

God's Gospel-Centred Plan

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[0 : 0 0] well friends let's pray father we do thank you for your great purposes in the lord jesus christ we thank you for binding us together in christ in your purposes and father we do pray that uh tonight you would help us understand these purposes and we pray this in jesus name amen well friends um we are we're we're doing this series which will take us about five or six weeks and uh i've warned you before that this is uh you know there's some fairly uh hefty content here i give no excuses for that but you'll need to have your bibles open you'll need to be concentrating you'll you'll need to be seeing what we're doing there's some great stuff that we're going to look at and uh so please make sure you keep with me there is an outline there for you um so you can follow along if that'll help you and it's a good thing to take notes i encourage you to take notes and i was looking at the mandarin the bilingual congregation this afternoon they're great note takers i'd encourage you to be like them they're they're very good at that and they take it all in so let's have a look um and i want to start by telling you a story uh the story is a story taken from the new testament from mark chapter 7 don't bother looking it up i'll uh i'll read it to you uh and i will um uh you'll just get the feel for it and that's what i want you to do i want you to just uh imagine the situation jesus got up and departed from there to the region of tyre and sidon and he entered a house and did not want anyone to know it and he but he could not escape notice instead immediately after hearing about him a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit came and fell at his feet now the woman was a greek a syrophenician by birth and she kept asking him to drive the demon out of her daughter and he said to her allow the children to be satisfied first because it isn't right to take children's bread and throw it to the dogs but she replied to him lord even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs and then he told her because of this reply you may go the demon has gone out of your daughter and she went back home and she found the child lying on the bed and the demon was gone now as we read this text i suspect that you might have the same sort of reaction as i do that is this story seems a little violent doesn't it it seems somewhat racist it is certainly not politically correct is it we react to the thought that jesus should talk about one group of people as being dogs while talking about another group of people being children friends as we read this story we really do not understand it and that is because we don't know or recognize the great rift that existed in the ancient world you see the people who wrote the bible were jews these jews knew that they were god's special people they had been called by god chosen by god and they knew that everyone else out there were gentiles excluded by god and alienated from god the idea of us and them undergirded much of their daily life it undergirded their theology it undergirded their thinking for them the whole world you've got to try and imagine a jew for them the whole world was full of us and them now because we're not jews we don't think that way we don't think about us and them and in fact we even think it's racist to think such that way and because of this we actually miss lots of things in the bible

we don't understand some things that we encounter in the bible and the book of ephesians in my view is a case in point and so today i want you to come with me as we read ephesians chapter one you see it has some great things to say to us about god and about god's way of work working in his world now please use the outline that i've given you uh i go you should have received one when you came in turn with me also to the book of ephesians and today we're going to take a lightning tour of four chapters so you know i've warned you ahead of time four chapters we're going to try and survey and as we do i hope it will open your minds to great truths about god and the gospel i want to do the four chapters because i think if you do what we did last year that is take it in small chunks that's a good thing but you won't see the big picture so i want to show you the big picture let's get started paul begins his letter by introducing himself he is paul the apostle now for those of us who know the new testament well we know some other things about paul don't we for example we know that he was a roman citizen we also know that he was a jew by birth and he had been a zealous jewish pharisee by conviction and by training and we know that while he was a zealous jewish pharisee god made himself known to him and then paul had become a christian this man with jewish blood had converted to christian faith and he is now god's appointed apostle god's appointed representative being sent to the gentiles to speak to them about jesus so this is paul and so after he's introduced himself paul launches into one long sentence in greek that's why we had to keep going to chapter to verse 14 adam because it's one long sentence starts at verse 4 and goes all the way through to 13 in the greek it has no full stops it has no commas it's just one long sentence so let's see what we can make of it now the first thing i want you to notice is a strange thing i want you to notice pronouns pronouns are very important in the bible and in interpreting the bible and in particular i want you to notice the use of the word us so you can see it in verse 3 you can then see it again in verse 4 5 6 7 8 9 and you just keep going all the way through the chapter and i want you to ask yourself when paul talks about us who do you think he's referring to now for half of my christian life i thought he was referring to all christians in other words i thought he was saying god has blessed us christians in the heavenly realms he has chosen us christians before the creation of the world he has predestined us christians to be adopted however i want to share with you that i've begun to think otherwise i started this about 10-15 years ago let me show you what changed my mind and i want you to take what i say with a pinch of salt i could be wrong but i think it makes a lot more sense so let me show you look at verses 11-13 and i want you to look at what paul has to say in verses 11-13 he says this in christ we have also obtained an inheritance having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will so that we who were first to set our hope on christ might live for the praise of his glory in him you also when you heard the word of truth the gospel of your salvation and had believed in him were marked with the seal of the promised holy spirit this is the pledge of our inheritance toward the redemption of god's own people to the praise of his glory i want you to notice what verse 12 says paul talks about we who had already put our hope in christ that is who's he talking about

