Session 1

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Our first reading tonight, or the only reading tonight, comes from the book of Ephesians, verses 1 to 21. You can find it on page 1134 in the guest Bibles in front of you, if you didn't bring one.

For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you.
That is the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which is not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.
This mystery is that through God, the gospel of the Gentiles and heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus.
I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given to me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administrations of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things.
[1:19] His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In him and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.
For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom in his whole family, in heaven and on earth, derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your innermost being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know that his love that surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Not 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 the glory in the church and in Christ throughout all generations. Forever and ever. Amen.
[2:29] Well, good evening, everyone.

It's great to be here tonight. Just in case you were interested, this talk is pre-recorded on video because there was a chance that I may not be here tonight.
In fact, there's a chance I might not even be here on Sunday. We're seeing how things go. But so it's pre-recorded. And so if you want a copy of it, I'm sure we can give you a copy of it if that need be.
And so if I sleep in on Sunday, we're covered, which is great as well. Let's pray as we dive into Ephesians 3. And please, if you haven't got it already, get a Bible, open it up, put it in your lap at Ephesians 3.
You really do need to be engaging with God's word. And if you want to be convinced of that, then come on Sunday and I'll tell you why. So bow your heads, let's pray.
[3:32] Father God, we thank you for the wonderful privilege of joining together right now. We ask that you would do, as Paul prayed for the Ephesian church, immeasurably more than we could possibly ask or imagine over the course of this weekend.

Lord, we pray for your word to be powerful amongst us. We ask for your spirit to come so that the glorious gospel which has brought Jew and Gentile and people from every tribes and language and

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nations together under the headship of Jesus, that gospel will impact us, that we would understand the heightened depths of the love of Christ in such a way, Father, that you would make us a beacon of your glory and your wisdom in this world.
So, Lord, that is huge. And so we ask that you would do more than we could possibly imagine amongst this little church here in Chatswood.
And we ask it for your glory. Amen. And so here we are tonight for the continuation of our commitment series and the beginning of our partners weekend.
I wonder why. I wonder why are you here? It's Friday night. It's wet. It's cold.
[4:59] Why are you here? Why are you here and not out at the movies down at Hoyts tonight where Jack and Jill is playing, Adam Sandler, right now?

I wonder why you're not at home discovering better homes than yours on Channel 7. Or dreaming about an escape to the country on 7-2 and then realising why you haven't when you're flicked over to ABC and discover another Midsummer Murder.
Why aren't you at home winding down in front of the TV? I wonder why you're not down the road at the Bavarian Beer Cafe having, enjoying a leisurely dinner. I wonder why you're not at the gym, walking the dog.
That might be obvious. Why are you not visiting family and friends? Why are you not playing a board game? Why are you here tonight? Why are you here this weekend? Because nothing much better to do?
Maybe that's it. If there was something better to do or something more pressing, then you would have maybe given tonight a flick or maybe the course of this weekend a flick. You may not have even given it much of a second thought.
[6:08] After all, it's only church, isn't it? I wonder if you're comfortable in me putting those two words together like that, only church.

I wonder if meeting as a church is in fact an afterthought. It fits in and around other programs, plans, other agendas that I have.
Maybe that's a little strong. Maybe it's not really an afterthought, but still you wouldn't make too big of a deal about it. If you're comfortable with the words, it's only church, and if you're comfortable not making too much of a deal about it, I want to invite you into Ephesians 3 and have a look at it here with me.
You've noticed there as it was read through by Josh that the word church is mentioned twice in this chapter. In verse 10 and in verse 21.
I want you to notice the wording. Have a look there first of all with me in verse 10. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.
[7:23] The word manifold there literally means many-coloured. It means multifaceted. It's the same word used in the Old Testament for the fancy coat that Joseph wore.

