

Ephesians 1

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[0 : 00] I want us this evening to, in part, use our imaginations a little.

But if I could ground some of that in some verses of Scripture, it might well be appropriate to suggest to you one or two verses. We read in Paul's letter to Ephesians in chapter 1 and verse 11 these words, In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him, who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be for the praise of His glory.

And there's a sense in which, perhaps in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, that might be part of the unfolding purpose that comes to us in this magnificent letter.

In chapter 4 and verse 23, or if you go back to verse 22, we read, You were taught, he says, with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds, and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

And perhaps if you want maybe a succinct phrase or comment on these, perhaps weighty expressions in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it might be its counterpart in his letter to the Philippians, where he simply says in chapter 2, verse 5, Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

[2 : 19] Or let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. I like to think when we come to a fellowship of people that were amongst friends, and therefore there's not a lot that intimidates and inhibits.

I wonder if I was to ask husbands in the congregation this evening to put their hands up if they had wives that were forever changing things.

How many of you would put your hands up? Are you all cowards? I'll ask the brave ones. Ladies in the congregation this evening, who either are married or not married, do you like changing things in your home?

How many of you would put your hand up? Who likes changing things, decorating, jiggling with the atmosphere in the sitting room, the dining room, or wherever?

How many of you like doing it? No? Perhaps you're frightened to say so. My father was someone who never liked change very much.

[3 : 40] And perhaps some of that rubbed off on me, but my dad would often go off at the beginning of a week to work. And he would come back on a Friday to find the house, or at least the living room or the kitchen, all turned around, changed around, very often.

And he often reacted to that kind of change. It might have often been in terms of colour or decor, but bits of furniture that was there on a Monday might be there on a Friday or so on.

And maybe it's because God has a sense of humour. He gave me a wife who likes the same kind of thing. And having taken on this post with Forth Valley, perhaps there's a sense in which she's on her element again because she's got a blank canvas with a little flat that we've got to move into.

And there's a sense in which I connected with that reading many years ago, or a number of years ago now, a book by Max Lucado.

Because Max Lucado himself in this book suggests that perhaps amongst women they've inherited this trait.

[4 : 57] Not because it's a womanly trait or thing to do, but it's a trait that is part of the character and the heart of God.

Because there's a sense in which, as we do with our homes or whatever, we revamp. There's a sense in which our Father who is in heaven views you and me as sometimes we view our homes.

He loves, as it were, we might say, to decorate. In fact, we could probably go further in agreement with Max Lucado and say, it's not just that God loves to decorate.

God has to decorate. And He has to decorate because He wants what has begun as a good work in you and me to know a progression.

He wants, as it were, these parts of you and me that He has touched with grace to increasingly become more and more different from what they've been.

[6 : 09] He wants the hurt that has perhaps been true and part of our experience to be replaced with what one has called the landscapes of grace.

The walls of anger to be demolished and the shaky foundations restored. God never wants what He has begun a work in to remain unchanged and untouched.

And that's why this evening I want you to begin with me as we work through this theme to try and imagine something. I want you to try and imagine that for the next 24 hours Jesus Christ comes and He lives in you.

That is, He not only comes and lives in you, which theologically He does anyway, but He comes with you from church this evening to your home.

He assumes your schedules. You know, whenever I think of that, I think how I would love that for me to be on a Sunday where instead of me having to preach, He does the preaching and I listen.

[7 : 34] Where tomorrow morning when you go to work, your boss becomes His boss. Your mother becomes His mother.

Your pains becomes His pains. Your fears His fears. I want you to try and imagine that kind of experience with one exception.

That is, that nothing in your life changes at all. Nothing in respect to your health, your circumstances, your position, nothing at all changes.

It changes. Your heart becomes His heart. Can you imagine what that would be like? Think about it.

Him in you, in your world, in all the things that you do, in all your circumstances, good and bad, for 24 hours.

[8 : 45] would anyone notice a significant difference? What would people notice?

Would your wives see a different you or vice versa? Would your employees or colleagues sense a difference tomorrow in your place of work?

What about the less fortunate in your street, in your community, in your congregation? Would they experience a difference in the way you treat them?

Would friends, associates and family detect more joy in your life? What about your enemies? Would you notice them treating you perhaps differently from hitherto?

What changes would you notice in yourself? What alterations might there be in your life as there would be in my life? Again, if we were perhaps more open, we could shout some answers.

[10 : 03] Would we be less stressed? Would our mood swings be less? Would our tempers be different?

Sleep patterns improve? Would we view things differently that we look out upon such as nature? The reality of death, would we think differently about it?

All of these things, what would we notice in our own lives? things? But perhaps the biggest question of all would be what would God himself see?