when he says we who had already put our hope in christ i think he's talking about we jews who had put our hope in christ and then he switches pronouns and he talks about you and the you are clearly the people he's writing the letter to the ephesian christians and they let me tell you were mostly gentiles but they also had believed in jesus and they also had been sealed with the promised holy spirit friends i wonder if you can see what i'm saying in these two verses we have two groups of people being talked about first we have jewish christians like paul they are referred to as we second we have gentile converts like the ephesians they are referred to as as us sorry yes or as you now with that in mind a whole new possibility opens up for us of reading verses 3 to 14 now i'm i'm not saying these verses have to be read this way but i'm saying if you do they open up a tantalizing possibility for you let me take a look i want you to imagine that verses 1 to 14 us refers to jews who have become become christians and then let's ask what paul has to say about this us group of people so look at verse 3 paul talks about jewish christians like himself being blessed in christ now um the language comes from the book of genesis and paul is saying that in jesus jews have finally received the blessings that were promised to abraham in genesis 12 verses 1 to 3 then paul goes on in verse 4 and he talks about us being about these jews being chosen in christ this is the language of places such as deuteronomy 7 where jews are said to be chosen by god then paul talks about them being about these jews being holy that's the language of exodus 19 verse 6 where jews are said to be a holy nation then in ephesians 1 verse 4 they're said to be blameless that's the language of genesis 17 where abraham is told to walk before god and be blameless this echoes and friends i could go right the way through the passage and show you that all the old testament prophecies all the old testament sayings about jews are being fulfilled this passage is packed with old testament references and old testament allusions and in using them paul is making the point that in jewish christians god has fulfilled finally his purposes for all jews jewish christians are god's way of fulfilling his purposes spoken about in the old testament now then have a look at what god paul has to say about god's plan look at verse 4 paul tells us that god had a plan that began before the creation of the world so try and understand paul is now going right back into history and he's saying there's this plan god had it's a plan in which jews are special and verse 10 tells us that it's a plan that extends to the very end of time verses 12 and 13 tell us it's a plan that involves not just jewish christians but also gentile ones and with that framework in mind now flip over to chapter 2 in chapter 2 paul talks he continues his talk about you and us look at it in verse 1 he talks about you now here's here's the hint my suspicion is that the you refers to the same people it did back in ephesians 1 that is gentile christians then listen to what he says then he switches in verse 3 so just reading from chapter 2 have a look at it and try and understand you gentiles were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived following the course of this world following the ruler of the power of the air