The many-coloured coat of Joseph. And what it's saying here is the church is God's brightly coloured neon sign to the universe. The church is the public advertisement campaign of the wisdom of God.
Strange to glibly call it only church. And again in verse 20 and 21, Paul prays now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his wisdom that is at work within us.
To him be the glory in the church.
Of course, if you aren't doing anything else with your life. We've been called the Stabo generation, which stands for subject to a better offer.
[8:59] In the older days, you would probably, someone might call it the more polite older days, I would question that. You'd send out invitations and you would ask people to RSVP, which is French for let us know if you're coming.

And now apparently, hardly anyone does nowadays. Because instead of committing to being somewhere, we're Stabo people. Yep, you'll probably be there.
But in your head, you're thinking, unless of course a better offer comes along. Don't want to commit to anything too strongly right now, because a better offer might come up. But if it doesn't, I'll be there.

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And often we take a Stabo approach to the gathering of God's people. This is reflected at St Paul's, as it is in many churches. I regularly attend four congregations in our church.
And every one of those congregations has people arriving late. Some as much as half an hour late for church. Regularly. Regularly.
[10:07] Every week. And the other striking thing is the number of people who don't come to church regularly. It's not a weekly thing.

It's not a committed thing. It's Stabo. We'll see what else comes up. What it's saying here, and let us not miss the point here, the gathering together of church is God's beacon of his glory to the universe.
And that is the case, even if your experience of church is disappointing. Even if your experience of church might be slightly boring. Even if your experience of church might be that relationships are less than they could be.
We are here this weekend to catch a glimpse of God's intentions and to commit ourselves to that. All of us.
Whether you've been coming to church for a week, or been coming to church for 50 years. God's plan here is devastatingly simple and disarmingly beautiful.
[11:20] Paul's language bubbles over here with greatness and beauty. It's the sort of vocab that wants you to go grabbing for your dictionary just to explore a little bit more.

He's talking about the unsearchable riches of Christ in verse 8. And the manifold wisdom we've already seen in verse 10. The glorious riches of the Father in verse 16. And the love of God that surpasses knowledge in verse 19.
In wonderfully rich language that all talk about the same thing. The eternal plan of God to bring a new society together under Christ from all kinds of people who are bound together in love.
At this point, it might be a good thing for us, I think, to think back over where we've been in the last few weeks in Ephesians 1 and 2.
Paul says that there is a great inheritance. The great promises of God that the people of Israel had. The great hope of the coming King of the Jews had held onto for generations.
[12:25] Had finally arrived in the coming of the Lord Jesus. 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, the big surprise, is that when he says, you Gentiles are sharing in it.
That's the surprise. And we saw how Paul talked about us Jewish Christians, who he called the saints, and you Gentile Christians, sharing in the hope.
Sharing the inheritance together. Jews and Gentiles are being built together into one new humanity under Christ. And that is exactly the idea he continues on into chapter 3.
And that is why he is praying that this church in Ephesus would be the beacon of unity and love and the display of God's wisdom and glory to the universe.
[13:30] Now, chapter 3 is one of those chapters that's sort of messy. So you need to have your Bibles open right now so I can show you what's going on here.

It's one of those, it is messy. What happens is Paul picks up on the thought at the end of chapter 2, which says, You two are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit.
And then he begins chapter 3 sort of like, well, I'm going to pray that this, in fact, is what you will become. So he starts chapter 3 with, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles.
And then he breaks his thought. And he does this detour. And the detour lasts for 14 verses, where he says, again, For this reason I kneel before the Father.
And then he continues on with the original thought. So we've got to kind of hold Paul's train of thought together while we travel on this detour with him from verses 2 to 13.
[14:40] It's sort of like he starts into chapter 3, continuing the thought of chapter 2, but then he sort of says, hang on, before I go any further, let me remind you again of the theory.

Let me remind you of God's plan. Let me remind you of why I am here in prison and why Gentiles like you find yourself part of God's family. It's all because of this mystery that's no longer a mystery. It's all because of the plan has all finally come together. So let me remind you of that. And as you run your eye down, verses 2 to 13, you'll see he makes the same point over and over again.