Because that's what in a sense was the burning passion of Paul. Because the apostle Paul knew himself that when he met that amazing grace of God, that grace that had turned his life around, he knew that God had done something in his experience.

In fact, when he's writing to Timothy years later, he likens his own life to a draft drawing or a prototype of what the grace of God will be doing and can do in the lives of all who will like him, believe in Jesus Christ as Savior.

[11 : 32] God will be and it's the passion of all of God's people more and more become conformed to the image of him who has begun the good work in us.

That to those of us, as he puts it, to the Ephesians who've been predestined according to his plan, to him who works out everything in conformity to the purpose of his will, might have in these transformed lives of ours, the praise of his glory.

His passion was that we might increasingly become, as he puts it to the Philippians, more and more a people who have the mind or the likeness of Christ.

That's why in 4. 23, he said, be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness.

In that book I was reading by Max Lucado, and I don't know if any of you read much of this stuff or not, but one thing that I love about his writing is that he has the ability to write with words, but words that create pictures.

[13 : 09] And one of the amazing pictures in that book that he created for me was that this heart of God which he says must decorate, that is, must touch and transform your life and my life, does so because he loves us, and because he refuses just to leave us the way we are.

He wants you and me, as it were, to be like Jesus. I sometimes think that when we apply ourselves to consider this issue, theologically we might use the term growing in grace, or being sanctified.

Whenever we give ourselves to think along these lines, we make incredible mistakes theologically. We imagine, for example, I think so often, that all the onus is on us.

If only we had more faith, we would be like him. If only our love was deeper, if only our thoughts were different, God will do it.

I think we must put away that kind of thinking and think about the big picture and about the glorious purpose that God has for us and has begun to work within us.

[14 : 42] Because again, to quote someone, it says, God's love never ceases. Never. though we spurn him, ignore him, reject him, despise him, disobey him, he will not change.

Our evil cannot diminish his love, our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it any more than our stupidity jeopardizes it.

God's love, God doesn't love less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases. He loves us.

And because He loves us, it is God's heart for you and me that we become mirror images of His Son.

Those of us who have children perhaps can picture it best. When we look back perhaps to days on the beach with our kids, hot summer days, down on the beach, the ice cream van comes along and we are bombarded with requests for cones and for whatever and up to the van we go, we stand in the queue, we take our delivery and we make our way back.

[16 : 05] But when we make our way back to Mary or Johnny or Sally or whatever the kids' names were, we find them clattered in wet, dirty sand, hair matted in sand, mouths full of sand.

What did you do instinctively as a parent before you passed them the beauty of an ice cream? You took them aside, you brushed down or brushed the sand off their face and wiped as clean possible their hands before you handed them over, handed the ice cream over.

it's exactly the same, we might say, in respect to God's work and desire for you and me. He sees us in our lostness and in our need and in all the vulnerability that is human.

He sees us with all the sand and the dirt. And sometimes we even like the dirt over in preference to the good things that God is for us.

But God comes near to us and He, as it were, taking the language of Scripture, holds us over the fountain that's open for sin and uncleanness.

[17 : 19] And He washes away the film, the immorality, the dishonesty, the prejudice, the bitterness, the greed, and so on. He takes us, as we as parents took our children, and He cleans us.

And He says, look, I've got something much better for you. How is it we're to appreciate this in the context of this work that God has begun in us?

And in the context of the way we began by exercising our imaginations, if Christ was in us for a 24 hour period, what is the heart of Jesus' life?

That's possibly what we're asking now. And I want to leave with you very simply in the time that we've got. Maybe five or six, four or five pictures of the heart that is Jesus' heart.

That heart that God wants you and me more and more to mirror. And I think the first thing that stands out from Scripture and from our reading of the Gospels and of the work and the words of Jesus is that the heart of Jesus was a pure heart.

[18 : 44] It was a pure heart. And that stands out in a whole variety of ways. When you read the Gospels, there are always people, multitudes of people, milling about him.

There is this tension between those that are against him and overset by those that are for him. But in the midst of that tension, you pick up the fact that he was loved by multitudes of people.

And yet the heart of Jesus never ever succumbed to the danger of popularity. he was always one who comes to us from the scriptures as one who was content and who loved what was straightforward and simple.

Or again, if you go to the Gospels, particularly Luke's Gospel, it's inescapable that Luke's Gospel, apart from being a Gospel to non-Jewish people, was also a Gospel to women.

There are many women in Jesus' life and Luke is unashamed to advertise that fact. And yet there is never an accusation of impropriety.

[20 : 09] There is never the hint of lustful desire on his part. Again, when you think of the Gospels, and particularly as you think of John's Gospel, and as you think of that sublime introduction, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And then you hear in the echo of your faith, mind, the words of Isaiah 53. 53. 53. There would be no beauty in Him that we should desire Him.

