

Series: Church Matters

Preached @ ECCC by Grant Peers on 22nd January, 2012

Scripture: Eph 1:15-23

INTRODUCTION: CHURCH MATTERS

I promised at the end of last year that we would take a break from the Gospel of Luke at the beginning of 2012. I'm starting a series that will take us put to Easter that is called "Church Matters". This series is a response to the contemporary reality that church today is not highly regarded, often it has become a byword, people have lost faith in the church, it is a disregarded institution. *Today people will join a gym, the rotary club, a sports club, or the local tiddly-winks team long before they join a church!* Why? Many have been hurt by the church (Max Lucado's book – "Soul Survivor: how I survived the church"); Church has done ridiculous things (SOME supported apartheid); church leaders has abused power, influence and finances.

This series will answer the question: How can we be the church that God wants us to be? How can we be a healthy, vibrant and productive church? I propose that, if we go back and scour the bible for the basic pictures and precepts that God gives us for his church and look at them afresh, we will see a glorious, beautiful portrait; of God saying: the church matters! I want us to see and savour and become the church that Christ wants his body to be: for our sake (mutually), for the sake of those who are dying and lost, and for the sake of Christ's glory.

1. CHRIST FOR CHRISTIANS (21-22)

Read [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

15-16: There is a bunch of guys in Ephesus who genuine got saved and now Paul prays for them as they are beginning to walk out the Christian life. Paul is really thankful and really prayerful. And he explains to them what he prays for them:

17-18a: (1) enlightenment from God – in other words the wisdom and revelation we need to know God better comes by the Spirit. It is NOT a exclusively human effort. Yes, I have to read my Bible; but if I do it without dependence on the Holy Spirit to speak and make his will know I'm just reading! Apparently you heart has eyes. What does that mean? You perceive and receive spiritual truth in a different way from the way you learn Biology...

Applica: perhaps this is a prayer you can use at the beginning of your DT.

18b-21: (2) he prays that they may know hope and the glorious riches of the promise of heaven. (3) he prays that they know the power of Christ in them. Those who first received this letter stay in modern day Turkey. Christ had only died 30 years before and he wants them to understand the power that was at work in Christ when he was raised from the dead – to overcome all the power

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of Satan, sin, death and demons is the SAME power that is at work in us as God saved us and as we live today. That is not insignificant.

So we have the power of the living God at work in us by our salvation – just as he exerted that power to bring Christ back from the dead for our sakes so he exerts that same power to bring us back from spiritual death! But this power also affect the Christians corporately as the church – read vs **22-23**

2. THE CHURCH (21-22)

So Christ rules above all rule, power, dominion, or authority. *In other words even though Jacob Zuma and other foolish people in the ANC claim that the ANC will rule til Christ returns, that is not true – because everything is under Christ's authority and he decides who rules. (The Bible in fact says, "pride comes before a fall")*

The question is, "how is that power and authority evident in the church?" It is not what you would expect but it is glorious.

a. CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY

Christ is the head of the church does mean that he has authority in the church, but what is particularly important here is that he is the source and the centre of the church. He brings the church into being through his death and resurrection. Just like your physical heads is the place where your brain is , your brain sends our nerve impulse to all the parts of the body to tell them how to function – so Christ is the source and centre of the function of the church. There is no life apart from – without a head you're dead!

b. THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST

So there is a unity, a intimacy, a relation, an unbreakable bond between the church and Christ. Notice quickly that (I) the church is not a building. When the NT uses the word for church it never refers to a building. So I try not to say things like, "I'm going to church"... (II) The church is also not a meeting. When you say on Sunday morning, "I'm going to church" you're talking about our Sunday meeting. The interesting thing is that you don't say, "I'm going to church" on Wednesday or Thursday when you head off to cell group... Biblically, the church is the people, the disciples of Jesus.

Consider how clearly Jesus talks about the vital connection between himself and the body which is the church.

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Acts 9:3-4 As he (Saul) neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

And

Matthew 25:35-36 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' When.....

Matthew 25:40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

c. CHRIST FILLS THE BODY (23)

Verse 23 is probably the most difficult verse for us to understand. What does it mean that Christ is the head of the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way? The first thing I think it means is that Christ fills the body (the church) with his own life. We are a human organisation, but in a mystical, spiritual sense we are far more than that. Just think about that – God has chosen to put the fullness of his Son in us! That is a humbling thought and mind blowing at the same time.

So by way of the body analogy: in every part of my body is the fullness of my life. My fingers are no less alive with my life than my head or my heart. In fact if I were to sever the nerve and blood supply to my finger it would die. In fact 2Peter 1:4 is going to say that we are “partakers of the divine nature”.

So when you (or we) face difficulties and temptations and feel like it is impossible to go on... we must remind ourselves of this truth: I may be a very small member of the body but I am a member of Christ's body; I am 'in him'; I am related to the source; and his power and love and life and strength is in me; his vital energy flows through me!

d. THE CHURCH IS HIS FULLNESS (23)

This is perhaps the most profound point Paul shares here – that his verse also means that we, as the church, are his fullness. Firstly, this means that Christ loved us and came to this earth to die an atoning death on the cross FREELY. He did not need us in that sense. Yet in another sense a head without a body is not complete. Because of His work Christ is joined to the body and needs the body. The head needs the body and the body needs the head – so in a mystical sense they are one. And so, at this moment in the great story of redemption we (the body) are Christ's fullness on earth = the church matters!

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e. APPLICATION

Ephesians 3:10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,

Teamwork

Let me give you an example that explains this: just before Joanne went back to school she got a call from the deputy principle of her school to ask if she would share the message of encouragement to the 90 staff of St Georges Grammar School at the beginning of their year. The deputy principle who I believe is a nominal Catholic had a direction she wanted to take the message: she was going to give each person a mosaic stone and the message was: each staff member is a part of the greater beautiful mosaic and each piece is necessary. It's always difficult when someone gives you the conclusion and wants you to build the foundation to support it.

So we went to the bible and looked at the Romans and Corinthians passages that explain how Christians are to work together in the body of Christ. The problem of course is that, although SGGS is a church school all the staff are not Christians and they are not a church!

But I basically said to Joanne: the manifold wisdom of God has been made know through the church. In other words team work is God's idea, a team WILL function best when it adopts the biblical pattern of a body. The world proposes the idea of a mosaic – they stole it from the church, from the manifold wisdom of God; they got it from us.

Racial reconciliation

Or, what about the very 20th and 21st century idea of racial reconciliation, tolerance, acceptance and embracing those who are different, equality for males and females. Really, that idea belongs to the constitution of South Africa, or some NGO. In Christ there is no Jew or gentile, slave or free, male or female...

Character verses methods

Or, if you read Stephen Covey's book, 'the seven habits of highly effective people', in his introduction he give a brilliant survey of leadership styles. He says the theory of leadership has changed over the last 50 years: it has become more about methods, programs, skills and tricks of the trade than about character: integrity, authenticity, compassion, perseverance and the like.