the spirit that's now at work in those who are disobedient and then he says look at verse 3 all of us once lived that is jew and gentile alike we all that is there is a commonality between whether you are jew or a gentile there is a common bond between you all and whether you were previously jewish or previously gentile there is something that if you are christian you can say together the common bond all of us were enslaved to sin whether we were jews or whether we were gentiles it doesn't matter whether you were a jew or whether you were a gentile being joined to christ has also given you another bond all were sinful all were dead all were captive to the devil who says all lived in their fleshly desires all were under god's wrath but because of jesus all jew and gentile alike have been saved by grace look at verse 4 it doesn't matter whether you were a jew or a gentile all are saved by the common way by grace all are saved and they are raised up and they are seated in the heavenly places with christ but let's move now to chapter 2 verse 11 paul returns to his use of us and you language and he says remember that you gentiles were uncircumcised without the christ excluded from the citizenship of israel you were foreigners to the covenants of promise you were without hope you were without god in the world he said this is how you gentiles were you had you were no helpers in many sense because you couldn't be inside we jews were inside but you were outside as verse 13 says before christ came gentiles were far away far away from israel far away from god far away from blessing before christ came the situation is that if you were a jew you were very much in it was god and us and gentiles were very much out there was no god for them let me portray it for you i'm told that i can look very jewish you should see me with a skull cap i have one at home i've got the right nose for it i've got the right facial features i can look very jewish what paul is saying is there was me and all other jews i don't have jewish blood that i know of but anyway good scottish blood but there's me and there's you i'm in you're out that's what he's saying he says that's what that was the case before christ came there were insiders and outsiders jews and gentiles there was no god for you only i the jew had access to god that's what paul is saying and in verse 15 paul tells them what made that separation the separation was made by a barrier around god's people a wall of hostility that kept them in and others out it was as though god had built a wall around jews and said you jews you stay inside you're my special people and everyone else will be outsiders oh there were a few people that sort of crept over the walls every now and then but mostly that was the case verse 15 describes a wall of hostility it was the law with all its commandments and its regulations but says paul look at verse 13 but but now but now the gentiles who were once far off have been brought near they have entered in the wall has gone hostility is broken down gentiles can and have been brought in and how is this great act accomplished well the second half

of verse 13 tells us it is accomplished by the blood of the messiah of the christ of christ the death of christ in other words christ's death has obliterated the war between god's people and the rest between us and them there's now a whole new state of affairs friends let me try and illustrate by telling giving you an example i want you to imagine that uh this is uh up the front here is the uh old the temple in jerusalem in the first century now i'm going to leave the mic for a little while to do this so here is uh here is the temple um there's a set of stairs going up to it uh and uh up the top there is a a whole lot of system of different gradations of how close you can get to god according to who you are whether you're a man or a woman a priest or not a priest a jew and so on right but right down the bottom there's all there's these steps going up to it and right down the bottom there's a wall around it and as you come to it i want you to imagine you're a jetpack and now i've uh let me just probably and as i'm coming up there i think that temple up there represents god and i want to get up there i want to travel up there and lead the god of the jews because i know he's the real god i'm a gentile i come up and there's a sign let's go over this sign there's a sign right down at the bottom before the set of stairs and it says along these lines the person who goes past this point will be responsible for their own death that is the person who's a gentile can you see what's being said can you hear what jews are saying they're saying we've got god we've got access to god you gentiles you're outsiders and what paul says is now there's a whole new state of affairs there's no us and them any longer why once there was hostility there's now peace for everyone where once there were distinctions there were jews and gentiles not anymore there are no distinctions anymore where there was once us and them not any longer now there's just us together there are no where there were once two groups of people now there's just one new humanity says paul one new man one new person where one group had access to god and one had no access to god there's now unhindered access for all where one group of people were citizens of god's kingdom and everyone else was outsiders now all can be brought near in christ where god once dwelled with just jewish people as it were now all are citizens look at verses 19 and 22 you can see it and listen and look for his use of you verses 19 to 22 so then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of god built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with christ jesus himself as the cornerstone in him the whole structure is joined together as grows into a holy temple in the lord in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for god notice this is an incredible thing paul has covered an enormous amount of ground and if i am right about ephesians 1 then paul has summarized the whole of the old testament and the new the old testament is a story of creation of the fall and of

