

Today we begin a series of services on the letter of Ephesians

This week will be an introduction to Ephesians

and you might want to pause here and read [Ephesians 1.1-4](#)

## **Sermon**

There are many things that are important for us in the life of a Christian

In living a life as a disciple of Jesus

I want to highlight one just now.

The reading and study of the Bible.

(pause)

The study of scripture.

As a denomination this is something we do little of.

Certainly in the busy lives we live today.

We maybe remember from our childhood folk who had memorised large chunks of scripture.

Or could always tell us where to find certain bits in the Bible.

It's not given the priority it is in other religions.

Orthodox Jews will spend huge amounts of time studying the scriptures.

Devout muslims set a high store on knowing and memorising large portions of the Koran.

We don't so much.

But for the next few months we will be studying Ephesians when we worship here in Makerston Church.

And try to understand it

And learn new things from it.

That we can apply in our lives

And in the life of our fellowship.

(pause)

Studying the Bible,

What we understand is the word of God,

The book that we believe God speaks to us through,

Is so important.

But it's not given the priority in the church that it used to.

(pause)

Our worship service is structured round the word, the Bible.

As we read through Ephesians we will try and understand it

And as we learn from it I'm sure God's Spirit will teach us new things

And change us in our hearts and lives.

**(pause)**

Today is an introduction to the letter which is why we've just read 4 verses.

But first let's think about who wrote this letter

And who he wrote it to.

(pause)

'From Paul,

who by God's will is an apostle of Christ Jesus'

Who is Paul?

And how did he come to be writing letters anyway?

He wasn't one of the original 12 disciples so how does he get to call himself an apostle?

(pause)

Not all people who study this letter believe that it was written by Paul.

They question this because the vocabulary and writing style is different from Paul's other letters.

But we've no real reason to doubt that it was written by Paul.

And over and above that it doesn't make a difference to what we learn from it.

How God speaks to us through it.

(pause)

It's been made part of Scripture.

Part of the written word that we believe God speaks to us through.

So the important thing really is what God is trying to say to us through it.

What understandings the Spirit leads us to as we read and think about it.

(pause)

Who is it written to.

The title says the Ephesians.

The first verse even says -

'To God's people in Ephesus'

But there seems even some doubt about this

Paul doesn't send greetings to people that he knew in Ephesus

he had previously spent long periods of time there.

So knew some people well.

And he normally sent personal greetings to those he knew when he wrote letters

(pause)

Its more likely to be a circular letter

Sent out to many different churches

Or circulated among many different groups.

And unlike other of Paul's letters its not so much written to answer specific questions

Or correct particular doctrinal issues.

But is written to set out what it is that Paul really believes.

Putting Jesus at the centre of everything.

Christ being mentioned and named 6 times in these first 4 verses.

(pause)

We see letters like this in election campaigning.

But they are called manifestos.

Presented by each of the leaders of the different political parties.

Laying out their political position on many different issues.

And saying this is what I will do for the country if you elect me.

(pause)

So in the manifestos we know where the party leaders stand.

In this letter of Paul's we see where Paul stands on the important issues of our faith.

We see the centrality and importance of Jesus to Paul.

And the importance he should have in our lives.

(pause)

That does seem obvious.

Jesus is central to everything.

But is He.

Do we put Jesus at the centre of our lives

And focus everything around him.

(pause)

Clause 4 used to be central to the Labour Party.

It was on their membership cards.

‘To secure for the workers

by hand or by brain

the full fruits of their industry

and the most equitable distribution thereof

that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production,

distribution,

and exchange,

and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.’

When this was removed many Labour party members thought the party had lost its sense of direction.

Lost its core reason for being.

Jeremy Corbyn fought to re-establish what he thought was the core policies of a socialist party.

but then he lost the election to Boris Johnston

(pause)

Paul isn't trying to re-establish the core of what being a Christian is.

He's reminding those who read this letter of what the core is.

The centrality of Jesus.

He's reminding us who are reading this letter what the core of our faith is.

Jesus.

(pause)

The key thought of Ephesians is the gathering together of all things in Jesus Christ.

A cosmic battle is raging between the powers of evil and the powers of good.

And Paul is trying to gird Jesus followers for the battle that is to come.

To stay united in the battle that they are all ready experiencing.

(pause)

‘To God's people in Ephesus, who are faithful in their life in union with Christ Jesus’

Paul is writing to a people facing a world of disunity.

