

September 18th, 2022
I Love My Church: Week 2

It's Bill Hybel's quote that sets the tone for our entire series this month... The Local Church is the HOPE of the World!

Paul gives us some great answers in regard to the time he spent with the Ephesians. Ephesus was a key city in the ancient Roman world. A headquarters for trade, culture, and religion.

Ephesus was a favorite stop... they heard the gospel preached, they believed, and they turned away from their idols and ungodly practices. (Acts 19:19)

Ephesians not only help the Believer in their position (through the work of Christ), but also describes HOW and WHERE our faith is to be built... and that is through the CHURCH.

I love the Church! But I know not everyone does!

Probably at some point in their journey, they became frustrated by what they perceived as...

- a Lack of Love and Concern
- Internal Politics
- possibly a Lack of Vision
- their inability to Connect
- a relationship or friendship that went sideways

Charles Spurgeon... [He pastored the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London in the middle 1800's, and was preaching to a congregation of over 10,000 before there were microphones!]

He called the Church, "The Dearest Place"

"Give yourself to the Church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it.

Still, imperfect as it is, it is the Dearest Place on earth to us... All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people. How else is there to be a Church on the earth?"

Ephesians 2:17-18 (ESV)

And HE came and preached PEACE to you who were far off and PEACE to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Jesus preaches peace to those Near, and Far.

Now here's how the church at Ephesus would have heard that.

- There were Jews in the house- those who were under the Abrahamic covenant, and had understood a Messiah.

They were (in this text) those who were religiously *working*... trying to get to God.

Yet what Ephesians makes clear is... religious activity separate from relationship is hostility toward God, so it requires *someone* to enter in and reconcile that hostility. So Jesus preaches PEACE to those who are caught up in religious activity that lacks relationship with God, and he saves them from working, and draws them near.

So if I could unpack that in our context...

1a.) Some of you were saved being really NEAR. What I mean is... mom and dad woke up on Sunday morning, and they put you into clothes, and then they drove you to church, you went to Sunday School, you went to youth group.

1b.) Some of you were NEAR-ish... mom & dad took you to church, but there wasn't really any understanding of relationship, grace, and forgiveness.

So he saves those who are Near. He speaks peace.

2.) There were also Gentiles in the House, so He speaks peace to those who are FAR, they didn't have the Jewish head-start. Mom & dad didn't get you up at all.

In fact, Mom or Dad may or may not have even been there, and if they were, maybe they were passed out on the couch.

Maybe you got caught up in addictions. You just became your own god, and all you knew about Jesus was we have this default position in our heart... and the church was judgmental, and there was no way he could love you, so, "Forget him. I'll do what I want to do."

And yet somewhere in the middle of all of that, Jesus showed up, spoke peace into that hostility, and rescued you!

Some of you are right in the midst of this!

So what God has done in this text is, through the person and work of Jesus Christ, he takes those who are near, and those who are far, and he makes them into a God People, and here's how he describes those People.

They were Aliens and Strangers, which means they didn't possess the rite of citizenship. [Refugee]

Now that probably doesn't weigh heavy on us because of where we live. If you lived anywhere else in the world, it would weigh much more heavily on us.

We were sojourners, aliens, strangers, and Christ, speaking peace from far and near, brought us together as his people to become the Church.

I. The Church is not a place; it's a PEOPLE.

Question: Can I Offend a few people here today?

Please understand that I grew up in church. But we flip out if someone brings coffee in here, or kids run across the seats! This is the sanctuary and it's holy! I get it...

Here's the rub... We're adamant about protecting this BUILDING, but we can be terrible at protecting God's People!

- We don't reach out
- We don't invite
- We don't build up
- We gossip... we offend

So here's our Mission, and let's keep focused on it!

II. The Church must be Biblically Focused

- Seek and Save the Lost
- Disciple the Found

In *Ephesians 3:10 (ESV)*, it says, "... so that through the CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known..."

In other words, WE are to be Salt and Light in the world... and show this world through the lens of the CHURCH, that we are a really good reflection of what the Kingdom of Heaven is like!