[20 : 04] promise it's the story of how god began with the world but then chose out of the nations of the world one nation the children of abraham that is the jews and for century after century it looked as though god was only concerned about jews and then god sent jesus into the world this jesus died and through his death the law that separated jews and gentiles was obliterated and separation was removed and the door became open for gentiles to come in gentiles who could have the same access to god could become part of the people of god and do you notice what they are is the temple up on the hill any longer up the stairs no they are together being built into a temple of god together they are the new temple of god jew and gentile equal access to god this is the story of the new testament now that in mind paul launches off into ephesians 3 still with me because if you if you stay with me there's just great stuff here you see paul describes how his ministry fits into the great plan of god look at chapter 3 this is the reason that i paul am a prisoner for christ jesus for the sake of you gentiles for surely you have already heard of the commission of god's grace that was given to me for you can you hear what he's saying saying you've heard haven't you you've heard haven't you about the commission of god's grace that's been given to me you've heard how i've been given that grace for you you've heard haven't you about the administration of god's grace given to me for you gentiles you've heard haven't you this is god's mystery he says and that mystery is that through the gospel gentiles are heirs together with israel look at verse six verse six that that is this is the mystery that has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit that is the gentiles have become fellow heirs members of the same body and sharers in the promise in christ jesus through the gospel notice all the words there this incredible event has happened it is in christ jesus in the messiah jesus and how does it happen look at it there through what through the gospel god this great common salvation of jews and gentiles has happened in christ jesus through the gospel and with that said paul now turns away from what god has done to what god is doing now look at verse 7 following he turns to god's ongoing purpose he says that in this present world god's ongoing purpose is twofold to proclaim the gospel to the gentiles verse eight and to make known god's have a look at the language is wonderful in in verse 10 there so ephesians chapter three verse 10 so that through the church the wisdom of god in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places i wonder if you grasp what's going on here what paul means by the second statement is that the spiritual powers should see in this new church made up of jews and gentiles that not only has harmony been restored between god and humans but harmony has now been restored between the greatest disparate groups in humanity between jew and gentile people by the gospel but more than that the church which is full of united jews and gentile christians witnesses to the heavens that harmony can exist between the greatest divided people on the planet that jews

and gentiles are no two no longer two but one and you know what that says says if god can do that then is on his way to the end and the end cannot be far off because that's what the end will look like where every nation on earth will be gathered together around his christ and around him you can see what's being said can't you paul is saying that god has this great purpose for the whole created world to bring the whole created world to come to know his son and worship his son and his means for accomplishing this purpose is purely and simply his gathered people god's means for bringing the world into submission before the feet of his son is you oh sorry i should say us is us the church of god us is god's means for accomplishing his purpose in his world well now friends if that's if that if that's going to happen if this is so what do you reckon needs to happen to us the people of god for that to happen for god's people to really be able to do that job well i think paul thinks three things are necessary have a look and see if you can trace them with me the first thing that is necessary is a very deep work of god because let me tell you when i look at myself and others um it's incredible that we could be the means for this so we need a very deep work of god and that's what ephesians 3 verses 14 to 21 is about i think paul prays that god's people will fully grasp what god has done can you see it there it's if you think about the prayer in the context it makes marvelous sense for this reason i bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name and i pray that according to the riches of his glory he may be he may grant that we be strengthened that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his spirit and that christ may dwell in your hearts through faith he prays that god will strengthen his help his people to know and understand what he's doing that he'll strengthen his people for the task and then it will be necessary for that to happen they'll need to grasp what god's been doing now the second thing that is necessary if we the church of god are to be the agent of reconciliation of the world is that the people of god commit themselves to the task and i think that's what chapter 4 verses 1 to 6 are about have a look at it god's united people have got to make an effort to be united they've got to show their unity they've got to maintain the unity in the spirit and they've got to assert their unity that is they've got to say i'm going to downplay my own agendas it's not me and you and we're going to fight together until we see who wins no we're going to downplay our own agendas so that we together can attain the unity of the faith which we already have in christ instead of arrogance what's that going to mean you're going to have to be humble and gentle instead of impatience you're going to have to be patient god's people must bear with one another in love that's what he says without being passive they must make an effort to keep the unity they have in christ they're already one body already one spirit they've already been called in one hope they have one lord one faith one baptism one god and father of us all they've got to show that oneness in their relationship with each other but there's one other necessary thing they will need god's appointed spokespeople they will need the speaking gifts that god gives to his church have a look can you see these verses he says he lists these four or five gifts apostleship prophecy evangelism pastor teaching he says the church is built up on the foundation of the words of the apostles and prophets jesus