We can understand and relate to that,

Looking at all that is going on in our world today.

Paul is arguing that disunity is not God's purpose.

But that God is calling us to be united in Jesus.

To be united around all that he said and did.

(pause)

Ephesians was written at a time when Paul was in prison.

## **Ephesians 3.1**

I,

Paul,

the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you  
Gentiles.

## **Or in 4.1**

I urge you then,

I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord.

## **Or 6.20**

For the sake of this gospel I am an ambassador  
though now I am in prison

So he was a prisoner when he wrote this letter.

(pause)

Probably near the end of his life.

We don't know where he was when he wrote it,

Which prison he was in.

Maybe it's while he is in Rome,

Waiting to see the Emperor

Or as he is being transported to see the Emperor.

(pause)

What's the letter about then.

Why was it written.

We know why the political manifestos were written.

To get people to vote for a specific party.

To attract them to a particular party by saying the things that that party will do when in power.

Or the things that they hope to do when in power.

(pause)

If Ephesians,

Unlike so many of Paul's other letters,

Is not written in response to a letter he received.

Or not written to correct mistakes that certain churches were getting into,

Why was it written?

(pause)

This letter is different from other ones that he wrote.

It has a different style,

A different feel to it.

If this is written to meet a situation it's a general situation.

A general way of thinking.

Manifestos are written to get people back to focus on what's important.

What the key things about a parties political philosophy are.

Paul is trying to get his readers

And all of us back to focus on the basics of our faith.

The centrality of Jesus.

(pause)

Paul is challenging the Gnostic thinking that is about at this time.

That the key to everything is knowledge.

The idea of possession of secret knowledge being what was important.

Paul is challenging that kind of thinking in this letter.

Challenging the mystery religions that dominated in the Roman Empire.

Paul is saying that Jesus is the key to everything.

Knowledge of Jesus is what's important.

A relationship with the living Lord is fundamental to all that we're about as a church.

Everything hangs together in Jesus.

(pause)

If Paul was writing a letter to us today what would he be challenging us about.

What would he be saying to this congregation

And to the whole of the Church of Scotland.

About where we are going wrong

Or what we need to focus our lives on.

(pause)

The major changes made by the Church of Scotland in recent years are to try to get us to focus on the basics of our faith.

We are being challenged as to what our priorities are as a church.

What is our mission as a church

What are our priorities in this church.

Helping people come to know Jesus,

To live in fellowship with him day by day.

Or just to continue to exist.

(pause)

Are our buildings

And our fellowship what is important

Or our discipleship of Jesus.

Our daily walk with the Lord.

(pause)

Do we love our buildings more than we love our mission?

Our mission to share the Good News.

To share the love of Jesus.

To make Jesus the centre of everything

(pause)

In this letter Paul is saying that there is disunity  
in this world

And in the whole universe

That there is a cosmic battle between good and  
evil.

A battle against Gnostic thought.

And we can relate to and understand this.

We may see it as a battle of ideologies.

Of ways of thinking.

Democratic freedom or living under the terms of  
an all encompassing Caliphate.

**(pause)**

Our political leaders

Of all parties

And in most nations

Are talking of the disunity in the world.

The divisions that bring hatred

And breed violence.

The problem they all have is knowing how to reverse these divisions and hatred.

Pauls says only Jesus can change things.

Only knowing Jesus and following Jesus can bring peace and stability to the world.

(pause)

Paul is saying that things will come back together in Jesus.

The universe has been divided against itself.

There's conflict in the heavenly places

But things will be reconciled through Christ.

Through his death and resurrection.

## **V10 of chapter 1**

'This plan

Which God will complete when the time is right,

Is to bring all creation together,

Everything in heaven and on earth,

With Christ as head.'

(pause)

And then there is the idea of things being done  
through Christ's body,

The Church. You and me.

The church is to bring unity to a divided world

(pause)

So the first three chapters deal with how Jesus unites Jews and Gentiles

Unites us all into one body.

(pause)

The 2<sup>nd</sup> 3 chapters,

Chapters 4 to 6,

have much to say about the place of the church in God's plan to bring about the unity.

The Church is the body of Christ.

The Church is to do Christ's work.

The Church are His feet to run His errands.

A mouth to speak for him.

(pause)

So in first three chapters we see Jesus as God's instrument of reconciliation.

