

Travail for the Church

by Stephen Kaung

The church is God's purpose in Christ Jesus, and it is the corporate expression of Christ, the body of Christ, the fullness of Christ.

Duration: 1:03:33

Scripture: Matthew 16:18, Romans 8:28, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 1:9-10, Ephesians 3:8-11, Colossians 1:15-20

Topics: "Eternal Purpose", "The Church"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the theme of God's eternal purpose from three different perspectives: Christ, the Church, and Christians. He explains that Jesus came into the world to find His bride, just as Adam sought a companion. The speaker emphasizes the significance of the water and blood that flowed from Jesus' side when He was pierced, representing the remission of sins and His life. He also mentions the importance of the Church being more than just a gathering of individuals, using the example of Peter, John, and James to illustrate that the Church is not simply the sum of its members.

Transcript

Will you please turn to the letter to the Ephesians. Letter to the Ephesians chapter 1 verses 9 and 10. Ephesians chapter 1 verses 9 and 10.

Having made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in himself for the administration of the fullness of times to head up all things in the Christ the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth. Chapter 3. We begin with verse 8. To me less than the least of all saints has this grace been given to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ and to enlighten all with a knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God who has created all things in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the all-various wisdom of God according to the purpose of the ages which he purpose in Christ Jesus our Lord in whom we have boldness and access in confidence by faith in him. Let us have a further word of prayer.

Dear Lord we are glad to be in thy presence we praise and thank thee because thou has the word of life we have believed in thee and there is no one else we can turn to but to thee our hearts do rejoice knowing that thou art for us and if thou art for us who can be against us we praise and thank thee that as we come to thee we know we believe that thou will speak to us speak Lord thy servants hearing we ask in thy precious name amen. We all know that a theme of this conference is the eternal purpose of God and we

are going to look at this subject from three different directions. First we will look at God's eternal purpose as seen in Christ Jesus and Colossians the letter to the Colossians will be the background and our brother Lance has already started on that last night.

Then we will look at God's eternal purpose as seen in the church and the letter to the Ephesians will be the background and this will be my responsibility and then we will look at God's eternal purpose as seen in Christians and the book of Romans will be the background for it and our brother Dana will speak very soon. God's eternal purpose we can look at it from three different in three different dimensions there is Christ there is church and there is Christian and yet all these are one. We read in the letter to the Ephesians chapter 1 verses 9 and 10 that God has made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure in other words even before the foundation of the world God has exercised his own will according to what pleases him and he purpose a purpose in himself and that purpose is to be fulfilled at the fullness of time and we know that purpose is that one day all things will be sum up headed up in Christ Jesus the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth.

In other words here we see the mystery of God. God has a secret and the secret of God is a person his beloved son. You know if you look into the heart of God what will you see in God's heart? In God's heart you only see one person that is his beloved son.

His son is his fullness. His son is the mystery of God. No one has ever seen God but the one who is in the bosom of the father he has declared him.

We say God is the greatest mystery in the whole universe unless he reveals himself. No one can know him but we praise and thank God that he does reveal himself in his son. You remember our Lord Jesus said if you see me you see my father because he is the mystery of God.

He is what has been hidden in the heart of God all since the foundation of the world and he is the one who reveals the father who reveals that secret of the father. Now our brother has already started last night how Christ is the mystery of God. How he is the heir of all things.

One day everything will be summed up in Christ Jesus. He will be the head over all things. Everything will be under his feet and everything will manifest Christ Jesus.

That is God's eternal purpose and how important it is that we know him. But when you turn to Ephesians chapter 3 from verse 9 to verse 11 and here you'll find it is said and to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages who has created all things in order that now to the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies might be made known through the church the all various wisdom of God according to the purpose of the ages which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. When you compare chapter 1 verses 9 and 10 with chapter 3 verses 9 to 11 you'll find there are lots of points of similarity.

You'll find God purposed. You'll find before the foundation of the world. You'll find the administration of the fullness of time.

You'll find God's counsel and you'll find God's working to the accomplishment of what he has purposed. And yet you'll find there is a difference here. And the difference is in the first case you'll find God has purposed in himself.

In other words, God exercised his free will and he made a purpose. It is a purpose that is purposed in himself. And so far as that purpose is concerned it concerns his beloved son.

That is the purpose. But then in the second case when you come to Ephesians chapter 3 you'll find again God purposed and it is before the foundation of the world. But it says he purposed in Christ Jesus.

First he purposed in himself and that is concerning his son. Then he purposed in Christ Jesus. And what does he purpose in Christ Jesus? Even before the foundation of the world you will find it is the church.

Because there, before time begins, God purposed in Christ Jesus that there will be a church. And in that church he is to pour forth all his grace. Through that church he is to even teach the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies the manifold wisdom of God.

Brothers and sisters, the church is God's purpose in Christ Jesus. Or we may put it in another way. The church is what God has purposed for Christ Jesus.

And to that church he will pour forth all his wisdom that even the principalities and authorities in the heavenlies will see his manifold wisdom. So in other words, the testimony of the church is not only just to this world, but even to the unseen world. That is what God has purposed in Christ Jesus.

The letter to the Ephesians is focused on the mystery of the Christ. When you look at Colossians, in Colossians chapter 2 verses 2 and 3, you will find the full knowledge of the mystery of God, which is Christ Jesus. If we want to know the mystery of God, if we want to have any knowledge of the secret of God, it is in Christ Jesus.

