

Sermon Notes from Pastor Lloyd – 12th June 2022

EPHESIANS 1 – GOD’S THINK BIG WILL ROCK YOUR WORLD

Written by Paul during his imprisonment. The plan and purpose of God is the story behind this book. What is God’s plan and purpose for us and this world? We trod the streets of Ephesus three years ago – here we are walking down its main street...what an amazing place this is. These days its ruins are miles inland as the harbour has silted up but when Paul wrote this letter to the church it was a bustling seaport. Some photos from its remains show its library, main street and a newly excavated hill that has unearthed buildings with intricate décor. We watched as people tried to fit broken pieces together like a giant jigsaw. Many years ago NZ had a prime minister called Robbie Muldoon. And under his leadership, the country embarked upon some ‘**Think Big Projects**’. A number of them failed spectacularly, including the huge Methanol plant just outside New Plymouth where we lived. It was supposed to be the energy answer to oil but what we discovered years later was that nobody wanted methanol when natural gas could be produced more efficiently. But did you know that God has a think big project? Today I’m going to share it with you. But before we do that let’s just refresh ourselves with the opening verses of this chapter.

Paul reminds us that when you have Christ you have everything you need. Because when you received Christ into your life by the Holy Spirit you received every blessing and supply that God the Father has for you. The chapter then goes on to clarify just some of those blessings. **Chosen and adopted** – we are probably familiar with teachings about being chosen and adopted. You don’t have to always understand something for it to be true. That God has chosen you *yet you also chose him* is another of the mysteries of faith. Both statements are true. Adopted means you are not only chosen but you are inheritors of God's wealth being born into his family. You did nothing to earn being bought into his family, he put his choice on you and you are simply the recipient of his favour or grace. But your future is certain and assured. Now I don’t want to teach anymore on this because you will have heard a lot about this for sure. It’s a fairly common topic for preachers.

For what purpose is all this? - This morning I want to focus on something that is less often preached on because it's controversial. What we have in this chapter is some teaching about God's ultimate plan for the world and universe. We are going from you and your faith and your choice to God and his purpose....I want to focus this morning on verses 9-10 in particular. Through science, the microscope has opened up amazing worlds like our DNA and advances in the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Never before have we known so much about this amazing world and the created order. But we are going to turn and look through not a microscope this morning but a telescope. Beyond this world to others.... When we were recently in the South Island at Tekapo we saw Mount St John. There on a cloudless night, it's one of the best places on the planet to see the stars, planets, and galaxies. This morning I want to try and give you a Mount St John experience of God's purposes for this world. The answer is here in the first chapter of Ephesians – it’s a Christian universe. ‘To unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth’.

Whoa – let's back up the bus for a minute! Does that mean what I think it means? That one day everything will be Christian in the universe and bought under Christ's authority? We have recently added the history channel on our TV and a lot of it is about wars and the rise and fall of nations and civilisations. What we can learn about history is that nothing lasts! The great civilisations come and go over time but there appears to be no clear lasting pattern – many have tried to discern it but none can nail it.

Here is what some have said about this – **HAL Fisher's** conclusion was "In history, there is no plot, no rhythm, no pattern only one emergency following another". **Oscar Wilde** called history a 'criminals agenda'. What we can say is that there is a plan and a purpose and a plot and it's this – the universe is going to be Christian! All creation is moving forward to this. So as this world wobbles on its axis with war after war, and the posturing of man's power and control – we know from the Word of God that this is all moving towards a climax where God and his kingdom will reign.

Some years ago when we were in **Geneva** we saw the man-made attempt by John Calvin, the 16th-century reformer, to create a Christian city. A New Jerusalem was his vision. He called it the 'City of God' - a model of what Kingdom living here on earth might be like. But it failed and he was burned at the stake for his heresy for departing from the true faith of the Catholic Church. God will bring about this reign of Jesus in his time and in his way.

This chapter is God's purpose for his world and you. Just contrast with me for a minute about the ways we often think or speak about faith.

- I chose Him is think (small).....He chooses me is think (big).
- Christ helps me in my problems (small) ...Christ fills all in all (big).
- I want to be comfortable, happy, and healthy (small) ... I want to be whatever God wants me to be (big).
- I have received gifts from God (small)we are gifts to God (big).

What Paul is trying to do in this chapter is encourage us to see the big picture. To let go of our me and my salvation, me and my problems, me and my choice, me and my life story – and see where this is all heading. We have learned today that God's purpose and plan for this world is a Christian Universe with Christ at the center. It's not dissimilar to the picture we see in the final chapters of Revelation and the teaching in the 2nd chapter of Colossians v15-20. It feels amazing, warm, inclusive, and powerful. I like what God is planning. It feels like the way the story should end up with a great finale. **But what does this mean for now?** What are the disturbing implications of this amazing truth? Here is where this gets difficult.

