

Sun 8 Sept

Sermon: Eph 3.1-13

Possible Small Group Questions

1. Tell us one thing that struck you in Phillip's sermon on Sunday.
2. Phillip talked about the word "mystery" in Ephesians 3.1-13. The word occurs 4 times (3.3, 4, 6, 9). How would you describe the mystery or secret that was known to God, but kept hidden from humanity until the time of Christ?
 - Leaders' note: the "mystery" concerned how God would use Israel to bring his blessing of salvation to all of the nations (as he had promised Abraham he would). Jews believed God would do this, but it was far from clear how he would do it - not many Gentiles were interested in becoming Jews (because you had to be circumcised) and most didn't like Jews at all!
3. Why is Paul, a Jew, so happy that this great mystery has now been "solved" in the person of Christ?
4. Why are we sometimes so blasé about God's inclusion of non-Jews in his family/blessing? What can we do to foster a spirit of celebration, gratitude and joy in our lives as those who have found the treasure that Christ is?
5. Why is it important for us today to know that we serve a God who keeps his promises, and outworks his purposes, even if this takes place *over a very long period of time*?
 - Leaders' note: we too are a "waiting" people, who look forward to the fullness of our salvation at the return of Christ. We can take courage from looking back to see that God has watched over his word and kept his promise in the past. In this way the Christian hope becomes more certain for us.
6. What are the stories that New Zealanders tell themselves about what it means to flourish as a human being? What are the dreams that inform our ideal of the good life?
7. Many Kiwi Christians feel they can pursue these stories/dreams and pursue Christ as well. Is Phillip right to say that Christ is the end of all these stories? Or is he pushing the point too far?
 - Leaders' note: no need to be defensive or dogmatic here; this question is just designed to help people engage with this part of the sermon.
8. Paul talked about suffering for the sake of the church, and described his suffering as being the church's "glory" (3.1, 13). This sounds very different from contemporary thinking which sees the church as something that is there to serve/bless/fulfil me. What might it mean for ordinary western Christians, in the absence of persecution, to suffer *for the sake of the church*?
9. Paul describes himself as a "prisoner of Christ" (3.1). That's a very negative image for us of the Christian life. Why is this idea so important for Christian's discipleship?
10. What might prevent us from being "detained by Christ"? Think about practical reasons that hold us back from being available to serve the mission of Christ and the church.