himself being the cornerstone so the words of the apostles and prophets must be explained and taught and as they're explained and taught god's people will be prepared for works of service and the body of christ will be built up that's what ephesians 4 is about and all god's people together will be built into a unity of faith and the knowledge of the son of god they'll no longer be tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine instead they'll become mature in christ and they'll grow in love now i don't know about you but i'm blown away by this reading of ephesians 4 or ephesians 1 to 4 see you know how i used to read it i used to read it about as being all about me i read it and i thought it was about me about my personal relationship with god uh it's about me now when i read it i see that it's in part about me but it's first and foremost about god ephesians 1 to 4 is in my view a survey of god's cosmic history god's massive plan and purpose for his world paul began with creation he surveyed history to the very end of time and he's given us a grand picture of what god is doing in christ he you know what god's doing he said it in ephesians 1 god in all the world is summing up everything under christ in christ god is about preaching the excellencies of christ to all human beings even the heavenly spiritual powers you see when christ is proclaimed and the church is brought into existence god says look at that we you look at that that's a picture of heaven that's where i'm going and he's chosen instrument for doing it this rag bag of people that is us brought to know the lord jesus we god's people are his instrument for declaring to the heavenly powers his manifold wisdom please understand what i'm saying when we come together every sunday there's a great tendency for us to think about us isn't there about my world my purpose my gifts my church but god wants us to think cosmically he wants us to think beyond our personal private lives and our personal private faith he wants us to think past our little church here at holy trinity doncaster and he wants us to think past our neighbor and he wants to even us to think even past our local community and he wants us to think out to the very ends of the world and the very gates of heaven and hell friends this third bible talk is the third in our series about the gospel and i'm deliberately setting out a theological undergirding for us as a church and paul has told us that our life together is a life that has been forged by god from all eternity it has been forged in christ jesus it has been forged through the gospel and the purposes of god reach to the very ends of the world it goes to every nation it teaches it reaches into the heavenly places themselves and it challenges the demonic forces that capture and captivate our world friends notice what paul has done here in the light of jesus the christ and the

gospel paul has thought cosmically and i want us to be a church that thinks cosmically i want us to think beyond our local community and to think as paul does to think as paul thinks to think about the whole world to think as god thinks you see our suburb and our country is full of people dedicated to pursuing their own interests our suburb and our country are full of people who are dead in their trespasses and sins who are walking according to the ways of this world who are following the ways of this world who are under the spell of the ruler of this world the evil one who are gratifying their fleshy desires and who are thinking in ways opposed to god every you know we are we are all like that paul says that we were all like that and our suburb is full of people like that the people of our country our suburb our world stand under the anger of a holy god who longs to be merciful and kind and gracious and has been in the gospel and we have that answer we know that god is rich in mercy we know that god has loved us in jesus and we are in a church that has has money we have a church that has a strong heritage of bible teaching we have a church here full of people with great gifts we have numerous contacts with people in the world outside the church we have been richly blessed by god for all that is needed to make an impact for god and what i am saying today is that i want us together to decide to do something with what god has given us to look outside ourselves to forget ourselves in the pursuit of god's goal and god's purpose i want us to become united in this our decision that is why i have preached these series of sermons across our congregations i want us to be united in being god's people and god's gospel centered people to hold god's gospel purpose as paramount in importance to commit ourselves to using all that god has given us to do what we can for him and the purpose of making his christ known throughout the world that is to be committed to evangelism as god is committed to evangelism to be evangelist as god himself is an evangelist and i want you to start with yourself i want you to determine to be a person committed to the gospel committed to evangelism committed to making christ known in the world and then i want you to be committed to being that and promoting that in our church for and then even perhaps beyond that committed to being that and promoting that gospel centeredness in our church and wherever you are friends we we have so many diverse backgrounds and interests we come from different backgrounds our family histories are different but if we are christians we have one common bond together and that bond is that we have been brought to god through christ jesus in the gospel so let's let us mark let that mark us in everything that we do we are gospel centered people let's work together as god with god as god's gospel centered people let's determine that all our life and all our decisions will be gospel centered ones with that in mind i'm going to close in prayer so pray with me almighty god you are our father and from you

every family in heaven and on earth derives its name you know our hearts and you know our innermost desires and so we come before you today and we pray for us together we pray that out of your glorious riches you might strengthen us with power through your spirit in our inner beings may christ dwell in our hearts through faith may we be rooted and established in love may we have power together with all your people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of christ may we know this love that goes beyond all knowing and may we be filled with the measure of all the fullness of god and we pray this in the name of christ amen and friends we've prayed that prayer do you know what after paul had prayed that prayer do you know what he said because i can say the same things to you well amen and a little more he says because the amen is coming he says now to him remember the prayer we prayed paul says now to him is able to do above and beyond what we ask according to the power that works in us to him be glory in the church and in christ jesus to all generations forever and ever and uh david amen that's it well done today so you bye