

The Centrality of the Church

Ephesians 1:15-23

In our society the church is considered a voluntary organization for the promotion of private religion, and Christians seem to differ little in their understanding of what God intends to accomplish through the body of Christ. In contrast to this, Paul prays that the Christians in Ephesus would know their glorious inheritance and power corresponding to what God did in Christ (vv15-20). This includes spiritual matters that pertain to lives of individual Christians, but Paul also says that Jesus is above every authority and power in this age and the one to come, having put all things under his feet *for the church* (v22). Jesus rules over everyone and everything and the church as his body participates in this rule.

What is the Church? We've already seen that the church is the body of Christ. How is the church connected to Christ? By the Spirit. The Holy Spirit was with Jesus from the time of his conception (Lk. 1:35), descended upon him at his baptism (Lk. 3:22), led him into the wilderness (Lk. 4:1) and anointed him to preach and teach (Lk. 4:18). Jesus promised to send the Spirit after his departure to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:9-14), and he told the disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit from whom they would be empowered to witness all over the world (Acts 1:8). After Peter's powerful sermon about Jesus' divinity, crucifixion and resurrection, the crowd believed, repented and were baptized (Acts 2:36-39). The church grew by 3000 and subsequently devoted themselves to worship and generosity (Acts 2:42-47). The church is the Spirit-filled, repenting, believing, worshiping and growing body of Christ. In many ways this is a simple, humble calling.

At the Center of the World God puts the church at the center of the world. We see this in the beginning when God put Adam in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it (Gen. 2:15), and the garden was symbolically the center of the world out of which flowed four rivers to the four corners of the earth. God called out Abraham from Haran and promised to deal with the people according to the way they treat Abraham and ultimately to bless all families through him (Gen 12:2-3). God placed Jerusalem at the center of the nations (Ez. 5:5), and whoever touched Israel touched the apple of His eye (Zech. 2:8). As a priestly nation, Israel either led the nations to Yahweh or away from him. The church is so important that Jesus is at the head of it, the firstborn, in order to have preeminence (Col 1:18). Jesus rules over history for the sake and benefit of his church (Eph. 1:22-23).

If the church is so important, why is it so messed up? Eugene Peterson said until Jesus comes back the church will be equal part mystery and mess. This is partly true; we know Jesus is loving and maturing the church (Eph. 5:25-27). Still, Jesus shuts down unfaithful and unfruitful churches and others he prunes (Jn. 15:1-2). With Jesus, we are working on the church.

What does this mean for us? As the church goes, so does the culture which tells where our focus ought to be. If we are faithful like Joseph, Esther and Daniel, we know God will use our efforts. This means we have to be humble, knowing God uses the weak and foolish to overcome the strong and wise (1 Cor. 1:27-29). We should also be careful. Media notoriety, real estate, book deals and golden mitres don't necessarily increase the faithfulness of the church—we were behind the Eighteenth Amendment. We also need to be aware that the church is *not* the kingdom (Ez. 47:1-12). The centrality of the church does not entail ecclesiocracy, though the separation of church and state is not the same as the separation of God and state. Without getting distracted by the transformation, we should know that the faithful church transforms a culture. This means the next diaconate election is more important than the King County Primary.