

# Ephesians 1:15-23

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. What we normally do, isn't it, on these Tuesday lunchtime talks is we go through a passage sequentially and see what the word is saying in the Bible.

I wanted to do something slightly different today with you. I wanted to talk to you about church. I realise that a lot of you are at different stages in looking into the Bible and Christian things.

You might not even call yourself a Christian today. You might not even go to church at all. But as we think about church and why church is important and the role that it plays in the Christian life, I want you to look into the church and to see why it's important and why it matters.

And if you are part of a church and you're a regular member and you're part of a church community, it is helpful, isn't it, to have a refresher on why church community is important.

And so that is what I want us to do today. I want you to decide this afternoon in your minds between two options. Which is better, out of these two options, which of these words feel better in your minds?

[ 1 : 20 ] Ours or mine? Us or me? Together or apart? But which of those words sound better for you, I wonder?

Those words are not a simple choice, are they actually? Because we've got a funny relationship with relationships. And as we think about church, we realise that as a society we are more connected with each other than ever before.

And we instantly think, no, us is the right way, isn't it? It's why someone invented the share button on your mobile phone. It's why we flock to use social apps all of the time.

But at the same time, we're more isolated as people than ever before, aren't we? They tell us that loneliness is increasing. And all the while we're encouraged to consider ourselves as individuals.

I am who I am who I am because of some personal characteristic of what I do or how I feel or what I want to think about myself. I even choose who I am, don't I?

[ 2 : 36 ] Without needing to think about family or community or nation or a world. So whilst we think us, together, ours sound like good things, they are not good things, are they?

When they impinge on my individual decisions and preferences. And so underneath all of the rhetoric about community is the desire for life actually that is about me and myself and I.

And if you think that's a bit harsh, just think for a moment, for a second, about the person in this room who matters most to you. Just think about that person. Imagine them there, visualise them sat in this room.

Who is the person in this room that you've spent most time pleasing in the last week? The most time that you've spent keeping happy and caring for their needs?

It is one person, isn't it, who you've thought most about in the last week? The answer is, of course, me. Or if you're asking, you, isn't it?

[ 3 : 49 ] We're often more excited, if we're honest, about me things than we are about us things.

But the Bible teaches that when you're a Christian, when you're a believer in Jesus, that changes.

And what it means to be a believer in the New Testament and in the Old is a group picture to be a Christian. It is to be a nation under one king.

It's to be a flock under one shepherd. It is to be a building with one cornerstone. A body, Paul says, under one head.

So you could say, couldn't you, well, we're kind of talking about church. Going to and being part of a church. That doesn't make you a Christian, surely. Well, in a sense, that is right. But we've got to ask, which is better?

Us or me? Mine or ours? And I want to give you three reasons this afternoon why us, corporately, is really better than just me when it comes to the Christian life and to following Jesus.

[ 5 : 03 ] Why trying to do faith alone in Jesus is a foolish, nonsensical kind of thing. And why being committed to one local congregation of Jesus' people is his design for you.

And actually for the world, really. Three reasons why it's better. Number one, living in church community helps you to trust God more.

That's the first thing. Living in church community helps you to trust God more. I was chatting with someone the other day and they said, I do believe in Jesus. I'm a Christian, but I don't really do church now.

I don't really meet up with other churches, other members of a church regularly. I do believe, but I just prefer to stay at home and do worship at home.

And nowadays that's really easy to do, isn't it? It's really easy to pretend that we can do church on our own and we can be Christians on our own. We can download a sermon off the internet.

[ 6 : 10 ] We can sing along to Matt Redman or somebody, can't we? We can pray on the sofa at home on our own. And of course we can commune with God anywhere, can't we?

We can pray on our own alone. There is nothing magic about being in a church building that helps us to do that. He is with us everywhere. But I want to say that church community is a place designed by God as the special setting in which Jesus increases our faith in him in a special way. Living in a church community helps us to trust God more in a special way. And he does that in ways there in a church that he won't normally do when you're on your own.

The means that he uses to do that are only things that you can get in a local church. They've been called the corporate means of grace.

Things like preaching and the sacraments, the Lord's Supper and baptism. Of corporate prayer. Of corporate singing.

[ 7 : 25 ] Of corporate worship. And we know that. That is true, isn't it? There are some things that we just can't do on our own at home. We can't have our own little communion service at home, can we?

You know, give ourselves a bread and wine. We can't baptise ourselves in the bath. There are things that Jesus has given for us to do corporately that we just can't do on our own.

