

A New Family to SERVE

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[0 : 00] Good morning, y'all. It'd be great if you could grab a copy of the sermon outline today with the Bible text on it. And also, it's on the St. Paul's app. So if you want to get it down, the St. Paul's app takes a while. It would be fantastic. So I wonder why are you here? I wonder why you're not down at the cinemas. I wonder why you're not winding down in front of the television at home. Iron Chef America is on after all. I wonder why you're not at the beach. I wonder why you're not even just down shopping at Westfield.

Why are you not at the gym, visiting friends, family? I wonder if maybe you're just here because, well, there isn't anything else to do. There's no other pressing needs. There's no parties on. The kids' sports not on right now. I wonder if, for instance, your thinking is, well, it is only church after all. And so when something more pressing does come up, then, well, that just takes precedence. I wonder if you're comfortable with the way those words run together. Only church. I do wonder whether church fits in and around everything else that's on. Certainly statistics of church attendance would certainly indicate that. And even those who regard themselves as mature Christians think that two out of four is called regular nowadays.

Maybe it's not an afterthought. But maybe it's just something that you've done. It's not so much, you know, you're actually here regularly, but it's just something that you have always done. You have just come to church. You've grown up just coming to church. And so you don't give any thought to it. You don't give any preference. You just do it like a habit, like you clean your teeth. Same kind of thing. For various conversations I've had with parents, I've noticed that parents struggle to answer the question when their kids ask them, why do we go to church? Haven't actually thought about it. Haven't got a biblical answer to it. So if you're comfortable with the words, it's only church, or comfortable just making it a daily habit or a weekly habit and not really thinking it's, or you're just in that phase of life where there's potentially a creeping cynicism, confusion, apathy, then I want you to see something wonderful today. While your experience of church might have been disappointment, boring, confusing, or relationships that have been less than what they could be, today we are catching a glimpse of God's intention for his church. And if you've got the sermon outline, you'll see that I've got three ideas. We're a new family, we're a united family, and then some practical application on being a brilliant family.

[3 : 44] Last week, we saw the incredible scope of God's plan for the universe through time and eternity of the Lord Jesus. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has redeemed us from sin, from death and captivity to selfishness and the ego. And no religious duty, no moral effort on our behalf contributes to it. We are liberated from slavery to sin to be who God has made us to be in the first place. We're being set free to praise and serve. And you may recall that at the end of chapter 1, Paul prays that people would see the evidence of God's mighty sovereign grace at work in the world. He prays that people would see that evidence in the world. And now in these verses, we see one of the major, if not the major evidence of God's work in his world.

inside the church, there are people living together in peace and harmony and deep relationship who outside the church could never get along.

God's plan of salvation in Jesus doesn't just bring us back into relationship with God, God's plan of salvation in Jesus. And it brings us back together.

I see what the saving work of Jesus accomplished. Chapter 2, verse 14, for he himself, this is Jesus, is our peace who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. Now the word hostility is used twice in these verses.

And it's a word that means hate. And the test case, if you like, the case study that Paul uses is the deep historical hatred between Jew and Gentiles, which is basically Jews and everyone else.

[6 : 03] not only has the death of Jesus brought down the dividing wall of hostility and hatred between us and God, but also the dividing wall of hostility and hatred between people.

Even centuries of deep hatred. But it goes a step further. It's not just the dividing wall has been ripped down. Halfway through verse 15, we read, 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.

God's purpose in salvation is to create a new humanity in Jesus. A new family in Jesus. We are not a club.

A club is where you share one or two common interests with other people. So, for instance, if you're a tennis club, you share the interest of tennis.

Or you share the interest of wearing white. Whatever it is. But you share one or two connected things. Points of connection. As part of an ethnic group, you have a much more profound connection with people of the same ethnic group than you do if you're a member of a club.

[7 : 46] There are possibly hundreds of points of connection that you would have and history that you would have with an affinity group as an ethnic group. And Paul is saying here that when you become a Christian, the connection points are even deeper and more profound than ethnicity.