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The plan that wasn't known before is now clear. The mystery that wasn't understood is now made known.
Follow it down. Verse 2. I'm assuming you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me and the way God made me a steward of his message.
[15:44] Verse 3. I'm assuming you've heard how the mystery was made known to me by revelation as I've written briefly. That is, when you read this, this letter that I'm writing, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which wasn't made known before, but now is made known through the apostles.

What used to be a mystery is now crystal clear. In verse 7, Paul is saying, and my job is to talk about this mystery made clear.
I was made a minister, a servant of this good news. My job, verse 8, is specifically to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.
And verse 9, to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. And what is this mystery that's now crystal clear?
Verse 6. This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.
[17:02] Well, that doesn't seem like much of a mystery, does it? Until we remember that he's talking about the crossing of the biggest ethnic dividing walls you can imagine, some of which Chris revealed to us last Sunday.

The gospel created instant hostility in Paul's culture. Because if you were Jewish, it was important to know that everyone had their place.
Of course, we all think that everyone has their place, and we're very quick to put them there in our minds, if not with our words and our actions. But the level of hostility here is much greater than we can understand in our current culture.
For instance, you get an idea of it, not a full idea, but an idea of it, if you lived in America in the southern states in the 1960s, where there were riots, very significant riots, over the fact that a black woman refused to stand up and give her bus seat to a white man.
People died for that. That gives you an idea of the sort of hostility. How do you cross dividing walls like that?
[18:28] How do you get this group and that group to mix together in a culture like that? No matter where you come from, this is what Paul says, the mystery is this, no matter where you come from, no matter what color you are, no matter what your ethnic background is, no matter how long you've been in the church family, if you've put your faith in the Lord Jesus, you're all part of the same body and we are all equal in the eyes of God.

The church, according to verse 10, is meant to be the display of that, the display of God's wisdom, God's full technicolor wisdom displayed in a grayscale world.
We're meant to stand out in that regard. God's glory and wisdom displayed in the church as these dividing walls are torn down in the gospel.
And there's nothing that Paul wants to see more than the Ephesians live out that reality. As he comes back from his detour into verse 14, this is the thing that he most wants to pray for.
Verses 14 to 21 is a long and 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 family.
[19:59] A prayer that God, out of the riches of his glory, might do something amazing in them by his spirit. A prayer that boils down to this in verse 17, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you being rooted and established in love. Remember, he's talking to a church made up of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. He prays that Jesus may so fill their hearts that they will really know what true love is.
Paul says in the middle of verse 14, I'm praying that you being rooted and established in love may have power. You Gentiles together with the saints to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ and to know the love of Christ that goes way beyond, way beyond all knowledge.
Way beyond all human wisdom. He says here, in other words, that this love of Christ doesn't make sense.

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It doesn't make sense that the love of Christ on a human wisdom scale encompasses all people. Everyone.
[21:26] Do you really get that? I'm not asking you, do you know it? I'm asking you, do you feel it? Because I think so often in the church, our love isn't that kind of love.

He says, I'm praying that you will together catch on to just how big the love of Jesus is and be so filled with the fullness of God.
He prays for it because when the church does it, it becomes God's great advertising campaign of his wisdom and his glory to the world, to the whole world.
And yet so often we forget that. We're still so tribal in our thinking, aren't we? We draw lines. I draw lines in my mind about who I think will respond and who I don't think will respond to the good news, the love of Christ.
I mean, we may not all do it literally, but you can imagine doing it. You sit, you can imagine who sits with who and who won't sit with who else, even on a night like tonight.
[22:46] Which family, which tribe, which generation, people who have been part of the church for 50 years, people who are just brand new, lines that you won't cross over because perhaps you haven't absorbed how grand and great the love of God is in Christ.

It's not so long ago we were watching killing in Kosovo on the news.
Serbs and ethnic Albanians, a hate that runs back a thousand years. And yet in that scenario, on both sides of the conflict, there were churches.
And in the middle of the conflict, one pastor of an Albanian Baptist church crossed over the racial divide and knocked on the door of a pastor in Belgrade.
And the pastor in Belgrade invited him into his church, invited him into his home and put him in the pulpit against all the background of all the hate that the pastor of this church in Belgrade took him in and welcomed him as a Christian brother.
[24:04] And this is what he says. We don't have anything in common apart from Christ. Is that not the point?