And Jesus has given us those things to build our faith up together in a community. It's always strange when people say to me, I don't want to come to church this week because I don't feel that God loves me enough.

I feel a bit spiritually low, so I'm not going to come this Sunday. Today, someone said to me a while ago, I'm lacking in assurance of faith, so I'm not going to come to communion this Sunday.

But that is just to totally misunderstand what those things are for. You're basically saying, I feel discouraged, I lack assurance, so I'm not going to come to the place that Jesus has given me to feel assured.

[ 8 : 31 ] And to gain encouragement. Because there are things in church that help us to trust God more, corporately in a church community.

Secondly, living in a church community helps you to enjoy God more. Helps you to enjoy God more. There is a sense where fellowship with God is experienced and seen differently, almost, I want to say, in a fuller way, in a church community and in a church body.

Through the Bible, we see that God is present in a special way in the place and in the act of congregational worship. And think of Moses, speaking of the place that God dwells, in the sanctuary of the tabernacle in Exodus 20.

Where God places his name. Psalm 46 says, God is in the midst of Jerusalem, the city of God.

And so the living temple, the church, as a corporate people, when they get together, really is the place where God dwells by his Holy Spirit in a special way.

[ 9 : 55 ] The collective body of Christ together. When it comes together, something different is going on there with God. Jesus says, doesn't he, where two or more are gathered, I am there in the midst of you.

He meets with us as individuals when we're part of a body and we do things that he tells us to do together as a church. In a different way than if we were on our own.

And so I want to say, if you try to do the Christian faith solo, you will, in a sense, and I want to be careful, but in a sense, you will get less of God.

You won't enjoy him as he meets with his people in a special way. Now, that's a bit topsy-turvy, isn't it?

Because normally when you share something, you get less of it, don't you? Imagine I brought a cake with me and we shared the chocolate cake out amongst us all.

[ 10 : 54 ] And as more and more people come in through the back door, each portion gets smaller and smaller, doesn't it? The more people, the less the share is that each of us have.

But with God, it is not like that. There is a sense that the more we share God corporately, the more we get of him, not the less.

The writer C.S. Lewis illustrates this really well. He says, imagine the same in human relationships, in human friendships. He says, you enjoy the company of one friend more, not less, when other friends are also there.

He says, think of what it's like in a group of friends. Imagine three friends. Often, he argues, it's the case that if one friend leaves that group, then you won't get more out of the remaining friend, but less.

Imagine three friends, Tom, Dick and Harry. If Tom leaves, Dick doesn't only lose Tom and his part in the conversation, but Tom's role in Harry as well.

[ 12 : 06 ] In each of your friends, there is something that other friends bring out, isn't there? You'll have friends, won't you, when you're on your own with them. They're really great and it's a good time.

But bring in another friend or more friends and there are things about that one friend that come out in a different way. And he says, this is the kind of love that we share in friendship and with God, where to divide is not to take away.

Where we possess each friend, not less, but more as the number of those with whom we share them increases. And it's the same, he argues, with God.

It is like heaven itself, where the multitudes of people worshipping God add to the, he says, the fruition that each person has of God as an individual.

And what he's saying there is that me, myself and I won't get more of God if I keep myself to myself. Because to divide him with others is never to take away from God, but rather to increase the fruition or to increase the realisation that I have of God as an individual.

[ 13 : 29 ] And so in a church community, in a church body, there are things about God that actually only some other Christians can bring out for me.

I'll see his character in ways much more in the light of other Christians' relationships with God. And as I listen to the word and I worship with others around me, God will become clearer to me than he is on my sofa sat alone at home.

And as I see other people's struggles and other people's joys and other people's temptations and other people's lives worked out with the Lord.

As God himself reveals his plan for their lives and his character in their lives, I am more able to enjoy him in my life. With God, you see, with God, you see, it really is the more the merrier.

And you can't get that, can you, by just church hopping and not being involved in people's lives, not being committed to a church congregation, to one Christian community with a group of people to enjoy God with.

[ 14 : 47 ] You just won't have those opportunities. And so living in church community helps you to trust God more as the means Jesus gives us for growing in faith.

Helps you to enjoy God more. And thirdly, and I think most importantly, living in church community helps you to glorify God more. Helps you to glorify God more.

And this really is the most important thing of all, isn't it? Because the whole purpose of the Christian life and the whole purpose of church is not first about what we want, is it?