This connection is more deeper, more extensive than any other connection point. So much so that as an Anglo-Australian, I have a greater connection with other Christians of other cultures than I do with people who are of my own ethnic group who are not Christian.

What the gospel of Jesus does when he rescues us from selfishness and the ego, Jesus reshuffles the layers in our ego deck or identity decks.

My and your cultural heritages do not get obliterated in the Lord Jesus. They are just put in their right place. I am still an Anglo-Australian male from rural northwest New South Wales.

The only place on the planet where the English language is spoken without an accent. There is irony in that statement in case you haven't picked it up.

[9 : 22] And you are who you are with your cultural identity markers.

That doesn't change. But our connection and our unity with Jesus trumps it all. It all. The church is a new humanity, a new family with a new identity.

In Jesus, God has made it possible for us to get over the horrible, horrible divisions of the human race. God displays the wisdom and the worth and the saving power of Jesus to the world through his new family.

You may have noticed that the church, the word church is mentioned twice in chapter 3, verses 10 and 21.

I want you to notice the wording. First of all, 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.

[10 : 40] Manifold, the word manifold in verse 10 means literally many colored. Many, multifaceted wisdom of God.

And it's the same word that's used in the Old Testament for Joseph and his many colored cloak.

The church is God's many colored, diverse church.

The church is his brightly colored neon sign to the universe. The church is the public advertisement of the glorious wisdom of God.

God's plan is devastatingly simple and disarmingly beautiful. His eternal plan is to bring a new family together under Christ from all kinds of people who are bound together in love, who outside the church are opposed to one another.

That's his plan. Secondly, we're a united family. The emphasis in chapter 2, verses 19 and 22 is we are not just together in the same sort of area, but that we're in fact united.

[12 : 14] Verse 19 says that we are his household. We are his children. We are his family. We are his eternal family. It also says that we are his temple.

You see, what happens in the move from household to temple, the intensity builds to the final image. In verses 21 to 22, we are his temple being built together for his spirit to dwell in for his glory.

A king lives in a country with his subjects, but there may be no relationship between the king and the subjects. A father lives under the same roof with his children.

If you're a citizen of a country, you might live next door to each other. You may live long way from each other. You may have no connection with each other at all. But if you're a child growing up with siblings, you are living in very close proximity to one another.

That's what happens with family. Of course, however, as you move the metaphors to temple, if you are stones in a building, you're cemented to each other.

[13:36] The image here at the end of chapter 2 is of our unity, our connectedness, our togetherness in Jesus. And this theme of togetherness and unity flows over into chapter 3, where Paul prays that the church will be a beacon of unity and love to the world.

Ephesians 3 is one of those chapters that's very messy. You might have picked that up as you read to us just a moment ago. So Paul begins chapter 3 with, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles.

And then he stops. It's like he breaks his thought halfway through and goes on a detour. You know how frustrating that is when people do that and you're talking to them and you're trying to work out how is this connected with what, you know, you've started the sentence but you haven't kind of finished it?

And this little detour of Paul's lasts until verse 14, where he says, For this reason I knew before the Father.

And so what you've got to do is you've got to hold his train of thought while he travels on this detour from verses 2 to 13. And the detour, he's like, this is kind of his idea of the detour.

[15:00] Let me remind you of God's plan. Let me remind you of why I'm here in prison and why Gentiles like you find yourself part of God's family. It's all because of the mystery.

That's no longer a mystery. It's all because of the plan that finally came together. And as you run your eye down verses 2 to 13, you'll see he makes the same point over and over and over again. The plan that wasn't known before is now clear. And verse 6 is what has been made known.

The 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.

Together, together, together. And there's nothing that Paul wants to see more than the Ephesians living out their togetherness.

[16:20] As he comes back from the detour in verse 14, that's the thing that he is moved 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 diverse and a united family.

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.

He prays that Jesus may so fill their hearts that they'll know what real love looks like.

