

Many of you know that I worked as a veterinarian before I came to Canada. Well, I did various jobs, including one where I worked as a veterinary pathologist. Now when you hear the word pathologist I bet some of you are thinking glitz and glamour – you know, CSI stuff. Something happens here, and then a test result comes through here, and then this is discovered here. Fast-paced, action-packed. Well I'm afraid to say that pathology, and certainly veterinary pathology is just not like that. It's anything but glitzy and glamorous. I used to spend my whole day cutting up dead cows; and dead sheep and dead pigs and dead goats and alpacas and lamas and bison! Going through bodies inch by inch. Combing through cow muck, or stomach contents, or other nasty body fluids, looking for something, some clue, some idea of what was going on. Pretty routine, pretty dull much of the time, not very glamorous. And worst of all, I used to smell. All the time. No matter how many gloves I put on— you know, those long ones – the smell used to stick to me. Everyone I met wrinkled their nose at the aroma. There was no chance of me finding a girlfriend!! I just smelled all the time. Well, to try and help us with this routine, dull and smelly job, the government, who I was working for, used to get us all together once a year for a big fancy conference. They'd take all the vets and lab workers doing this kind of work, and get us together, and try to help us see the bigger picture. They'd tell us that doing our routine, dull and smelly job, we were part of a great network of vets doing this same job across the country. They'd show us that if we didn't do this, then nobody would be there to spot the new disease, see the new problem. That if we weren't there, doing what we did, there might be a cattle epidemic, or a sheep epidemic. Or even, if there was a disease that could pass from animals to humans, and we weren't there to spot it, a human epidemic. They were trying to tell us that by doing our routine, dull, smelly job, we were really saving the world! Fighting off disease. Being superheroes!! Some of you don't look convinced! And I don't blame you – neither was I. I mean, it was good to see the big picture, and see that we were a part of something greater, but saving the world was going over the top!

Well, this passage we are looking at today does a similar thing to what my employer was trying to do – show us the big picture. Not that this passage goes over the top. Not that this passage is exaggerating. No, Paul is serious. The bible here is serious and true. This is a real bigger picture.

So let me give you the big idea of the passage up front. Let me try to sum up what Paul says here, and then unpack it as we go through the passage. Paul is saying this: God is doing something bigger than you think. Let me say that again: God is doing something bigger than you think.

Let's look at this passage together and see this – see what Paul is saying and what he is showing us about what God is doing.

See, first of all then, that there are a couple of background things to note. Before Paul gets into the real meat of what he is saying there are a couple of things he says. Let's note them together.

First, Paul says that he is thanking God – this whole passage is a prayer from Paul to God – that he is thanking God for the churches he is writing to. He starts by thanking God for the groups he is writing to in his letter. Let's read it. Verse 15:

Eph. 1:15 ¶ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

Eph. 1:16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Paul starts by saying, I heard of your faith and your love, and so I give thanks to God for you. Now, see this is an interesting place to start. He doesn't start with the big picture. He doesn't dive straight in. He is going to go onto the big picture. But he doesn't start there. And also see that he doesn't start with

problems. These churches must have had problems like we have problems. They must have had people in the church who were difficult. They must have had preachers who weren't brilliant. They must have had committee meetings that were dull, ministries that were struggling, people who refused to change. If they had done a survey it would have looked similar to Granville's survey – good but not perfect. Yet he doesn't start with the problems and difficulties – he starts with thanking God for them. They had faith and love. Maybe that was small, seemingly insignificant at times. But it was a gift of God, not to be taken for granted, not to be overlooked in his eagerness to get to the big picture. He starts by thanking God for them.

Now this is important for you and me to see. Especially for people like me – idealists, maybe at college, maybe with all sorts of ideas and schemes and plans and vision for the church. This passage says that we can start in the wrong place. We can start with our big plans, or we can start with the problems and weaknesses, but these are both the wrong starting point. Paul starts with thanking God for them. They had faith, they had love. These things might be small, but they were not insignificant. They were gifts of God.

That's the first background thing before we get into the meat of the passage. Now see the other background piece. See the other thing Paul says here at the beginning. Here it is: Paul prays that they would know God better. Paul prays that they would know God better. Let's read it:

Eph. 1:16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Eph. 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Paul prays, right at the beginning, before everything else -it is the great thing on his heart for these churches - that they would know God better. That God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to enable them to know God better. For him, the great need of the church was to know God better. This was the big thing necessary – this was his heartbeat for them.

I wonder what we would have prayed for? What would be our one big heartbeat for Granville? What would be our one big heartbeat for St John's down the road, or Trinity, or the other churches in the city, or churches that we know round the world. Paul sees that the one great need, the one thing, the first thing he prays for is that they would know God better.

