

Pastor Lloyd's Sermon Notes – 3rd July 2022

EPHESIANS 3 GRACE AND MERCY THE CULTURE OF THE KINGDOM

We finished up two weeks ago speaking about: the **body** of Christ that is a working living entity and its *connectedness*, this new **building** God is making with Jesus was the cornerstone from which all *alignment* is to be taken; where the walls have come down between races, colours, ethnicity and cultures, wealth and even genders. In fact, there are *no rules* in the kingdom **but one**! Love God and love people. And God has done this by dismantling the two greatest barriers that prevented this from happening. The barrier between him and us and then us and each other. Instead of separation there is inclusion, instead of hierarchy there is one level for all, instead of knowledge and enlightenment for a few; *all* will be taught by the Spirit, instead of a top-down leadership; all people would be gifted by the Spirit. And here's the kicker.... God had *always* planned it this way. Isn't that an amazing concept....and to think that's what we are! Now immediately I see a huge problem. We the church do not always get this right. We need to get more of the kingdom into the church! And the only way for that to happen is for the church to live out the kingdom in our daily lives. Today I want to try and answer the question - ***Why doesn't the church look like the kingdom?***

In the opening part of Chapter 3, Paul describes himself using different names. For me, I am a husband, but I'm also a father, a pastor, a musician, and a renovator. Paul introduces himself in this chapter as someone who wears many hats. They are all important because they say something about him. ***I am a prisoner – of Christ.*** What he means here is twofold – yes, he is in prison but more than that - he has been hopelessly and forever captured by Christ. His heart at the core of his being has been captivated. So now the only agenda he has is what God has prepared for him to do. Which right now appears to be sitting in jail writing and praying for these new churches. So, whether he is in or out of jail, he is still a prisoner! I wonder if you see yourself as being captivated by Jesus? ***I am a steward – of God's grace:*** What is a steward – he is a manager of someone else's property. Paul says he is a manager of God's grace– A dispenser of God's grace, a kind of distributor of God's wealth to others. What an awesome description of someone's life. I go around dispensing grace to people. But a steward also has the responsibility to ensure the grace is not wasted, he wants to see the results of his stewardship. I will return to this later in the message. ***I am a minister – of the gospel – a servant.*** Now instead of being a Pharisee who observes and judges others by their adherence to the laws of religion. He says I am a servant of all. A *doulos* (slave servant). How can I help you? How can I serve you? How can I assist you? So, the core meaning of the word minister is a 'servant'. ***I am a Truth teller – a proclaimer.*** Now here is an interesting one, a truth-teller is someone who tells the truth regardless of its appeal to others. They do not measure their delivery by how receptive those listening are. They do not modify or water down the message to make it easier on the ears. They are simply proclaiming the news about Jesus. The cross is not only a mystery it is a stumbling block for many, it is even offensive. ***I am an Explainer of God's ways – a teacher of God's mysteries.*** I like this one, Paul is a teacher and imparter of God's Word. You know there is no

greater privilege than to do this. Especially to teach the more difficult truths that require people to stretch their thinking.

This means as we journey through life we need to amend, upgrade, and change our thinking about some things as the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to us. Let me ask you something, have you changed your mind on something about God and his Word over recent years or months? – I hope so!!! Today's verse I want to focus on that sums up this new culture of kingdom living is Ephesians 2: 4,8,10 In these verses there is the key to why the church doesn't always reflect the kingdom. *But God who is so rich in mercy...It is only by God's grace you have been saved.... God saved you by his grace when you believed.... He has created us anew in Christ Jesus so we can do the good works he planned for us long ago. There it is: In Mercy by Grace through Faith for good works!!!!*

Let me tell you a **modern-day parable** that illustrates this:

In the early 1900s, there was a Danish writer named Karen Blixen. The story is set in Denmark around a remote fishing village with muddy streets, houses that were little more than hovels, and impoverished people who were austere staunch Lutherans. They wore plain black clothing and ate gruel with boiled cod. On Sundays, they gathered to sing the songs of faith but with no joy, as they had lived a life of hardship and poverty. The Dean of the village was a white-bearded old man with two beautiful teenage daughters. In the next fifteen years, both daughters resisted the advances of several suitors and settled into the rhythm of village life as middle-aged spinsters. After their father died the two girls were determined to carry on the mission of their late father. But cracks began to emerge in relationships and the sect splintered badly. One bore a grudge against the other over a business matter, there were rumours of a 30-year-old sexual affair involving two others, and two women had not spoken to each other for over a decade. But they still met on a Sunday singing the old hymns dressed in their drab clothes and ate the same gruel and cod. One night it was raining and there was a thump at their door, when the sisters opened it, a woman collapsed on the step. She spoke no Danish but handed them a letter of introduction from afar. The woman's name was Babbette who had lost her husband and son during the civil war in France, her life was in danger she had fled and found a ship sailing to Denmark where she was hoping for a new start. Babbette can cook the note said. With no money to pay Babbette, the sisters offered room and board in return for doing chores. Babbette worked for the next ten years for the sisters, the first time she was shown how to make gruel or prepare the cod Babbette's nose twitched and her eyebrows shot upward but she never questioned her assignments. She fed the poor people of the village and even helped the sisters with their Sunday services, Babbette brought life to a stagnant community. Babbette never spoke of her past life in France but one day after twelve years a letter came for her informing her that she had won the French lottery and the prize was 10,000 francs. The sisters were delighted with the news but their hearts sank when they realised that soon Babbette would be leaving. This windfall of money coincided with a planned anniversary celebration of the faithful few whose numbers by now had declined to just eleven. Babbette came to the sisters and announced. "In all the time with you, I have asked for nothing, but I now have but one request. Let me prepare the anniversary celebration meal. I would like to cook for you a real French dinner". What choice did the sisters have really but to agree? The money arrived from France and then so did the

food and wine. Ship after ship arrived with provisions for Babbette's kitchen. Barrow loads came with crates of livestock, cases of the best champagne, meat, fresh vegetables, truffles, pheasants, ham, seafood, and even tortoise.

All agreed to eat the meal Babbette would make even though they had misgivings. Then they learned that an invited guest would arrive to eat with them escorted by one of the young cavalry officers who had courted one of the sisters years ago, he was now a general serving in the royal palace. Babbette scrounged fine china and crystal from various houses and set the table. The meal began and the villagers by agreement sat mute around the table. Only the general remarked on the food and drink – that's the finest Amontillado I have ever tasted, the soup he said I would swear was turtle soup but where would that have come from around these parts? "Incredible!" he announced when the next course was Blinis Demi doff. While the rest of the gathered faithful ate the rare delicacy without expression or comment. And washed down with the finest Verve Clique 1860 Champagne. He alone seemed to appreciate what was set before him. Gradually the feast began to work its magic on the eleven. One brother confessed to the other that he had cheated him, the two women spoke to each other, and one even burped which caused quite an uproar. The general though could only speak of the meal. When the main course was brought out which was baby quail cooked in an exquisite sauce the general exclaimed that he had tasted that dish in only one place before in all of Europe which was the famous Café Anglais in Paris! That restaurant was renowned for its head chef who was a woman. After the meal the general rose to speak and began his speech "mercy and truth have met together", then he paused, for he usually prepared his speeches well beforehand. His uniform is covered with ribbon and decorations from past victories. "Surely grace has visited us this day". His speech was lost on the brothers and sisters of the Lutheran sect that day and they departed the feast and made their way home across the snow-laden ground and sky above ablaze with stars. Babbette's feast ends with two scenes. The eleven faithful joining hands outside under the stars singing the old songs of faith around the fountain and celebrating communion. Babbette's feast opened the gate and grace stole its way into their lives. The final scene takes place in the kitchen piled high with plates, pots, and leftovers, everything unwashed. Babbette sits amid the vegetable trimmings and empty bottles and looks as wasted as she did on the night she arrived on their doorstep twelve years before. "It was quite a nice dinner" one of the two sisters said to Babbette. Babbette seems far away and after a time she says to them. "I was once a cook at the Café Anglais". The other sister says "We will remember this night once you have left us and gone back to France" she seemed not to have heard Babbette's former employ. Babbette tells them she will not be going back to Paris. All her friends have been killed or imprisoned, "But you have the money – the 10,000 francs to start a new life"! Then Babbette drops the bombshell, she has **spent all her winnings, every last franc on the feast they have just devoured**. Don't be shocked she tells them. That is what a proper dinner for twelve costs at the Café Anglais.