We have grown up in the evangelical Protestant genre of faith. It has stressed the personal choice of the gospel for salvation and regeneration. Concurrently with this stands the teaching in the gospels on hell for those who reject the truth about Jesus. Now, how do we align this gospel with today's teaching on a Christian universe with all things being bought under the authority of Christ? Have we so personalised faith that we miss the bigger picture of God's purpose for all people to come to faith and bow the knee to Jesus? Just how do we reconcile this incredible future that these verses clearly teach with other passages of scripture that stress equally personal choice and its consequences?

And if this amazing universal church is our future what are the implications now? What then is the **nature of hell and separation from God**? Is it temporal or eternal and if eternal punishment - how can this sit alongside the character of God as a loving Father who desires that all will come to faith? How could a God of love get any pleasure by relegating people to eternal damnation and torture by fire? What does this mean for the **preaching of the gospel** now to people who need to hear it? If there is some later opportunity for people to respond to Jesus and be overwhelmed by him and bow the knee, why do we need to bother? What does this mean for **those who have never heard** about Jesus? Will they be given an opportunity to hear of him and believe? Can they be included in this Christian universe? What does this say about the **efficacy (or power) of Christ's sacrificial death** on Calvary if it cannot save all people for all time? Is it limited to a certain number of people as some assert – or is it powerful enough to save all people and all nations for all time, and even retrospectively backward from the cross to those who have previously died. It may come as surprise to you that some of the early Christian theologians came to the conclusion that a universal salvation was not only God's intent and plan but a compelling and believable option.

Now I've raised some really big questions here this morning. But let me be clear about what I have shared with you:

God's purpose and plan for this world is a Christian universe.

The Bible and the gospel are moving toward the kingdom coming to earth – it began with Jesus and will continue with the church telling his story of death & resurrection.

How God does this I don't fully know. What I do know is that we have the great commission to go into all the world and share this message.

Having put forward this amazing truth about a universal kingdom....Paul finishes this chapter with an equally compelling teaching about personal faith and responsibility. The final part of the chapter reminds us of the **three ways we came to faith**. And it is here that I think the truth is found in what appears to be a paradox. It is not either/or, it is both/and!

You **heard** the good news about Jesus (but God chose you). You **believed** it and were born or regenerated into the kingdom (but God adopted you) You were **sealed** with the Holy Spirit – God's stamp is on you. Now I want you to note that all this final part of the chapter comes back to personal choice and the freedom to choose....indeed even the **necessity** to choose. But how then does this fit alongside the teaching of verses 9 and 10?

Here's where I want to share with you a **principle of Bible interpretation** that is essential to hold onto. *Where two things look apparently contradictory which is correct?* Which do we choose? One way of working through this is to ask the question... Which of these requires something of me that I can affect here and now? – or to put this another way – which of the two requires God to do something I have little or no control over? You see, to go to what is called the 'universalism theology' requires nothing for you because it's all about God and what He will do. It's a convenient 'out' for you to justify neglecting the sharing of the gospel. God will save who he wants to when He wants to without our help. A revelation of who Jesus is and the opportunity to choose him at any future time is nothing you can bring about.

Here is the principle – ***you are responsible for what you can effect and have been charged to do***. To preach the gospel message in and out of season, to convince people about Jesus. And to urge people to make their choice about Jesus. Isn't it just amazing that the same writer of Ephesians also wrote Colossians where this teaching about a Christian universe is proposed but equally so he is passionate about people coming to faith and being sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Here is what it boils down to. Will I allow something apparently contradictory that I read in the Bible to send me down a rabbit hole that exonerates my personal responsibility?

Let me return to the jigsaw tiles of Ephesus in closing. Theology is our explanation of truth as revealed in scripture. Sometimes our explanations look contradictory or weak when they come under scrutiny. We fumble around like these tiles with pieces of truth trying to make them fit into the picture **we want to create**. Or to put it more clearly – to make the gospel package what we think it should be...because that's our story!

But here's what you can be certain of. God will put together his plan for this world and universe with Christ at its center. How he does that is with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Do I fully understand how he chose me yet allows me the freedom to choose him – No.... how all the world will be a Christian universe where every knee will bow to the glory of God the Father – No. Friends the final word on this chapter is this – you don't have to understand something completely for it to be true. God is going to do this his way his time and he invites us to participate with Him to bring this amazing future about.... "Go into all the world (cosmos) and preach the gospel to every person" was his final command to us....that's what **we are to do**. One day all creation will be bought under the authority and reign of King Jesus – **that's what He will do!**