He would grow up as a tender root out of dry gowns. There would be nothing about Him that was extraordinary. And this amazing fact that the one who was truly human and yet truly God comes to his own, and you would expect the embrace of his people, but they reject him.

And yet the response of this pure heart is to forgive them. It's nowhere more beautifully evidenced than in the crucifixion itself.

The multitude, ghoulisn multitude, are around the site of crucifixion. Not long before they had cried Hosanna, Hosanna to Him who comes.

[21 : 49] and then turned and cried, crucify Him, crucify Him. Give us the Rabbits. And here he is looking down.

This one who has come into the world to seek and to save that which is lost. He's looking down on a multitude that before he had wept, maybe some of them he had wept over and had said how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens but you wouldn't come to me.

Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. That's a pure heart. And if you come perhaps closer home to his own near ones, to those that were with him as his disciples, Peter having traveled three and a half years with him, who would later describe him as the Lamb of God and blemished and spotless.

That same Peter, on the night in which Jesus needed him most, betrayed him. And what did Jesus do?

Wagged the finger at him. He simply looked, looked deeply into the soul of Peter, so much so that he went away. and wept bitterly.

[23 : 19] His heart was pure. So pure that Herod went through so many hooks during the process of trial that ultimately led to his condemnation.

Because as Herod said, I find no fault in him. That's the standard of heart, my friends, that we need. a pure heart.

Secondly, the heart of Jesus was peaceful. And it's something we pick up in various examples again in the Gospels. But just as his heart was pure, so was it peaceful.

You remember when the multitude came out to him and sat under his teaching. The disciples learned that they'd come out and they'd been there so long that they hadn't eaten.

They'd come out and they hadn't taken sufficient food with them. What was the reaction of the disciples? The reaction of the disciples was that of fretting.

[24 : 30] not with Jesus. He thanked God for the problem and he took what seemed so insignificant and turned it into sufficiency.

Again, when you go back to the disciples, on that occasion when they're surrounded by children, again it tells you something about the loveliness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the children gathering around him. What was the reaction of the disciples? Their reaction was that the children were in nuisance value. What were they wasting their time with little kids?

Why was their peace being broken by the noise of children fretting around Jesus? But the heart of Jesus is so different.

Suffer them, he says, to come unto me. But again, go with the same disciples into the boat on the Sea of Galilee and the storm comes up.

[25 : 41] We can identify it because if we were on the boat with them, we would be precisely the same. One of these real swells arises on the Sea Galilee.

And the storm bites to the point where the disciples are absolutely petrified. But where is the Master? He's down sleeping.

Or again, in the Gospels, towards the end of his life, just around the time of his betrayal, you remember when they come to arrest him.

Peter draws the sword and cuts the ear of one of the soldiers. What does Jesus do? The reaction of Jesus is to lift his hand up and to heal that which Peter had maimed.

his heart was peaceful. He was at peace in himself. He could forgive and he refused to be led by the spirit of vengeance.

[26 : 55] But thirdly, his heart was purposeful. And again, we don't need to spend long here, but just highlight the fact. From the very outset of Jesus' ministry, there was a sense in which he knew his calling.

He knew, as we said this morning, that the Son of Man had come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. And from the moment his public ministry began, he himself, as it were, conveys this purposeful drive that is within him, to go towards Jerusalem.

And you pick it up in the Gospels, in Mark's Gospel, you pick it up, and in some of the others. But in Mark, for example, it's interesting because at the beginning of Mark's Gospel, Mark tells of Jesus saying, speaking of the hour, the hour has not yet come.

But by the conclusion of Mark's Gospel, you hear Mark recording the words of Jesus, the hour has come. And when you're reading in John, for example, you pick it up in that great moment in the midst of the darkness, when the darkness is perforated by the cry, that one word, cry from the cross, that perforated the darkness, *teralesti*, it's finished.

His heart was a heart that was purposeful or had this goal in it, to seek and to save that which was lost, which meant for him the cross.

[28 : 53] But then you notice also, it was a heart that was pleasing. Sometimes people that are ambitious or goal-driven, I don't like to use the word ambitious in connection with Jesus, but goal-driven or purposeful can be rather boring, dull people.

Sometimes they can be downright off hand and difficult company because they are so focused on one thing. But that can never be said of Jesus despite the fact that he knew why he had come into the world.

Despite the fact that he knew he must ultimately go to Jerusalem. Despite the fact that ultimately he knew that his life must become a ransom for many.

There was never a moment in his life where that life or that heart was unattractive. His thoughts were flesh and thoughts.

His personality must have been incredibly attractive. So much so that children gravitated to him as well as adults.

