

Ephesians 2:1-13

January 9/2011 AEMMC

## **Contemplatio -- GOD.**

GOD is the overwhelming reality in Ephesians 1. **Slide Eph\_Intro \*\*\***

And it has to be this way.

In Ephesians 1 we find out who God is and what he is doing in the world.

And once we understand that picture –

As we enter the MEMORY of the big story and see the overwhelming reality of God and his plan –

the MYSTERY revealed, the Promise fulfilled –

then we know who WE are –

how we fit into this MISSION of redemption that is as small as individuals  
and as big as creation.

On the first morning this last week when I started to really prepare for preaching,

I sat with a brother who does life coaching with people.

He sketched the process for me.

Many people have no idea who they are – what God made them for.

When they discover God and his kingdom they discover their gifts and calling.

Suddenly life makes sense.

It is no different here in Ephesians.

Paul tells us who God is and what he is doing in the world –  
and then we discover who we are and how we fit into this story.

**But GOD is the overwhelming reality.**

**VIDEO INTRO \*\*\*\***

GOD is the overwhelming reality.. as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it,

**“The beyond in our midst.” Slide1 \*\*\***

And as we launch out into the first chapter, we maybe get a sense

That this is all WAY beyond us – we are over our heads.

And it's too much for even Paul – he keeps breaking into worship and prayer.

## **GOD is the overwhelming reality..**

But we launch out anyway – hopefully we all have crash helmets—

Right away we are raised up into eternity.

And so there are three words I want to use to anchor us –

Words that will keep us anchored as this great drama unfolds in heavenly places.

The first word is MYSTERY – verse 9 **SLIDE2 \*\*\***

What God is doing is what God has always done –

He is telling us his secrets.

He is letting us into the great mystery – revealing himself –

In the eternal counsels of God – in that eternal dialogue between Father, Son, Spirit  
There has been a purpose that is now revealed in time.

That IN LOVE he chose us – set us apart – to be blameless in his sight—

He chose before time to make us his sons and daughters.

And this brings us to the second word – MEMORY – **SLIDE3 \*\*\***

Because what God did in Christ was part of an ongoing story.

The Gentiles step into a plan that was already in motion in Israel.

And then we step into the plan two thousand years later.

But the story was already in progress. We are now ten chapters along.

After the fall God made covenant with Abraham, and with Moses, and with David.

He promised to send a deliverer – a Savior.

And now the time has reached its fulfillment (verse 10)

But the plan is **MUCH MUCH bigger** than we had understood.

We thought it was about us – just as Israel made the mistake to think it was about them.

But God has much more in mind.. his plan is to bring together all things in Christ..

His plan is as large as the earth and heaven..

His mission here on earth but it extends beyond the furthest star. **Slide4 \*\*\***

Christ will be all in all.

And if this is overwhelming to you, just read between the lines here..

Hear the music.

If these words were musical notes they would LEAP off the page.

Paul can barely contain himself.

It doesn't really fit my nice list of MYSTERY, MEMORY and MISSION.

**Back to Slide1 \*\*\***

But one word jumps off the page again and again in chapter 1

GLORY

V 5 the glory of his grace

V 7 the riches of God's grace

V 12 the praise of his glory

V 14 the praise of his glory again

V 17 the Father of glory

V 18 the riches of the glory of his inheritance

GLORY GLORY GLORY

Can you close your eyes and see the glory of God?

**THAT** is Paul's prayer – not that you would have more words to talk about God

Not that you would change your mind about something

But that you would **GRASP and SEE GOD**

That the eyes of your heart would open / That you would fall on your face in worship

PAUSE **Slide5-3M \*\*\***

Ok, back to my "M" words..

This sermon today is brought to you by the number 3 and the letter "M"

When we remember who God is,

When we recall the story of Israel and the words of the prophets,

We find out that God is on a MISSION.

God is out to redeem creation, starting with the church as the first fruits.

**Creation – fall – new creation.** That's the big story.

That's what has Paul so excited.

Now we get invited into this drama as it unfolds.

New creation – resurrection – Jesus has already defeated death – his kingdom is **already** breaking into this world.

