

Kington Baptist Church

MESSAGE BOARD – 80

In his letter to the Christians in Ephesus St Paul makes some of the most momentous statements found anywhere in the Bible. In this letter he is free from having to answer problems, a concern that is uppermost in many of his letters, where he had to combat wrong teaching or wrong conduct. Freed from that necessity he allows himself to take wing and climb into the upper atmosphere of the glories of the gospel. For instance these words in the third chapter – and ask yourself could anything more glorious be conceived by the Christian mind:

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more than we can ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
(verses 18-21)

For now what interests me is found in the first chapter. In just six words the Apostle states the ultimate purpose and intention of God in his mercy and grace towards us. His words speak of the ultimate purpose of our salvation, and indeed the ultimate purpose of the entire creation – no statement could aim higher than that! These words set our perspective; they set our course and they put before us a truth always to have in mind when we think of God's grace to us. These are the words I have in mind:

'...to the praise of his glory.'

In an extremely long single sentence (running from verse 3 to verse 14) Paul has been telling the Ephesians about their, and our, salvation – how God has united us to Christ, blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places, has chosen us to be holy in Christ...; and so on – read the verses for yourself.

To the praise of his glory – but what does this sublime unfolding of salvation mean; what is this tremendous outcome; what are we told that throws light on this amazing purpose of God? In other words, how's it going to be when what Paul calls 'the dispensation of the fullness of times' arrives?

First it seems we must take notice that this is a recurring theme in Paul's writings. This is the hope that thrilled him as nothing else could. It should thrill us too, if the love of God is in our hearts we long for these things to work out to the praise of God's glory – the glory of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament we're given certain glimpses of what this will mean, of what it will be. The first glimpse I'd mention is in the words of Jesus: *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* (Luke

15.10) Jesus speaks here of salvation and of the joy in heaven over one sinner who finds salvation. Jesus expresses this in a very particular phrase: *joy in the presence of the angels*. Certainly this means joy among the angels. But it means more. Who, we may ask, is in ‘the presence of the angels’? It is, of course, God himself, the Father. What our Lord’s words say is that the salvation of one who was lost brings joy to the heart of God. But it would, wouldn’t it? For this is his eternal purpose, this is why Jesus came among us, this is why the Holy Spirit was sent. This is to the praise of his glory – it brings God joy!

The second glimpse is this: *in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain*. (Revelation 5.6) Here the centre-throne of glory, the throne at the very centre of heaven is occupied by the Lamb ‘who was slain’. We remember, *every knee will bow, every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. There is nothing that is so much to the ‘praise of the glory of God’ as this: *‘the Lamb upon the throne!’* The slain Lamb as sovereign over all things in heaven and on earth and under the earth. Nothing is more to the praise of God’s glory than this ultimate exaltation of his love – his glory is the glory of his love – here glorified and placed central to all things above and below: the Lamb, still with the scars of his sacred slaughter forever glorified – the evidence that he has redeemed us to God by his blood. On the central throne of heaven is God as victim-triumphant: *I am He who lives, and was dead, and see, I am alive forevermore. Amen.* (Revelation 1.18).

Here too is a third glimpse of what we look forward to when all things will be to the praise of God’s glory:

I looked, and saw a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honour and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’ (Revelation 7.9-12)

Finally, a fourth glimpse of what Paul means when he tells us that **all** things will be to the praise of God’s glory.

In heaven we shall see everlastingly that we have greatly sinned in this life, but that will in no way lessen our joy, for we shall see that it in no way lessened His love for us, nor made us less precious in His sight. The testing experience of falling will lead us to a deep and wondering knowledge of the constancy of God’s love, which is not nor can be broken because of sin. (Julian of Norwich)

This must be so. The fact is that it is *sin* that defines us! This is what we are known for! God’s entire purpose of grace focuses on our sin, its forgiveness and eradication! Remember the publican in the Temple? *God, be merciful to me*. Who are you? *It’s me – the sinner!*