

**Now to Live the Life – The purpose driven church – Ephesians 3:1-13**  
**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017**

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On a day like this I'm sure you'll agree that listening to a testimony like Shaun's makes me realise what a privilege it is to be part of the family here at Locking Castle. Shaun said to me in the week that he hoped sharing his story would shine a light, and boy, didn't it just! When you hear someone who has suffered so much knowing that God loves him and has a good plan for his life, it really is wonderful and somewhat mind-blowing.

But so often we find in the Bible that God confounds our expectations and sensibilities. The apostle Paul wrote that after he had prayed three times to be delivered from the pain of what he called his 'thorn in the flesh', the Lord spoke to him and said 'my grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.' What a totally amazing thing to say! Totally opposite to what the world would usually expect or accept. God turns worldly wisdom completely on its head.



Over the past few months we have seen two world leaders engaging in an increasingly hostile war of words and actions. Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump have traded apocalyptic threats, personal insults and military sabre rattling in what seems to simply be a bid for power and status on the global stage. They seem to think that wisdom dictates escalating demonstrations of power and hostility.

Yet imagine a different scenario. Imagine Trump and Kim recognising that they are children of the same heavenly Father, and that mounting hostilities are simply fruitless and destructive for everyone. Imagine they mutually offered to lay down weapons in order to seek the common good. Imagine both Mr Trump and Mr Kim embracing peace, freedom of speech and freedom of worship for everyone... Does this sound somewhat unlikely to you? Ridiculous even?

Well that is the incredible vision of the Kingdom of heaven. The Bible says that one day all creation will be united, at peace and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.



Ephesians 1 v9 calls this the mystery of his will. It will happen one day and it's already started in many places and situations over the course of the last 2000 years since Jesus came to be with us. If we can just take hold of a little bit of that vision for ourselves today, just like Shaun has in his life and circumstances then the world would be truly a glorious place to live.

In our reading today from Ephesians 3 Paul is writing to a young church that was overcoming their prejudices and the ethnic divisions between Gentiles and Jews, reminding them that they were chosen, empowered, saved and united to be one people working together according to God's purposes.

### *Ephesians 3*

<sup>1</sup>For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--

<sup>2</sup>Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. <sup>4</sup>In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. <sup>8</sup>Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup>and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. <sup>10</sup>**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, <sup>11</sup>according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>12</sup>In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. <sup>13</sup>I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

The very fact that you are all sat here this morning is a testimony to the Wisdom and grace of God. People of all sorts of ages, stages and backgrounds coming together to unite around one thing: Seeking the beauty and the glory of the God who made each one of us. It is amazing to think that wherever you go in the world, there are people who do the things we do, value the same words we value, pray the same prayers we do, because we all hope and trust in the Lord Jesus.



This is Callista. She is from Namibia and she now lives in Cardiff and works for HMRC. I met her for the first time on Friday because Emily and I went to City Church Cardiff to take part in a street evangelism outreach as part of the Mission to Wales organised by New Wine Cymru. Callista and I teamed up to go into the centre of Cardiff to simply look for people to talk to about Jesus.

Now if you've ever been accosted by street preachers, if you are anything like me you would run a mile from such irritation and awkwardness. So of course we both felt out of our comfort zone, but the lovely thing was that Callista was brilliant. She would simply introduce herself and ask someone their name, then she would say to them 'I've just got to tell you two things really quickly: God loves you and he has an awesome plan for your life.' It amazed me that the majority of people we spoke to responded positively and were happy to hear more. In one hour we ended up praying for 6 people, 2 of whom prayed a prayer of forgiveness and salvation with us, one wanted prayer for healing and several wanted literature to read about it.

But my point is that it was quite amazing to be on a mission and praying together with a Welsh Namibian Tax inspector who had all the same concerns as me and yet I knew loved the Lord just like I do.

When the Church works well it really reflects the Glory and wisdom of God. Verse 10 of Ephesians 3 says: <sup>10</sup>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.

Clearly the bible tells us that the universe has more dimensions than the ones we can see, taste and touch. Paul describes the dimension of the heavenly realms, where God interacts with Spiritual beings and there are spiritual rulers and authorities. These could be angelic or demonic, we don't know, yet the amazing thing is that there are three things that traverse the dimensions, throughout the universe. Paul describes them in the wonderful passage most often quoted at weddings: In 1 Cor 13 He tells us that although everything will pass away and disappear; 'these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

When the Church demonstrates the qualities of faith, hope and love that Jesus demonstrated and unlocked for us through his life death and resurrection, it lasts much beyond our lifetime. The effects echo into eternity. The manifold wisdom and glory of God is demonstrated when we reflect the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

J John tells a wonderful story of when he was sat next to someone on a plane and she asked him what he did for a living.



He tells it like this...

I like to be a little bit creative in telling people what I do. I sat next this lady on an airplane at Heathrow Airport and I said "Hello, where are you going?" *and she says "I'm going to Singapore, where are you going?"* I said "I'm going to Australia...what to you do?" And she told me *then she said "what do you do?"*

I said "Well...I work for a global enterprise." *She said "Do you?"* I said "Yes I do, we've got outlets in nearly every country of the world." *She said "Have you?"* "Yes, we've got hospitals and hospices and homeless shelters, we do marriage work, we've got orphanages, we've got feeding programs, educational programs, all sorts of justice and reconciliation things. Basically, we look after people from birth to death and deal in the area of behavioral alteration."

*She said "Wow...what's it called?"*

I said "**It's called the Church.**"

Now of course the church has done some desperately bad things in times past and we're still making mistakes today, but nevertheless, in his Grace, God has given the church the responsibility of conveying his grace and goodness to our broken world.

The great news for everyone is that as verse 12 says <sup>12</sup>In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

No-one is excluded from the invitation. It is our job and our purpose to hand out the invitations. To tell each and every person that God loves them and has an amazing plan for their life.

I hope you know that here today this morning, because if you don't we'd love to pray for you.