*How is this possible? How can the dead be raised?*

**The beyond in our midst.**

I pray that you may know --his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted

when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that can be invoked,

not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Hallelujah!

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

That's chapter one – and it nearly leaves us breathless.

**SLIDE6 Comparison \*\*\***

Now how does Paul continue in chapter 2?

Let's compare the first half of both chapters --

There are some words that pop up repeatedly in both places..

GRACE

And PROMISE – FULFILMENT

The first half of chapter one and first half of chapter two are parallel.

Then between ch 1 and ch 2 we have an odd transition.

Suddenly the focus is on sin and past history

“you were dead in your trespasses and sins”

The flow is like this now – **Slide7 – Progress \*\*\***

Who God is -- and his eternal purpose

Who we are – or were – without mercy --  
then -- What God has done because of who God is –

Our new status as forgiven.

But all this is preparation for **another** revelation – and this is mind blowing –

“EVEN WHEN we were dead in our sins..

EVEN THEN – GOD – RICH in mercy –

Made us alive together with Christ – *and raised us up with Him* –

WHOA.

Where is this going? This is WAY more than forgiveness of sin.

Let’s try that again – verse 6

God “made us alive together with Christ, and raised us up with him --  
and seated us with him in heavenly places in Christ.”

PAUSE **Slide8-Seated \*\*\***

I missed that line.

When I was saved, and for most of my first five years as a believer  
I had no idea that this was my destiny.

Forgiveness was pretty good – maybe I didn’t need to know the rest.

Even some of the great confessions of faith miss this.

But there is no making sense of the book of Acts until we understand this.

We will not be effective as missionaries  
*unless we understand the authority we have in Christ.*

Where do we get this authority?

Paul ends chapter 1 with these words: 1 verse 19

He prays that we will know the surpassing greatness of His power –  
the power that stopped the mouth of death.

Where did that power come from? 1 verse 20

He brought it about in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him – where?

“at his right hand in the heavenly places.”

In ancient Eastern culture a king’s throne was surrounded by two other seats:

One on the left, and one on the right.

The highest power and privilege in the kingdom was reserved for the right seat.

So this picture Paul is giving us is of Christ now reigning with God in heaven.

and verse 21

“Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named”

**Name ABOVE all Names!**

**Jesus reigns! Slide1 \*\*\***

That’s good news right? That is the heart of the gospel message.

But now we come to chapter 2 and we get this shock –

I think it should shock us.

It shocked Paul -- when he wrote Corinthians he said this

Therefore / from now on / we recognize **no man** according to the flesh--

Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh  
Yet we know him thus no longer..

**If any one is in Christ – behold – new creation!!**

Whom he justified he also GLORIFIED..

Verse 10 “we are his workmanship”

The word is “poesis”

**We are God’s poetry** – God’s art – we are the summit of His purpose –

He is creating a new people in Christ who will rule the Universe with him.

This is the kind of thing that can get you put in a white suit and a padded room.

Do we really believe this stuff?

**The Beyond in Our Midst**

Heaven came to earth but when Heaven left it took earth back to heaven.

No wonder Paul uses words like “riches of his grace.”

But YOU – says Peter --

YOU \_\_\_\_\_ and YOU \_\_\_\_\_

YOU are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ( 1 Peter 2)

In the last chapter of Matthew Jesus says to the disciples,

ALL AUTHORITY has been given to me – in heaven and earth—

GO THEREFORE and make disciples of all nations.

John 20 “As the Father has sent me, so I send you”

And then we see this being worked out in the book of ACTS.

Before, Jesus was healing and casting out demons..

NOW the disciples are doing the same work – walking in the same authority.

What happened?

At the end of Luke's gospel we hear Jesus –

“I am sending the promise of the Father on you..” (24:49)

And then in Luke's second volume we read what happened at the resurrection:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come up on you..  
And you will be my witnesses.. (1:8)

And then in chapter 2 we witness Pentecost.

And everything changes.. **everything!**

The future kingdom breaks into our world

The kingdom breaks into our world  
in ordinary men and women / who have received the power of the age to come.