Now Paul does not just mean head-knowledge. He doesn't just mean knowing with our minds. Paul was a Hebrew, and the way of thinking about knowledge for the Hebrews was knowledge – knowing - with their whole being. Head and heart and will and actions. Everything. Knowing was hearing and seeing and experiencing and loving and engaging with and living according to and obeying. Knowing was with their whole being. Paul is praying that the church in Ephesus, and the churches in Asia Minor, and the church here at Granville, would know and experience and love and obey God. Whole being. Knowing God.

And the other thing to see about this is that Paul doesn't just use the ordinary word for knowledge here. When you look at the original language, the Greek, Paul doesn't just saying knowing. He adds a piece to the word, he changes the word, so that it is more intense. It is not just knowing – it is intense knowing, deep knowing, full knowing. He wants them to know God, deeply, intensely, fully.

So this is Paul's great heartbeat for the churches he is writing to. Let's move on. Let's deal with the bulk, the meat, of the passage. You see, how is Paul thinking that they will come to know God better?

What is he thinking will enable them to deeply and intensely know God better? Well, the answer to that is through them seeing what God does, seeing his actions. To know God better Paul wants them to see God's actions.

This is like the difference between knowing someone on the internet, on facebook or the like, and meeting someone in life. On the internet you can see what they say, you can see the image they present, you can see what they tell you about themselves. But it is only when you meet them, when you see how they actually act, when you see what they do, that you know who they really are. We know people as we see them act and do in real life. We know God better as we see what he does, has done, is doing.

So then here's what Paul is saying that God is doing, here is His action:

1. First, see this: God is doing something bigger than you think in the church. God is doing something bigger than you think in the church. Let's read it together:

Eph. 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Eph. 1:19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Paul is continuing to pray for the churches he is writing to, and he says, I pray that you might see what God is doing in the church, that this is big, massive, huge. God is calling, God is making an inheritance, God is acting in power. Calling, inheritance, power. These three words would have set bells ringing in the Ephesians heads. Lightbulbs would have gone off in their minds when they heard these three things – calling, inheritance, power. You see, these are the same words used of ancient Israel, God's people in the old testament. God called ancient Israel to be a people – they were the congregation, the called together people. God made them to be his inheritance. From all the nations of the earth, they were his treasure, his riches, his wealth. And God acted with power towards Israel – leading them out of Egypt, bringing them through the Red sea, knocking down the walls of Jericho before them, bringing them into the promised land. By using these words – calling, inheritance, power – Paul is hinting at these ideas of God's people in the old testament, ancient Israel, and causing the Ephesians to think of the great story of what God did for them.

Except here God is doing something even bigger. You see, I've been playing willy-nilly with the word 'church' up to now. I've not been tying the word down. I had better explain myself. The word church in the new testament often refers to local gatherings of believers in Jesus - local congregations. Like Granville Chapel, which is a church – the gathering of believers, not the building. Like St John's. Like Trinity Baptist. These are all churches.

But listen, there is another use of the word church in the new testament. A bigger use. Church can also sometimes mean all God's people, all God's people across the world, all God's people across all of history. This is a bigger meaning, all God's people everywhere and every-when, if you like. And that is what Paul is referring to here.

See, by using these words – calling, inheritance, power – Paul is making them and us think of ancient Israel, but he is taking that idea and talking about something even bigger. See God's new people – those he is calling, making his inheritance, and acting in power towards now – this new people are no longer like ancient Israel – no longer only of one nation, no longer of only one race, no longer of only one nationality, no longer in only one geographical location. No, God is doing something even bigger

now – based on that same model and same idea – but bigger. His new people encompasses people from all nations, languages, people groups; people from all socio-economic classes; people from all walks of life and occupations; people from all backgrounds. God is doing something bigger than we could imagine or think – calling, making as his inheritance, acting in power – to bring about a global people from everywhere and everytime. God is doing something bigger than you think in the church.

Do you see where we are going here? Paul is praying that they would know God better. To this end he wants them to see what God does, has done, is doing, so that they might know him better. He wants them to see what God is doing in the church – the vastness of it – that he is making a new global people – like ancient Israel but much bigger, much more encompassing of every part of the world.

So that's the first thing – what God is doing in the church. And here's the second, here's the second part of seeing God's actions:

2. God has done something bigger than you think in Christ Jesus. God has done something bigger than you think in Christ Jesus.