The writer is trying to convey to us something in the story. Babbette's feast is not a story about a meal but it's a parable of grace. **The gift that costs everything for the giver and nothing for the recipient.** Grace demands nothing from us but gratitude. The faithful few

had heard sermons about grace every week but then went out and tried to live by the rules and pieties during the week. But grace came to them in the form of a meal that they had in no way earned and who barely understood nor even acknowledged it....no strings attached, on the house. And friends.... the reason why the church doesn't reflect the kingdom is found in this parable. ***We are so busy being spiritual that we miss the party of God.***

Grace and mercy are freely available to us but we keep eating gruel and singing our songs. What the World desperately needs to see is us having a party with the gifts of God, and where decisions we make day by day are graceful and merciful. We are the grace dispensers. Grace is the only thing we have that the World does not have. That is the culture of the kingdom. ***Grace and mercy are the two legs of love.*** Sadly, for many people the church is not the place they would think of nor come to when seeking out a place of love, mercy, and grace. We have not done this well. In our lives and churches, we are many times graceless, judgemental, and unforgiving. Graceless Christianity has turned off many people from Christ. Graceless Christianity has divided churches, marriages, and relationships. You know the world can copy most of what we do as Christians, they can copy our good works, our emotional singing and music, our volunteerism and care for the sick and dying - every other aspect of our faith except one thing – ***they cannot copy grace.*** Because grace is something that ***comes from outside us....***to you and then through you. God generates grace, not us! Left to ourselves we are graceless. You don't manufacture grace it comes from God. Grace is difficult to explain....it is more something which is done than dissected. EB Whites got it right when he said "grace can be dissected like a frog but in the process of doing so the things dies in the process"! Usually, grace is set against something else to help define it.... law and grace, shame and grace, forgiveness and grace, injustice and grace.... but grace and mercy just are because they originate with God our creator. Grace was his idea. Grace and mercy is his culture, that makes us different to the world's way of doing stuff. The best book on grace other than the Bible is in my view Philip Yancey's "What so Amazing about Grace"? I long for a Church where grace and mercy are the culture: *I come in mercy – not judgment* (my approach to any situation). *I live by grace – not the rules* (my new measurable standard for life). *I operate through faith* – not by what I can see (my unseen dimension). *I long for good works* – not a performance-based life (my motivation for living).

In **verse 10** of this chapter, Paul tells us what happens when we the church enforce the kingdom rule of love here on earth. And the impact of it might surprise you. – we are to ***declare it to the principalities and powers in the heavenly realms.*** Heaven is watching us and how we live out this new kingdom living. Something powerful happens in heaven and the Spirit world when we do this. It's almost like Jesus is saying – "Did you see that"? That's my kingdom of grace and mercy! Maybe this kind of culture can only be born in us through prayer....it doesn't seem to come naturally. **Verse 14, I bow my knee before the Father** – because I can only pray to effect change. Only God can bring about lasting change in our lives. Only grace will enable you to forgive. Only grace will release you from judgemental attitudes that will drown you.

Paul prays for five things – all of which start with God not us:

Inner man – not outer. Strong conscience, strong will, convinced mind, and loving heart...

Indwelt by Jesus – that he will be at home in your heart **Established** – rooted and grounded (below the surface). **Enlarged** – small thinking, small-minded, ego-centric, big picture. **Filled with God** - completeness to your worldview - where He does more than we ask or even think.... filled with God is to be filled with grace!