Because we are died and raised with Christ.

***We sit with Jesus in heavenly places.*** \*\*\* Slide9 \*\*\*

To follow Jesus on mission is to go out in the power of the Spirit.

***This is what we are about, demonstrating and declaring that God reigns.***

*We are the firstfruits of a new creation  
–a sign and a foretaste of the kingdom of God.*

But you might say , wait a minute – I don't see evidence of this kingdom reign?

In fact, just the opposite. Mostly it seems like good guys lose.

And mostly it seems that the sick get worse and die.

And Paul would answer, EXACTLY!

Because we live in this period of conflict between two kingdoms:

The kingdom of man, and the kingdom of God.

God's kingdom has arrived in Jesus and the Holy Spirit – but not in completeness.

We live in between the times.

PAUSE

And now we have another reason for Paul's prayer. Remember chapter 1?

He prays that "that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened"

That we may know his love and incomparably great power..

*Paul is praying that the veil between two worlds be removed*

He wants us to be aware of the great drama that is unfolding around us.

It takes special eyes to see it.

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It's true that sometimes the kingdom is present in power –

And we see someone get healed or a life changed.

But mostly the kingdom comes to us in ordinary ways.

There is this scene in Bruce Almighty where Bruce parts his soup using Gods power

And later God rebukes him—parting soup is a cheap trick.

- A single mom who holds down two jobs – that's a miracle
- A man who repents after a life of drinking – that's a miracle

But sometimes I wonder why we don't see a reality like the book of Acts?

Why doesn't God's kingdom have a bigger impact around us?

[WHO SHRUNK THE GOSPEL?] \*\*\* **Slide10** \*\*\*

One reason is that we shrunk the gospel.

We made Jesus into a PRIVATE Savior when actually he is LORD of creation.

It's true that Jesus died for our sins.

But he died for something much bigger than that – **He died to make all things new.**

Whenever we see an announcement of the good news in the Gospels we see people being healed and delivered –

healed of physical sickness.

But what does it matter if this world is going to burn?

Why would God heal anyone if this is all passing away?

And as we saw in the sermon series before Christmas,  
all the birth announcements were about the coming rule of the Messiah  
and a renewal of justice.

The gospel message was all about God's kingdom rule.

This is why we pray "Thy Kingdom come – **on earth..**"

The good news is social, spiritual and physical – no separation –  
it is all God's coming shalom, his work of peace.

We have managed to divide things that God never divides.  
And in doing that we made the gospel PRIVATE when it should be PUBLIC.

Because Jesus is Lord **over all**.

One of the reasons we are less effective in local mission than we could be  
is because we have this sense that culture is secular  
and the church is sacred -- and therefore these two cannot mix.

The problem with that idea is that it makes nonsense of the Gospels.

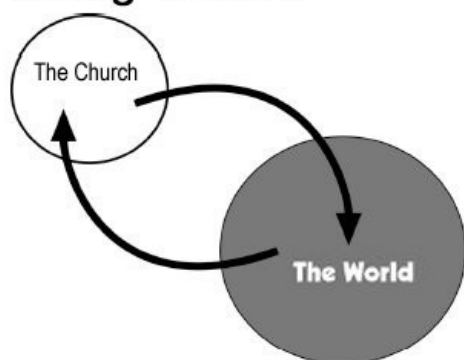
*Jesus is always hanging out with sinners.*

How do we make sense of this?

### **SLIDE11 Going Church - Sent Church \*\*\***

There are two ways to see the relation of church and world.

## **The "Going" Church**

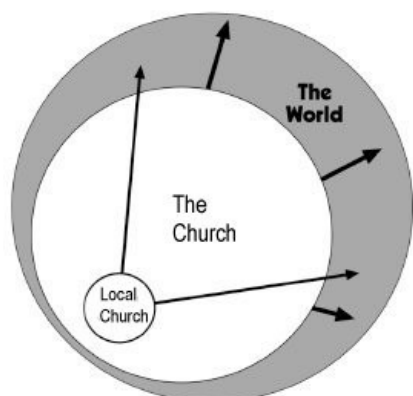


We exist separately and on the edge of society.

