

**Mission and Ministry Sunday**  
**October 18th 2009**  
**Revelation 21:1-3**  
**“Your kingdom come.”**

## Introduction

I wonder whether, in the midst of the busy-ness of everyday life you sometimes wonder what it's all about!!  
Most of us probably do at times.  
I think there are probably times when most of us wonder where we fit in to the overall scheme of things.  
How what we do can be important in terms of eternity.  
The studies many of us have been doing on our spiritual gifts over the past few weeks have, we hope, given us an idea of what God has given us to serve others and build up the church.  
But, perhaps we still only really see part of the picture, a small bit like this, and can't see what the whole thing is!!  
In The Lord of the Rings, Sam says this on one occasion to Frodo, “Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that's a long tale, of course, and goes on past the happiness and into grief and beyond it — and the Silmaril went on and came to Eärendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got — you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?”  
This morning, we are going to use just a few minutes to step back and try to see big picture.  
To, I hope, come to the same sort of realisation, as Sam did in what I've just read, that we are actually part of a big story.

We are players in a drama that has its beginnings in eternity past and will have its conclusion in eternity future.

I hope that this will be a source of encouragement in your Christian life.

As you seek to serve God.

To see that you and I - we are all part of God's Big Plan.

It is something that excited the apostle Paul.

He talks about God's plan as a mystery.

Something that in the past had been hidden but which has now been revealed.

A story about how God is creating a people for himself, how God is building his kingdom.

He puts it like this:

Ephesians 3:6

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

We, as part of the church have been brought into something big!

So let's look at that now and start... at the end!

## Read Passage

### The dwelling of God...

It might be a bit dangerous to start off by looking at a short passage from Revelation.

We, as Christians have managed to turn the book into a source of division rather than a source of delight.

Because this passage should delight us.

It is a picture of the culmination of God's plan for this world.

As John watches, the Holy City, the place where God dwells, comes down to earth.

And what a sight it is.

John goes on to describe it, and while we don't need to get bogged down in what is actual description and what is symbolism, the city is huge - it's base is half the size of Europe.  
Its foundations made of precious stones, its streets made of gold.  
This is no ordinary city.  
This is the city where God lives.  
A city that has no temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.  
Its a city that needs no sun or moon for the glory of God gives it light.  
And as John watches a voice from the throne - God's voice - tells us that God now dwells with humanity in the new heavens and the new earth.  
In other words, the kingdom of God has fully arrived.  
This is what God's plan for humanity, his plan for creation is all about.  
The creation of a dwelling place for God on this earth.  
We need to just pause there for a moment because we may never have thought of it like that.  
We have this picture that God is in heaven and we are on earth.  
And that is, of course, true.  
We are told that God is enthroned in heaven (Ps 2:4).  
But the grand narrative of scripture - and especially the first couple of chapters of Genesis - suggest that the earth would be God's dwelling place.  
The place where the presence of God was known.

## **Eden**

So let's go back to the beginning for a moment.  
There in the Garden in Eden, where God creates man and woman, in a world that is "very good" God 'walked in the garden in the cool of the day'.

His dwelling place, as in the passage from Revelation, was with humanity, with the man and the woman.  
And they blew it!!  
Paradise was Lost - I know it's been used before!!  
But God's plan to create that dwelling place for himself does not end.  
God doesn't allow the destruction of that original communion with humanity to be the end of the matter.  
God puts things right.  
One way of seeing the narrative of scripture is as the story of how God is putting right the problem caused in Eden.  
As the passage in revelation says, "Now the dwelling of God is with men."  
The mission of God remains the bringing of the presence of God to the world.  
Bringing his kingdom and his rule so that, as we read earlier in revelation, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."  
And how God has chosen to go about this, is prefigured in Genesis as well.

## **Through the people of God**

Having created the man and woman he gives them the task of spreading the kingdom of God, the rule of God, beyond the realms of Eden.  
They are to go out and fill the earth.  
Eden, the garden was not meant to be the only place that God was known.  
The man and the woman - God's people - were to take the knowledge of God, the one they communed with in the garden, to the rest of the world.  
God's rule, through his vice-regents, extending throughout the earth.  
That was the big plan.

And that plan continued, even after the Fall.  
God continues to choose people - his people - to bring the rule of God to the world.

## **Abraham**

In Abraham, we have a similar thought.  
God promises that through the people that would come from Abraham, through what we now know as the Jews, the world would be blessed.  
God told Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you... and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."  
Or as God puts it through the prophet Isaiah, "I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth". 49:6  
The blessing of God upon Israel was never meant to be for Israel alone.  
As God's people, they were to bring the blessing of living under God's rule in the security of his salvation to the rest of creation.  
But Israel blew it!!  
As Adam and Eve were exiled from Eden, Israel was exiled from the Promised Land.  
The Temple, the visible sign of God's presence on earth - the place where God chose to dwell, is destroyed.  
Paradise is once more Lost.

## **Jesus**

But God does not abandon his creation.  
He does not give up on creating a dwelling place for himself among his people.  
And so God himself comes to dwell on earth.  
The Word, the second person of the Trinity, 'became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (Jn 1:14) John tells us.

In Jesus, we have the perfect example of a servant of God - the people of God - fulfilling the mission of God to bring his presence to the world.

To usher in the kingdom of God.

And through his life, death and resurrection Jesus showed us what the coming of the kingdom would be like and what it would cost.

And as his people, we remain the means God has chosen to bring about his plan.

## **The Church**

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that we are "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Do you see what is happening.

The church - you and I - we are where God has chosen to dwell now.

We are the people of God and the place of his dwelling.

We are the temple in this world.

And just as Israel was to take that light to the Gentiles, so are we.

But we do this not so much as a task.

Not just because we are commanded to.

Not because mission - the bringing of God's kingdom, is expected of us.

We do this because reaching out to humanity is what God does.

From the time in the garden to now.

From the time when God said to Adam, "Where are you?" to Jesus saying "the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Luke 19:10

Mission arises from the heart of God himself. - John Stott.

So reaching out isn't an activity - though it may express itself in activities - it is, instead, an attribute of God.

And as we reflect God's character more and more in our lives, so we reach out to bring God's presence to a waiting world.

That is where you and I are in the great plan of God.

## To the glory of God

And so we reach out because it is part of what God does, we join in his mission.

And we do it in order to bring glory to our God.

We do it so that Habakkuk's prophecy may come true.

"The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord"

We do it, not because reaching out is the ultimate goal of the church, but because reaching out will achieve the ultimate goal of the church - the coming of the kingdom of God.

The time when every knee will bow at the name of Jesus.

As John Piper says, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't."

Reaching out to others is in order that they may know the wonder of a relationship with God and join the worship of God's people.

By reaching out we enable others to share in the salvation we enjoy.

So this isn't triumphalist or imperialist, it is an expression of love: the love of God, the mission of love that God has for this world.

A mission that starts in the garden, goes through the choosing of Abraham, to the coming of Jesus.

It is the mission that brings light to the world so that they may join in the praise of heaven and sing with all those who are God's people,

"Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever" Rev 7:12

Then, and only then, as the Holy City descends to the new earth and God takes up his dwelling amongst his people will the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to offer, that God's kingdom should come, be fully answered to the eternal glory of our God.