Paul says, middle of verse 17, 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 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 knowledge.

[17:40] That's what we looked at last week. It's what we see in his many blessings that he's poured out to us.

Every spiritual blessing in Jesus. And the more we grapple with every spiritual blessing in Jesus, the more the layers of our identity deck gets reshuffled till he sits at the top, always.

Paul says here, it doesn't make sense, but the love of Christ encompasses all kinds of people.

Paul's praying that we will together catch on 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, they become God's great advertising campaign to the world. Over 20 years ago, there was a war raging in Kosovo between Serbs and ethnic Albanians.

That war came on the back of a cultural hatred that had run for over a thousand years from both sides.

[19:04] And it resulted in terrible crimes against humanity. There were Christian churches on both sides of that divide.

And right in the middle of the conflict where ethnic cleansing is happening, one pastor of an Albanian Baptist church in Pristina crossed over the racial divide and preached in a Serbian church

on the opposite side of the conflict, filled with Serbians.

Against the background of all the hate, the pastor of the church in Belgrade took this man into his home and put him in his pulpit.

And the pastor said, we don't have much in common apart from Christ. And that's the point.

If you really catch on 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 and a shared discomfort when we meet.

[20 : 27] Against the odds, against the generations, against the cultural dividing lines in a way that not only astounds the world around us when they see the way we love one another, but the spiritual powers as well.

Did you see that? It's enough to make the angels rejoice and the demons hang their heads in shame.

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 authorities in the 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 monsters.

Marveling at the glory of the gospel as the boundaries the world puts up come down between us.

We're here to be part of God's church.

[21 : 35] We're here to actively love one another. We're here to demonstrate to this world and the angels in the heavenly realms the wonders 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 the world. So if you're a parent and your kid asks you, why are we going to church?

Oh, kiddo, we're going to demonstrate to the world and to the angels in the heavenly realms the wonders of God's plan of salvation. The world's plan of salvation worked out in Jesus Christ.

The beach is not inviting. It can wait. It'll be better in heaven anyway. So how do we work it out?

[22 : 47] How do we be God's brilliant family? It's passages like this and many others in the New Testament behind our purpose statement which normally is on the wall behind me.

You can find this in our vision booklet for this year, the stuff I'm about to say now. Behind our purpose statement, that is, our purpose statement is the reason we exist as a church and our one says that we treasure Jesus together for God's glory and the joy of all people.

See the connection with what I just said from Ephesians 2 and 3? That's why we exist. This passage also lies behind what we're seeking to do together. Our vision as a church here in Chatswood is to be a church that unites our diverse community in the good news of Jesus Christ so that more and more and more people through the gospel have the layers of their identity and we're going to be shuffled by Jesus.

And passages like this lie behind our strategy how we're going to achieve our vision to unite our diverse community in Jesus. We will achieve our vision by being a transcultural church, not a multicultural church, a transcultural church, displaying the manifold wisdom of God to our livelihood.

That means that we reflect, we embrace, and we enjoy all the diversity of the context of our neighborhood, all the ways that God has made us while in the power of the gospel having our identity decks reshuffled, rising above all the cultural differences that are amongst us and being united together as a community, as a family under Jesus.

[24 : 34] He becomes supreme. He's the one who connects us. We do not try and find cultural connection. We rise above it and find connection and unity in Jesus.

Therefore, what that means in practice, we develop united congregations like this one that reflect the ethnic, generational, social, economic diversity of our neighborhood and we deliberately, deliberately work against the homogenous unit principle that wants to segregate people into affinity groups.

We will use the unifying language of our neighborhood in all our corporate gatherings and communications. We develop mature disciples of the Lord Jesus who are equipped with skills and cultural intelligence to serve across cultures.

So there is deeper appreciation of our differences and we develop culturally diverse leadership teams across all layers of decision making.

Now there's work to do to make that reality measure up here at St. Paul's and sin will always get in the way. But we must fight for it.