Let's read it together:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength,

Eph. 1:20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

Eph. 1:21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

Eph. 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

What God is doing in the church, the powerful way that he is acting to make this new people, is similar, is comparable, to what God has done in Christ Jesus. God has raised Christ from the dead, he has seated him at his right hand, that is, in the place of honour and authority next to God the Father, far above every power in the universe – whether human governments and powers, whether supernatural powers, whether powers of good or powers of evil. Every power in the world, every title, every name is under him – under his feet, subjected to him, and therefore he is appointed head over everything. Everything in the universe. Do you see those 4 movements? – raising Christ, seating him, subjecting everything to him, appointing him as head over everything. God has done something bigger than you think in Christ Jesus.

You see, we are not to have small thoughts about Christ Jesus. We are not to think that his rising from the dead is a small thing, a nice thing, a thing which Christians celebrate but that makes no real difference to the world. No, it is not like that. The world has never been the same since Christ rose and ascended into heaven to sit next to his Father. A great new reality has started, has come in. The universe has a new head, a new chief, someone new is in charge. God has done something bigger than you think in Christ Jesus. Raised him, seated him, subjected everything to him, made him head over everything. A new reality is present in the universe – Christ, head over all.

Now we've got to stop here. We've got to have a timeout here. We've got to pause for a moment. If we go straight on then there is a big danger. It's this: if we go straight on then there is a danger that we end up holding our bibles in one hand, and our TV's and newspapers in the other, but never bringing them together. If we go straight on without pausing here for a second then we are starting down the path of merely saying nice things, and repeating nice platitudes, but not bringing them anywhere near real life,

and what is really going on in the world.

Because we have to, this week, stop here, and mention Haiti, and what is going on there. We have to take what we have just said, that Christ Jesus is now – God has made him – head over the whole universe, and say 'but what about Haiti?' If Christ Jesus is head over the whole universe then why has he let this happen? What is going on? If Christ is over all, what is he thinking?

Now I am not about to answer this question. I'm not about to give an answer, solve the problem, sort this enormous question out. We mourn over Haiti, we weep with others, we say with others why, o lord, why? So I am not about to give an easy answer – I don't think there is one.

But there are a couple of things we can say and should say here. One is that we just don't know the answer to the problem. Even though people have thought about the answer to this problem, of why God should allow suffering, for centuries now, and even though they have come up with some answers at times, we are still left saying 'we don't know, we don't understand, we join with you in crying out 'why lord?', we join with others in saying 'how long o lord will you allow these things to happen, how long, o lord, will you let this kind of thing go on?' So we are left saying, 'we don't know, we don't have a glib and easy answer' – this pain that we see when we look at our TV screens is not explainable away.

But as well as this there is something else we can say. Again, not as an answer, not glibly, not making light of what has happened and the overwhelming things we are seeing. But there is something else to say, and it is this: We do believe that Christ Jesus is head over everything in the universe, and that gives us hope. Not glib hope, not easy hope, not making-everything-alright-instantly hope. But hope. That Jesus, the one over everything, will not let this kind of thing happen forever. That he will put a stop to it one day. That one day, and we hope one day soon, he will put an end to all pain and suffering and misery and famine and earthquakes and tears and even death itself.

You see, it is a bit like jetlag. I travelled back from Scotland last week, and I was a bit jetlagged for a couple of days. I was in Canada, living here, sleeping here, eating here. And yet, at the same time, I was still back in the previous country, I was still at my previous destination, in that I was feeling sleepy and hungry at Scottish times, not Canadian times. I was here in a new country, a new reality, and yet at the same time I was still back in Scotland, the old country in a sense – my body certainly felt that way.

Well, we believe it is like the whole world is suffering from jetlag. There is a new reality in the universe – Christ Jesus is head over everything. But at the same time that reality hasn't been fully realised yet, it hasn't been fully worked out yet, we are still to see the fullness of it yet. There is this new reality, but at the same time we are still living in the old reality – jetlagged if you like – waiting for the day when Christ Jesus works everything out fully, when the world gets over its jetlag. Christ Jesus is head over all, and yet this is not fully realised on the ground yet.

So this gives us hope. The world is not finally a place full of evil. Suffering and pain and death are not normal. They will not last forever. It is good that we feel aggrieved at them, disgusted at them, horrified by them. They are not natural. We are not to accept them as just the way things go. We are not to pretend they don't matter, or that suffering is an illusion.

No. We believe that Christ is over all, and that as head over all he will one day sort this out. He will one day put an end to the kinds of things we are seeing in Haiti. He will one day bring in a new heaven and new earth. He will one day finally cancel all pain and suffering and death.

End of timeout. It is important we stopped there, important to see how this passage speaks into the situation we see on TV, important to ask the question of the bible, and not just ignore it.

