

## In Jesus

### Ephesians 1:1-2

Danny went to his first rugby match yesterday. Scotland vs Italy at Murrayfield. Danny's seen plenty of rugby matches before - every six nations game will always be on at our house. Well, actually, he's seen bits of games. He would come in and out of the room, sometimes paying attention to the little men on the small screen and asking what the score was, then wandering off to do something else he was distracted by.

When you watch it on the telly, the rugby is in your house. You're bigger than it is. You can turn it on or off, put it on mute, wander off and do something else then come back when you're interested. But when you're watching it at the stadium, *you are in the rugby*. It's bigger than you are. You're enveloped in it; it becomes your whole atmosphere and environment, you're surrounded by it and shaped by it and all your attention is on it.

It's amazing how much more Daniel loved the rugby when he was in it, rather than it just being something in his lounge. And this is what I pray we will discover as we spend the coming weeks in the book of Ephesians - that you love Jesus way more when you realise that what changes your life is not Him being in your life; but you being in His.

People have often talked about Christian faith meaning 'asking Jesus into your heart so you can go to Heaven.' A Bible scholar called Klyne Snodgrass (yes, real name...) says that the problem with that is that '...*we* define reality, and Christ is about one inch tall.' One small part of *your* life that *you're* in control of, where you can take or leave Him, wander off, put Him on mute...

Now it's true that Paul, who wrote Ephesians, talks in some of his other writings in the New Testament about 'Christ in you.' But just a couple of times. But the phrase He uses way more to sum up what knowing Jesus means is the other way round - that 'you are *in Christ*.' Paul says 'in Christ' 36 times in Ephesians alone! And Snodgrass says, '...when we realise that we are in Christ, *He* determines reality, and encompasses all we are.'

When you realise that your life is *in Christ*, He becomes your atmosphere, your environment, defining of everything about your life and relationships and surroundings and your very identity.

So as we go through this letter to the Ephesians, the whole time we'll be learning about how life is transformed by being *in Jesus*. We'll be discovering

more about how life is infinitely fuller *in Jesus*. We're going to start today by looking at the first two verses as an introduction to this letter, and mapping out the letter and where we're headed in the coming weeks. Then later after we sing, we're going to look at the first point on that map in vv.3-14 in Paul's excited prayer of praise to God.

Now I've said that Ephesians is a letter. You get that from the first two verses. It's from someone, and it's to someone. And it's written with the kind of customary greetings that letters of the time included; a bit like the 'hope you're well just now' that we sometimes write at the start of our emails.

Except in this letter, all of that - who it's from, to whom it's addressed, and the well-wishing greeting - it's all Christianised. That is to say, it's all redefined by the name and person of Jesus (you haven't grasped what being a Christian is until you've grasped that).

It's *from Paul, an apostle of Jesus* (apostle mean 'sent one'). It's *to the faithful* (which probably here means 'those with faith in') *Jesus*. And what Paul wishes, or rather *prays*, for his readers; is grace and peace to them from *Jesus*.

Jesus is the defining reality of the life Paul knows, and that his readers know. And that naturally results in Jesus' name constantly being on his lips, and in his writing. The name of Jesus is there three times in these first two verses, and it's there ten times in the whole of the passage that we read.

*How many times a day would you estimate you say, write or type the name 'Jesus'?*

This letter is *from Paul*. Paul was someone who didn't use to know or believe in Jesus. But since Jesus broke into his life he was transformed so much that he went to prison for his belief in Jesus. And writing this letter from prison (as 3:1 and 4:1 and 6:20 tell us he is), he can write with excitement and joy about Jesus and what He's up to in their lives.

We read in v.1 that this letter is *to the 'saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.'* But all of that needs explained. 'Saints' and 'faithful' sound to us like 'the holy-worthy-good people.' You know, the super-keen Christians. But it's not. 'Saints' (or 'holy ones') - just means 'set apart to God.' The people who belong to God. And 'faithful in Christ Jesus' means those with faith in Jesus. Paul is addressing people who belong to God because of their faith in Jesus.

But not in Ephesus, confusingly. As any of you who are into checking out the footnotes at the bottom will see, the earliest copies of the Greek text didn't have 'in Ephesus.' Paul writes this letter like it's addressed to people he didn't know personally (have a look at 1:15). But Acts 19 tells us that Paul spent two years starting and growing churches in Ephesus. He knew them better than anyone.

So what we've probably got here is a letter that was written for a bunch of new churches in the area around the city of Ephesus, sent round to teach these new churches the basics of what it is to be a Christian. So it's a really, really helpful letter for us as a church. Because as we grow as a young church, and as some of us are just getting into a life of being Christians, it's got loads to teach us about the ABC of that - who God is, who we are, and how we live in the light of all that.

If you come with us through Ephesians over the coming weeks, and let God speak to you through it, it's going to change your sense of identity. Rewrite who you think you are. It's going to help you to see yourself as God sees you, and live like that.

We're going to see how living in Jesus means being united. United with Him, - so that our life is bound up with His. And united with each other as church - so that our lives are bound up with one another. Your life will get defined more and more by the people you see around you here, and more importantly by the God we worship together.

We're going to see how living in Jesus means discovering how chosen, valued, precious and worthwhile we are to God, who cherishes us way more than we have ever or could ever cherish Him. We're going to see how living in Jesus means being people celebrating freedom from a slavery that we didn't use to realise we were living in. And how living in Jesus means becoming more fully human together - living a new life that looks a lot different to the old one.

Plenty of times, that's where people who aren't Christians (and some who are) think it all starts. 'I'd have to clean up my language, drinking, relationships and temper before I could be around church. God wouldn't want me, not like this.'

Now all of those things and more about tidying up our lives will come in chapters 4-6. The new kind of living we'll read about there that rescued, treasured human beings blessed by God are to live will cause all of us to look

in the mirror and ask God to help us change what we see (both those in church for weeks and those in church for decades). But that's not the starting point at all.

The starting point is always God and what He does. How He behaves towards us. And the big themes for us to discover there are summed up in Paul's greeting in verse 2 - 'grace' and 'peace.' In chapters 2-4 we're going to read about peace. Peace with God, and peace with one another. It's God who gives us these things. That comes before any of our response in the way we live towards Him, or towards one another.

But before that peace, we read about grace, in chapters 1-2. Grace is the undeserved kindness of God. It's God choosing to give gifts to people who really, really don't deserve them. 'Just because' gifts. Gifts that spill out His deep, unimaginable *love* for muppets like me and you. Richard Coekin helpfully explains it like this: Ephesians teaches us about the blessings that God gives to us. Grace is the *cause* of those blessings. And peace is the *effect* of those blessings.

So on the road ahead we're going to be discovering grace, followed by peace, followed by new living. And through all of that, an identity change. We're also going to find Paul talking about fullness a lot. It's not just a catchphrase that 'life in Jesus is infinitely fuller.' It's God's Word to us in Ephesians. So let's start discovering it and sharing it together.