[25 : 50] I'm glad that Nick and John are at this morning at a church called Parkside Church down near Fairfield, a church of about 700, 800 people where 50 different nationalities are gathered together in these kinds of congregations.

just learning about how to do it better. Now no church can be totally inclusive but how do we stretch to be more ethnically and culturally and socially inclusive?

How do we work hard to have a shared discomfort when we meet? That's to keep the gospel in front of us Sunday by Sunday by Sunday before we come, after we've been, while we're here.

How do we work, sacrifice and serve to be who we are? See if you're a Christian you've been called into God's new family and you have been called into deep relationships and deep involvement in the Christian family.

You cannot love and serve in shallow relationships. How deep? How deep? I hear you ask. That's a silly question to ask at this time of the day but I'm going to go into it anyway.

[27 : 16] Deep enough for personal accountability. I've got three things to say in this. Deep enough for personal accountability. We are the same family. One thing you'll know about growing up in a family is transparency.

That is, your family knows who you are and you know who they are. There's, they wipe your nose, they change your nappies.

Your facades don't work in a family when you grow up and you're going to fit. They know who you are. On occasion while growing up when I got ahead of myself in self-importance, my dad would say to me, don't forget I wiped your bottom.

that's just a, you know, put me back down there. No facades in a family.

Transparency is essential. So I want to ask you in this church family, transparency is essential. Are there people who know your habitual sins because you've told them and then given them a hunting license to come after you if they see that you're indulging in them?

[28 : 34] Our family relationships also need to be as deep as whole life hospitality. A family lives together. In a family you share each other's space and things. You eat, you play, you work together.

Hospitality is letting people into your whole life. It's not just putting on a meal for people. It's letting them into your whole life. It's not just about showing up to church events. Like we are colleagues. It's not about turning up as students to study or club to play tennis. We are brothers and sisters. We also need to deepen our relationships to the point of corporate spirituality.

God comes to us as a gathered people. He inhabits us as a gathered people. We need to talk about our prayer life, what it's like.

We need to talk about how real God is in our heart, what God is teaching us through the Bible. The reason why we don't do that is either because we are chronically, chronically shy, which the Spirit of God can get over, or because those things are actually not happening.

[29 : 51] They're actually not happening. In his book, The Four Loves, C.S. Lewis has a chapter on friendship. It's a great book.

I'd encourage you everyone to read it. Lewis, as he was over a long period of time, was one of three friends. They were, if you like, co-BFFs.

There was Lewis, there was Ronald, and Charles, three of them, three of them co-best friends. Tragically, Charles died.

As great as Lewis was about the death of Charles, he thought to himself, at least I've got Ronald. He assumed he would now be closer to Ronald because there's just the two of them now.

And therefore, he would get more of Ronald. He doesn't have to share Ronald anymore. As the weeks and the months went by after Charles died, Lewis discovered that this in fact wasn't the case.

[30 : 58] He discovered he actually got less of Ronald. And he finally realized that there was a side, a part of Ronald, a personality bit of Ronald, that he could not bring out of Ronald.

And that that bit was now lost to him. He goes on to say, it takes a community to really know a person.

because any individual is not enough to draw the whole person out. People are complex, people are deep, and we cannot know someone by ourselves.

We need a community to know them. And friends, it's the same with Jesus. We get to know Jesus better together.

The deeper you get into the spiritual life of friends, the deeper you get into Jesus. And if you're not getting deep in Jesus, there's a connection there between how deep you are getting into the spiritual life of others.

[32 : 21] Jesus. And the deeper you get into Jesus, the deeper your unity and your love as a family. If you want to experience the surpassing power of God in your life as Paul prays for, you need to plunge yourself into his new family.

To the degree that you serve your new family is the degree of depth you will get into Jesus and embrace your eternal identity as members of his family. And so as we look to the year ahead and throw ourselves into God's family in service of one another, may Paul's prayer in verse 20 be our prayer.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is work in us.

Amen.