We make forays into the dangerous world, and retreat  
back into our own fortress for safety  
and to recharge our batteries.

The world is a dangerous place and very risky for believers.

## The "Sent" Church



The sent church sees its role as integral in the wider society.

We are "in" the world but not "of" the world.  
We exist as salt and light.

We are a unique, or counter-culture,  
within the cultures of the world.

The world is a dangerous place, but Christ goes before us.

We are called to live within the world to influence  
and to communicate our message by word and deed.

Together we are a living Temple –  
we take God with us wherever we go in the world and make his goodness known.

### SHRUNK THE GOSPEL – 2 **Slide12 \*\*\***

Another reason our impact is limited  
is that we divided God's people into clergy and laity..

The titles aren't important.

The point is that - in practice - we seem to believe that some Christians  
Are called to ministry and some are not.

Early Mennonites did not think this way.  
All the Reformers were concerned to escape the clericalism of the Catholic church.

But the Anabaptists went the furthest.

They did not restrict the ministry of the word to ordained leaders.

In the last one hundred years the professionalization of ministry made this worse.

In some churches you can't teach unless you have a degree.

And when we started paying preachers,  
We created another psychological barrier for the rest of us.

All these forces pushed us toward centralization.

Ministry was not only limited to special people,  
It became limited to special times and places. Church buildings.

But read John 4 – the time is coming, and now is,  
when those who worship the father must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Temples are irrelevant. We'll look at this more next week.

But if you are following me, ask this question –

IF temples are irrelevant – because WE are the temple.

IF there are no professional ministers, only the body of Christ filled with the Spirit.

IF there are no holy places – only holy PEOPLE..

What does that mean for ministry and for mission in our time?

We get attached to buildings and places –

We get attached to forms, when what we need are biblical functions.

**Slide1 \*\*\***

In Matthew 9 Jesus tells us that the wine is more important than the skin.

The Spirit endures – the form changes.

The wineskin will always wear out - cultures change.

Our shift to multi-congregations and moving one congregation into town  
Is a recognition that forms change.

Let's find a way to allow greater diversity to increase our reach.

We can have more than one flavour of ice-cream.

As we also shift staffing roles, we want to become equippers –

We don't want to do all the mission and ministry,  
We want to train and release all God's people for service.

And we want to revalue service in the world.

Heaven is his throne and earth is his footstool.

If all the world belongs to God, we want to serve wherever God places us.

Sunday occupies a few hours a week.

What is God up to for the rest of the time?

A living priesthood is active wherever God is at work.

God is active in homes, where two or three are gathered.

Mike Frost tells the story of three nuns who were asked to survey their neighbourhood.

In their neighbourhood were two high rise towers.

They were low rental and not in good shape.

As these women went door to door they found that people  
were hesitant to talk with them.

So they rented an apartment and moved in.

Soon they were discovering all kinds of needs and they found ways to help.

After a year they started inviting people to come together once a week to sing and pray

Now they have planted three churches in one tower.

God is active where we are, wherever we name him Lord.

Our Sunday gatherings remain important as a way to celebrate God's goodness

And to encourage one another.

But we want to place greater emphasis on small groups,

Gathering to encourage one another in homes and coffee shops.

“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow up in all things  
Into him who is the Head –e ven Christ”

But wait a minute – what happened to “The Beyond in Our Midst?”

We have gone from God in our midst..

**To .. US .. in the midst of the world.**

Because WE are the living Temple

We are a people indwelt by the Spirit.

“Once a king and queen in Narnia –“

It is WE who are sent, as Jesus was sent, into the world. **\*\*Slide13\*\***

Bonhoeffer writes,

God is beyond in the midst of our life.  
The church stands,  
not at the boundaries where human powers give out,  
but in the middle of the city.

**The church stands  
In the power of God**

**In the middle of the city.**

Let me close with Luke 10

The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.  
Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest

To send out labourers into his field.  
Go your ways – I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves..

Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat what is set before you,  
And heal those who are sick, and say to them,

The kingdom of God has come near to you.”

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