In the second three chapters we see how Jesus uses the Church as His instrument of reconciliation.

(pause)

The Church must bring,

Must take Christ to the world.

That then is an overview of the whole letter.

(pause)

Let us take a few moments now to look at the first two verses of the letter.

To see what they in particular say to us.

To see what we can learn from them.

(pause)

Paul makes claims to be an apostle, an ambassador of Jesus.

‘From Paul, who by God's will is an apostle of Christ Jesus’

(pause)

He is this not by his own will,

Not by his own choice

But at God's choosing.

'who by God's will is an apostle of Christ Jesus'

(pause)

God chose Paul to do this work.

God made Paul an apostle

Made him a messenger.

Sending him out with a special task.

The task of sharing Jesus with a world who didn't know him.

Who knew little about him.

(pause)

God chose us to be his disciples.

And like Paul,

We are messengers,

Sharing the good news of Jesus with the world.

(pause)

We belong to Christ.

And like Paul our lives are not our own to do with as we want.

Our lives are Christ's.

We belong to Jesus.

We must live as Jesus wants us to live.

We have to do the will of Jesus.

We have to do what he calls us to do.

We have to be His servants

And do His will.

(pause)

The people who Paul wrote to in Ephesus,

And elsewhere,

Are faithful in their life in union with Jesus.

‘To God's people in Ephesus,

who are faithful in their life in union with Christ  
Jesus:’

(pause)

They are faithful to their calling,

Faithful to God.

And they live in union with Jesus.

So to should we.

Living closely with Jesus.

Being close to Jesus in our daily lives.

(pause)

‘May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.’

God is our Father

And the concept of God being a Father can be difficult for some.

Can be difficult for those who have very bad memories of their Father

Or who may have had no Father at all.

(pause)

Grace,

The sheer underserved generosity of the love of God.

Peace,

Something that is beyond our outward circumstances.

There is only one source of peace in all the world,

Jesus.

We know peace as we live for Jesus

And as we do His will.

We will find peace in our union with Jesus.

We will know peace in serving God.

(pause)

Being faithful means to be faithful in doing  
God's will.

Paul had a specific job to do.

We all have a job to do

And have been given the gifts to do these jobs,

(pause)

We are all God's servants.

We are people with a mission.

The mission of serving Jesus in the world.

The mission of building God's Kingdom,

Where and however we can.

And in the context of this letter by bringing unity  
where there is division.

Of reconciling people one to another

And to God,

Through Christ Jesus. **Amen**

**Let us pray**

Father we ask that you would be with us in  
these coming months as we study Ephesians.

Help us Father get to grips with this letter that  
Paul wrote.

Help us to understand the subtelties of it.

To understand what you are trying to say to us  
through Paul.

(pause)

We struggle at times Father to read the Bible.

We think we don't know enough

Or are not clever enough to really know what  
it's saying

Or what it means.

(pause)

But we know that you sent your Spirit to help  
us.

We know from Jesus promises that the Spirit  
will help us understand what we need to know.

(pause)

Fill us with your Spirit Father.

Excite us as we read Ephesians

Teach us new things.

Change our lives and our hearts from what we  
learn.

Make us better, more faithful disciples of yours.

(pause)

Paul was such an amazing man.

Wrote so many amazing letters.

Did so much with and in his life.

Even dying for standing up for what he believed.

(pause)

We don't want to die for our faith Father but we do want to stand up for what we believe.

We want to live as your disciples.

And grow stronger in our faith each day.

We want others to look at us and know that we are your disciples.

We want people to see your love and spirit shining out from us.

In all that we do and say.

(pause)

Teach us new things as we read through  
Ephesians.

Change our lives as we read and learn.

So that like the people Paul wrote to he could  
say of us,

‘they are faithful in their life in union with Christ  
Jesus’

(pause)

Help us Father to work to bring unity to our  
divided world.

Help us Father to bring peace to a world where  
there is now so much violence and conflict.

You call us Father to bring peace.

You call us Father to live at peace with one  
another.

To love one another as Jesus loves us.

And we struggle to do that when some respond to an outstretched hand by turning away.

We struggle to do that when our overtures of love and care are rejected.

(pause)

Help us Father to take the love of Jesus to the whole world.

Help us to hold Jesus at the centre of everything.

The centre of our lives.

The centre of our churches life.

The centre of our nation and the world.

(pause)

In His name we pray, **Amen.**