[30 : 15] There is a passage in Mark that in which Mark tells us at the early stages of his ministry. Multitudes come to him. Mark tells us from Edomia, Jordan and beyond Tyre and Sidon.

Multitudes he says came to him. I don't know if you've ever paused at that part of Mark's gospel and simply asked the question what drew multitudes to Jesus?

Some will say instinctively surely it was the fact that he was a miracle worker. If I was blind and I believed he could give sight I would go to him. If I had someone who was lame and I believed he could allow them walk I would take them.

Yes, all of that's true. Multitudes came to him because of the things that he did. Multitudes came to him because no man ever spoke like he spoke.

but I also like to think that multitudes came to him because the very heart of Jesus which was transparent in the sense that it reflected who he was and who his father was was a heart that was winsome.

[31 : 33] And so it was pleasing in that sense. his words were pleasing because they came from a pure heart.

His thoughts were pleasing because they came from a pure heart. His actions were pleasing because they came from a pure heart.

And last of all, the heart of Jesus we might say was spiritual. And perhaps this is the crowning attribute of him. Whenever it's recorded for us in the gospels of some of the intimate thoughts of Jesus, what we are privy to is this amazing intimate relationship that existed between him and his father.

I, he would say on one occasion, I and the father are one. his first sermons record for us this great truth.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me. And again in Luke we are told he is led by the spirit and full of the Holy Spirit and returned from the desert in the power of the spirit.

[32 : 55] He took his instructions from God. He had the habit again, if we read Luke, of constantly taking time out to go and to worship the father.

He memorized scripture. And again it's recorded by Luke for us that he is found often slipping away to a quiet place where he can pray alone.

And again if we are privy to these intimate moments the son of God does what according to John the son of God does what the father does.

I can do nothing alone Jesus would say. And so when we think about the heart of Jesus and think about how we describe it.

I've described it. I think it's almost fitting that we could take the words of the Shulamite woman in the Old Testament and apply them to him. You remember the Shulamite woman is asked what makes your lover more unique than all the lovers of Palestine.

[34 : 11] And clearly in her mind she has rehearsed the answer. clearly in her mind she has gone back through all the beautiful attributes of her lover. And she responds to the maidens with this refrain.

He is all together lovely. He is all together lovely. And so is Jesus in that very real sense.

He is all together lovely. and it is that loveliness that the God who likes to touch and to transform your life and mine wants to see in evidence.

You might ask this evening, when will I have that heart? There is a sense in which the answer may be two fold.

you already have that kind of heart. You already have it. It may sound incredible that if your life is hidden in Christ, that life and that heart and that loveliness is already part of you and part of me.

[35 : 35] I wish we believed that. He already has made our hearts, our lives, His home.

You remember how Paul put it in his letter to the Galatians? I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

That may be part of the answer. The second part to that answer and with this I close may be illustrated I think by a story.

A long time ago in Ireland, when electricity in homes was not at all common, there was an old lady who lived by the sea, a lady of means, although many people didn't realize it, came to the place where she decided that she would have electricity installed in the house.

It may well have been the years of living a rather frugal life despite the fact that she had means to have lived a much more comfortable life. But anyway, she had the electricity installed, some months later the meter man came to the house to have a look at the installation and to record the amount of electricity that she had used.

[37 : 17] And he came through to the living room and he asked, by the amount of electricity you've used, he said to her, it doesn't seem to me that you are using it very much.

Oh, she says, I use it every night. I turn it on, she says, and give myself enough time to light the candles and then I turn it off. I laughed when I read that, I smiled when I read that.

But you know, you and I are like that in a sense. You and I are like that old lady. We are tapped into the power and into the source and into the means to make us like Jesus.

To make us like Jesus in all these ways that allows us to go out tomorrow into the world in which you go and I go and mirror Jesus for him.

and yet we, despite that, don't allow the power source to do its ongoing work within us.

[38 : 38] And that's sad, isn't it? I close by asking you the question, have you closed with the invitation of Jesus to come and to believe and be saved?

If you say yes, we praise God for that. But what you've allowed to begin in your life, have you allowed it to continue to transform you?

as a student in the university, as a teacher in the classroom, a nurse or a doctor in the hospital, in your place of work, in your home, as a husband, as a wife, when all of these peoples that you interact with day in and day out, look at you, do they see Jesus in you?

Do they see Jesus in me? And that's where we feel guilty. Because they should do.

And if they're not, quite rightly we should feel guilty. And we should allow what God therefore has begun in us, continue to work in us.

[40 : 02] Because you know, His plan for us has been a long time in the making. Because those He foreknew, as He said to the Romans, as He said to the Ephesians, He has predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.

That's quite a work. Will you allow Him do it in you? Will I allow Him do it in me?