Is that not the point of this chapter? If you really catch on to the breadth and depth and height and width of the love of Christ, then you've started down the path of loving one another against the odds, across generations, across cultural dividing lines in a way that not only astounds the world in which we live, but the spiritual powers as well.
It's enough to make the angels rejoice and the demons to hang their heads. 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 known to the rulers and authorities in their heavenly places.
Imagine that. Imagine the angels looking down on St. Paul's Chatswood and marveling at God's eternal purposes being worked out in us and seeing the wisdom and the glory of God in a church like this.
And them going, that's what it's all about. They see God's eternal plans and purposes worked out throughout the history of the church.
[25:42] They don't know what we know. They see it displayed in front of them. Marvelling at the love that's shown in small ways but a thousand ways.

Marvelling at the church of Christ as the boundaries of the world that the world puts up, the gospel tears down between us. And so why are you here tonight?
Why are you here this weekend and not at home tonight watching TV? TV. You're here to be part of God's church. You're here to actively love one another.
You're here to demonstrate that to this world and you're here to demonstrate it to the angels in the heavenly realms. The wonder of God's plan being worked out in Christ.
The wisdom of God displayed in the church. The manifold wisdom of God. You're here to reveal to the world that alienation and self-centeredness and hatred and division don't have the final word.
[26:43] You're here to work together to display Christ's love in real ways to a world. There's always lots of work to be done to make the reality measure up to that but here's the challenge.

First of all, be here every week. Be here every week. I am very glad that the man who discipled me instilled that into me.
No question, Steve. You go to church. No question. And when you go to church, you're not there for yourself. You're there to serve. Be part of it.

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Because church on a Sunday is frankly just scratching the surface of what church is all about. Look for ways to love people, to build bridges every way you can. Don't wait for an invitation.
Don't wait to fill out an acts of service form. Come here with the anticipation that I'm going to love and I'm going to serve. Pray for it on a Saturday night. Keep looking at the love of Jesus as you see it at the cross and look for ways to imitate that amongst your brothers and sisters in Christ.
[27:57] Instead of looking for things to complain about, look for ways to love others and you'll find, you will actually discover that the things to complain about actually diminish. There's a great reminder at the end of Paul's prayer that the potential for the church to be what it should be goes way beyond even what we can dream about.

I mean, so often it is disappointing, isn't it? Because we're so lukewarm about being what we're called to be because we're self-interested even as we come together.
And yet Paul prays this in verse 20. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or even imagine according to his power that is at work within us.
And he prays that God would be glorified as people see his church being what the church should be. That the church, sorry, that God would be glorified in the church as well as in Christ Jesus from generation to generation.
What an astounding prayer. I'd encourage you to go away tonight in the course of this weekend to read through this prayer. And will you join me in making it our prayer that God's reputation in the world would be increased by St. Paul's Chatswood.
[29:22] To pray for that. As God's reputation is being torn to shreds by new atheism that St. Paul's Chatswood would increase God's reputation in the world.

that the way we love, that the way we care for one another and the way we're united under the Lord Jesus Christ will bear the sort of fruit that we cannot even possibly imagine and are even too afraid to ask for.
Let's pray. Father God, work this out and ask we pray that this prayer might be our prayer. Lord, I pray that your glory and your wisdom might be known to the world that your reputation in this world, your renown will be increased because of the ministry of this church no matter how small, no matter how large.
Lord, whatever it might be, Father God, I pray that you would help us to consistently week after week grapple with how high and wide and deep and long is the love of Christ in the Lord Jesus. Love of God in the Lord Jesus. Father, we pray that we will continually go to the cross, see the love of Christ there and realize that that love is for all people and that we would take those steps to love each other and we ask it for your sake.
[30:46] Amen.

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