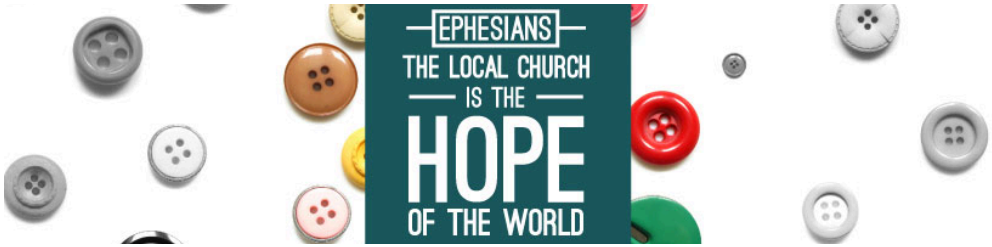

This week at Magdalen Road Church we continued our Autumn series in Ephesians as we reached chapter 3. We saw that the majority of this chapter was Paul bubbling over with the mystery of the church that's now been revealed (he's spoken of this truth in previous weeks as, by the cross, God has reconciled a diverse humanity around the cross – the dividing wall of hostility has been removed), and then his prayer for them and their maturity that they might live out the calling that they have.

v1-10: The mystery of the church that past generations longed to know

We began by noting the parallel between v1 and v14 – 'For this reason' Paul seemingly planned to pray but then was so caught up with the plans of God that he overflows with praise from v2-13. In these verses he describes his place within the plan as God's mouthpiece – bringing a message of reconciliation to the gentiles, as well as the privilege they have of being this side of the cross – past generations had not known this mystery that was now revealed. v6 clarifies what the mystery is – that the gentiles together with the Jewish people are heirs, members and sharers. On a full and equal footing, in no way second class. He then notes that this unity – bringing together of diverse humanity, is God's masterplan; his manifold (multi-coloured!) wisdom is displayed to a watching cosmos.

v11-21: The task of the church so that future generations will know

Paul then in v14 onwards, gets down to using the freedom and confidence to approach God (v12) and so prays for them. There are 3 key words that arise in his prayer that are all linked together: power, love and maturity.

Power comes up in v16, 18 and 20 (remember the Ephesian context of 'magic' and the importance of power in the mindset). Initially the power is to strengthen them so that Christ may dwell within them (increasingly be at home / welcome we said) but also so that they may grasp the enormity of his love for them. A love without limits, a love that surpasses knowledge – high and broad and wide and deep. We noted how this love, or a grasp of this love, would lead them to maturity (- being filled to the measure of all of the fullness of God). It's striking that maturity involves an emotional element – grasping the extent of God's love. Often we define maturity in a 'cold' sense, perhaps with how people love or what they know. Here it's far more 'emotional'! We finished by noting that this matters because the church is God's wisdom – we have a calling and a need for maturity to live that out and display that.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

What do you remember so far from Ephesians?!
Any key verses / ideas / arguments that Paul has made.
3v1 – for 'what reason'?!

Why does Paul spend time telling his story do you think?
What does Paul mean when he talks about a mystery here?
How does v6 especially clarify the outworking of this mystery?

What do you make of v10?
Who are 'the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms?!'
How is God's wisdom displayed to them?
How does this match up with our view of church?

What would you say to someone who said. "we don't need church anymore, it's outdated – there are better ways we can reach the world and live for Christ?'

For what does he pray for the Ephesian Christians?
What sort of **Power** do they have? What does he pray that it will achieve?
Why do you think a grasp of the **love** of Christ matters?
What will this love lead to in Paul's prayer?