And about what makes us happy and about what we enjoy, necessarily. It's not about our preferences, what music we like, what sort of songs we want to sing.

But actually the whole thing is for God. And it's about what pleases Him. The goal of church and of the people of God is God Himself.

[ 15 : 55 ] It is about Him. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And there are qualities about us that bring praise to God's glory which are simply beyond each one of us as individuals.

Now the reason that we read this passage in Ephesians 1 is that Paul teaches that here in this passage. Paul talks about the church, doesn't he? He calls it the body of Christ.

And he speaks about how the body of Christ reflects the glory of the Lord Jesus. Raised from the dead.

Seated at the right hand in the heavenly places. Far above all rule and authority. He is glorious. And there's nothing that we can do to add to His glory. The Father has raised Him.

And given Him the name that is above every other name. And Paul says, And the Father has given Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body.

[17:02] The fullness of Him who fills all in all. At the bottom of your sheets. Do you see what he's saying?

The only appropriate expression of a God who fills all things is a universal body of many, many people.

Not of just one person. You can't use big language like that, can you? You can't use filling all when you're just talking about one individual Christian.

I can't say, can I? Hi, I'm Chris. I am the fullness of Him who fills all in all. One Christian believer cannot embody or reflect the glory of Jesus and His grace sufficiently on their own.

God the Father has decided to glorify His Son by giving Him a people. Not just a person to worship and reflect Him.

[18:12] And we know on the ground in reality that that is so true. As the world watches on, it is through the church, through us, the body that the glory of Christ is best known.

Now, of course, I'm not saying that we can't witness the greatness of God, can we, in our lives as individuals. We can't do that with our workmates and our neighbours and our family members on our own.

And there have been great missionaries who have done great things, haven't there, in history, who have worked on their own. But scripturally, I think corporately, the witness, sorry, the witness is corporate, is much more common.

It's the norm. And if you try and think that you can be a lone ranger in evangelism, there will come a point where you'll find actually that your resources to reflect Jesus' glory just run out.

Where you are not sufficiently able to do that on your own for the one who fills all in all. Jesus speaks to His disciples in Matthew chapter 5.

[19:20] He says to them, The interesting thing in that passage is Jesus speaks to the disciples as a group.

The you in Matthew chapter 5 is plural consistently. So it's not really this little light of mine, is it, on its own.

But it's my little light, plus everyone else's little light, on a massive 4K TV screen, full of millions of little pixels, that reflect the glory of Jesus.

And there is something about the body of Christ, corporately, that is especially powerful as a witness to the world. When we live in a Christ-like community, when we love one another and we serve one another, when there is a real community, when it's us, worshipping, living together, and it's not just me.

Where church isn't just another ball that we kind of juggle in a variety of activities that we do in the week, or just one of many plates that we spin along with our leisure time and our work time and our family time.

[20:42] It is a community that defines who I am and gives Christ-like shape to my life. Where I think of myself in relationship to a family and to a body and to a nation.

And so I'm not a lone ranger. If that is true, then we need to think about this, don't we?

We need to think about our commitment to our local church. When people see and experience this body, it will change society, won't it?

It's true. If you want to change society, give them another society. And so this is why church matters. Most people I know who are Christian believers, who are strong in the faith, and are sure of the gospel, are people who have stuck with a church.

And they've stuck with a church that preaches and practices the Bible properly and faithfully. And so let me just say that if you're kind of hopping around churches this afternoon, if you've not found a church like that that preaches the gospel well and lives it out, you need to find one and you need to make a decision and stick with it.

[22:15] It brings no glory to God and is of no help to you if you're not in a church like that. Now no church is perfect, is it?

It will be a mess, but it's a mess worth making. Because most people who I know, certainly, who know more of God and enjoy Him more, are those same people who found a Bible-preaching

church, and have stuck with it.

It's true, being part of a church doesn't make you a Christian in one sense. It's not even saying being a Christian means you have to be part of a church. But actually the truth is, being a Christian and knowing Jesus means you get to be part of a church.

And if you're not a Christian, if you're not a believer this morning, this is what Jesus is calling you to, a community that is like nothing else on this earth. It's not just some club.

It is a community in which Jesus, the God who made the world and who made you, is present, blessing, and who is enjoyed, and is glorified together.

[ 23 : 28 ] And so, ask yourself this afternoon, which is better? Me? Or us? And if you are a believer, then consider yourself part of the family.

It is Jesus' way that you might trust, and enjoy, and glorify Him more. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.