways of hatred from person to person and people group to people group.

So much in the history that we read goads us to despise or to fear, for example, people in the Middle East. But Christians in Australia are on the same par with Christians in the Middle East. We are all part of the same church, recipients of grace. And this is God's masterstroke and the very fact that he wants those rulers in the heavenly realms to sit up and take notice.

[13:27] You see, as we recognise in each other another sharer of God's grace, another member of God's kingdom, you know, even if we come from very different cultural backgrounds, even if we are very different ages to each other, it's then that God's purposes in the church are made clear.

We could, for example, have, you know, one church for this racial minority group and another church for this age group, you know, perhaps 47 to 50 year olds, and another church for this other group with people with blonde hair.

people with love. But you see, that wouldn't be the people come together, that they are co-sharers, co-members, and co-inheritors of these great privileges and forgiveness from God.

It's either a co-church or it's not a church at all. See, God is interested in the church because it shows what he has been planning all along.

It is his greatest master stroke. See, where do you see the wisdom of God? Well, you could see it in the birds and clouds and in the universe.

[14:44] But what is God most proud of? What is it that he wants to put on display, even to those heavenly rulers? Well, it's the thing that he kept hidden until the time of Jesus, until that last moment.

It's the church. all of us being saved by the same grace. So this idea that God, being motivated by such kindness to all and refusing to vindicate one above the other, especially as both are sinners, but instead urging them to come together in forgiveness in Christ to himself and to each other, this is God's plan.

And this is the basic reason why our family is in the Middle East. You see, the church in the Middle East lacks trainers and people with good education in theology at the moment.

A hundred years ago it was different. A hundred years from now it might be the other way around. Who knows? And recently the church in the Middle East has found new opportunities to respond to questions from Muslims.

Muslims. And the church has faced new challenges as its own members have been alerted to new questions about the Christian faith from the internet and so on.

[16:09] So of course the church which has rich resources in this area, being co-members and co-sharers with the church in the Middle East, of course will share with them and by doing so show those heavenly rulers God's great plan of forgiveness for all and joining disparate groups who were once enemies of each other.

So once we understand God's plan and what he's most proud of, then sending people to the Middle East is a natural and an obvious thing to do because we realise what the church is.

So my challenge to you this morning is just to continue to you being that kind of church. Not just the church in Kilara made up of people who are a certain age group with a certain hairstyle or lack of

hair, but the church that Paul speaks of, a church where all are co-members, all are co-sharers and co-inheritors of these great privileges, God's masterpiece built on grace.

A few verses later in Ephesians, not in the part that we read earlier, but around verse 17, Paul says this, and you might remember this quotation, and I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and how long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

And I don't think Paul is speaking here about God's love for us at an individual level, although that's true, he does love us individually, widely and deeply and so on.

[ 17 : 59 ] But he's speaking about how wide God's love is across nations, across Jews and Gentiles originally, but now across all nations, across all different types of people that are sitting here this morning.

Do you realise how wide God's love is that that person next to you is also a co-sharer of those same privileges that you have? When Christ died, he died for all.

And Christ died so that all may come together with him through the Father. He's not interested, God is not interested in lots of little relationships of this person with God and that person with God.

God's finishing masterpiece is the church where those who are once estranged come now together and serve each other and show the heavenly rulers out there just what the power of God and the love of God is.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for this great love that you have shown us and this grace.

[ 19 : 23 ] Father, we pray that you would remind us always how we are co-sharers, co-members and co-inheritors. And these things that we have from you, we have not exclusively, but we have them through love and grace and we share them with each other through the church.

And we pray that through our demonstration of that love and things we do each day and the way we do church together that might bring glory to you as others see just how you bring people together to you and to each other.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.