So let me now finish the passage. There is one more thing to see here in this passage. We have been seeing that Paul is praying that these churches, and us, would know God better, through seeing his actions and what he does. We have seen that God is doing something bigger than we think in the church – making this great new people. And we have seen that God has done something bigger than we thought with Christ Jesus – raising him to be head over all things in the universe.

But this leaves us with a doubt in our minds. Is God doing two things here? Has God got two plans, two schemes, two ideas? Maybe we are thinking of the picture of someone who is rushing around trying to hold down two jobs, or someone who is struggling to do two things at once, or someone double-booked for two meetings. Is that the picture Paul leaves us with?

The clear answer here is no. Paul makes this clear right at the end of our passage. With the last couple of lines he takes us beyond God doing something bigger than we think in the church, and beyond God having done something bigger than we think in Christ Jesus, and says to us this: That God is doing one big thing. That he does not have two ideas and two plans – no, he is doing one thing.

Let's read the last couple of lines:

Eph. 1:22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,

Eph. 1:23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Paul is taking Christ and the church, and connecting them together here. Bringing them together so that we might see God is doing one thing, not two.

See what he says, that God appointed Christ as head over everything *for the church*. Did you hear that? - God has done this for the church. When I was studying this passage last week this caught me off guard. Surely this isn't right. Surely the church acts for Christ, lives for him, exists for him. Christ being made head over everything cannot be for the church, can it? But I looked it up, I read different translations, checked the commentaries, read the original greek, and it is there, sometimes in different words in different translations, but with the same force of meaning – Christ is raised from the dead to be made head over everything *for the church*.

Because the church and Christ are forever joined. He is the head, the church is his body. You cannot separate head and body, they are joined for life, and in this case joined forever.

And Christ Jesus, the one who in a sense fills the whole universe, who fills everything in every way, who is present everywhere and head over everything, he especially, in a special way, fills the church; so that it can be called the fullness of him. Christ, joined to his church, fills and fills and fills it, and goes on filling it, so that it is always full of him, full to the brim, brimming over with him, the fullness of him.

Think of it this way. Many of you have kids. Now maybe you are not great parents, and maybe there are things you regret deeply, but still, you know you love your kids, you know you would do anything for them, you know how much they mean to you and the delight you take in them. Well, it is the same with God the Father. He loves his Son. He delights in Him. He would do anything for Him. Beyond

our small and imperfect love in our children God loves deeply His Son.

But now see what God has done. See the wonder of this. That God has forever joined His Son and His church together. They are one, united, inseparable. So that everything and anything God the Father does for His Son He does for His church, and all the love and delight and strength that God the Father brings to His Son He also brings to the church. Us – me, you, Granville chapel, other churches, the church universal. All those who believe and have believed and will believe in Christ Jesus God. He has united forever the church with His Son, so that what he does for and with and in His Son He does for and with and in us.

This is the final wonder of this passage – that God has one idea, one plan, one great narrative, one story. And it is this – Christ and the church. Not Christ, and the church, separate, but Christ and the church one forever and ever. God is doing something bigger than you think, and the name of it is this – Christ and the church.

So what do we do with this? Let me give you a picture. A few years ago I was hiking in the Scottish mountains, and I was on my way down from a particular mountain and I got lost. I couldn't work out where I was. I had a map but I couldn't pinpoint my location. The only way for me to get un-lost, to find my way again, was to climb back up, to go back to the top. There I could see the way, I could see the valleys and the peaks and the ridges and the way down again, so that I could get off the mountain safely by nightfall.

And this is, I think, what Paul is doing with this passage. He knows churches have problems. He knows sometimes they don't do things very well. He knows that sometimes even they hurt people. And he is not belittling that. That is real, and he is not shrugging it off. But he knows that sometimes in the church and in life we can get lost, we can lose our way, when we haven't seen the big picture for a while, when we have lost sight of the great storyline, when we have forgotten what God is doing. So he prays for Ephesus and the other churches and for us that we would see the big picture again, that we would climb the peak again, look out on the view again, see the greatness of God's big plan, Christ and the church united, again.

And then that we would come down with the view in mind, seeing the way more clearly, resolving to live our lives by that great view and that great vision. To approach church here with the big view in mind, to make decisions about money with the big view in mind, to raise our kids with the big view in mind, to choose our occupation, our location, our friends – all with this big view in mind. To live, and to do church, with God's bigger-than-you-think idea in mind – Christ, the church, united forever.

So there only remains one thing for us to do, and that is do what Paul did - to pray. To take this prayer and pray it for ourselves, for this church, for God's global church. So as I read it, pray along with me, in your head or out loud – say yes to each line, join with me in praying this big prayer. Let's pray:

We keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know him better.

We pray also that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Yes Lord. Yes Lord. Amen.