But, here in Ephesians, you will find Paul said, by reading you know that how I know the mystery of the Christ that has been hidden throughout the ages, but now has been revealed to the apostles and the prophets, and what is revealed is the church. So the letter to the Ephesians is concerned with the church. But brothers and sisters, before we can deal with this matter of the church in the eternal purpose of God, we have to remember that the church is not the center of all things.

Christ is the center. Without Christ, there would be no church. The church has its origin in Christ Jesus.

Christ is the head. The church is the body. Christ is at the front.

The church serves the background. We can never uplift the church above Christ, because if you look into the heart of God, you see only Christ Jesus, his beloved son, nothing else. If I may put it in such a way, if it's not before because of Christ, you cannot see in God's heart the church.

You cannot see in God's heart you and me. The reason why we are now in God's heart is because we are in Christ Jesus. So strictly speaking, in the heart of God, you see only Christ.

He is everything to God. As our brother already mentioned, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him. He is the fullness of God.

He is the mystery of God. He is the manifestation, the revelation of the secret of God. That is our Lord Jesus.

But thank God, when you look into the heart of Christ Jesus, you see the church. He loved the church and gave himself for it. In the heart of Christ, you see the church.

He so loved the church that he came down from heaven. He emptied himself of the glory and honor that is his right as God, the Son of God. Ego with God, and yet he emptied himself of all his honor and glory and position, and he took upon himself the form of a born slave.

Even the fashion of a man. And he was born in a manger in Bethlehem. For the love of the church, he grew up in Nazareth, hidden for 30 years.

For the love of the church, he came out and preached the gospel of the kingdom. For the love of the church, he went to the cross and died for the church. So, brothers and sisters, even though we have to remember, we cannot emphasize the church more than Christ himself.

And yet, on the other hand, we do find that how the church is the darling of our Lord. And because of this, brothers and sisters, we cannot neglect the church. If our Lord Jesus loved the church so much, could we love the church less? Now, why is it the church is the mystery of the Christ? You remember in 1 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 12, the apostle Paul says, there is one body, but many members.

Many members, but one body. So also is the Christ. Now, probably when you first read that verse, your first reaction will be, there's a mistake there.

Because the body is one with many members. The members are many, but only one body. Well, that is the church.

So also is the church. But the Holy Spirit makes no mistake. Actually, he gave us the right interpretation.

The Bible make it very clear. So also is the Christ. Now, why is it? Because the church is nothing but the corporate expression of Christ himself.

It is nothing less than that, and nothing other than that. I believe, brothers and sisters, we all know that that building at the corner of the city square is not the church. Now, even though we all have the habit of saying, well, look at the corner of the city square, and you can see maybe more than one church, big buildings.

We go to church, which means that we go to that building to worship the Lord. But I believe, brothers and sisters, we all know that church is not made of bricks, or stone, or wood, or whatever material it may be. That's not the church.

That is just a physical building. It can be used for the church to meet, but it is not the church. Sometimes people say, I left my umbrella in the church.

Now, you can never leave your umbrella in the church. You can leave your umbrella in a building where the church meets. So we know this is not the church.

Now, what is the church? We say the church is ecclesia, the called out ones gathered together. Where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matthew chapter 18, verse 20.

We find out that's the church. The church is not the world. The church are the people whom God has called out from every nation, every tribe, every tongue, every people.

God called out a people, gathered them together unto himself. That is under his name, under his authority, under his headship. And when there are two or three gathered together under the authority of Christ, his presence is there.

And we say now, this is the church. But is this the church? Why is it when God's people, those who are called out of the world and gathered together, supposed to be under the name of Christ, and yet you find in the church there are so much fighting against each other. Can that be the church? Many years ago, I had the privilege of serving together with dear T. Austin Sparks.

And I know Brother Sparks, he is so spiritually minded, that if you mention anything earthly, it bothers him. So when we were ministering together, now I tried to explain what the church is to the people. So I turned to Brother Sparks and said, you have to forgive me, because I'm going to use a formula.

Now if it is spiritual, there can be no formula. So I said, I feel sorry for it, but in order to make it clear. So I said, I will use a formula.

Now what is the church? Suppose in the very beginning, there are only three Christians called out once. And these three are Peter, John, and James. You cannot find a better gathering than these three people.

So what is the church? The church is Peter plus John plus James. That's the church. No, of course not.

Because Peter in his natural self, John and James in their natural selves cannot be the church. They had to be called out. So we will say, what is the church? The church is Christ in Peter plus Christ in John plus Christ in James equal church.

Ah, you got it. No. Why? Because you know, Peter is a person who wants to be the head.

And John and James are not more gentle than Peter. You know, even at the last moment, when our Lord was going to Jerusalem, all the disciples had been struggling against each other all these years. Who is the greatest? Now the last chance.

And you'll find John and James are so clever. They got their mother out. And the mother is our Lord's aunt.

And the word of the aunt has some weight. So here you'll find their mother took the two sons to the Lord and said, Lord, we want to ask you for one thing. Promise you will give it.

I think probably they are too ashamed to mention what that thing is. Here is a blank check. Sign it.

But our Lord Jesus never signed a blank check. So our Lord said, now what do you want? Speak it out. Ah, my two sons, one on my right, one on your right, one on your left.

And the Lord said, are you able to drink the cup that I'm going to drink? To be baptized with the baptism that I'm going to be baptized? Oh, they say we will. They do not know even what it involves. And the Lord said, you will.

But to sit on my right and left is not for me to give. It's for the Father to give. And the other ten were indignant.

Why? Because they were outmaneuvered. Now, if you put Peter, John, and James together, how they will fight? And maybe two against one. That's not the church.

Peace should be the church. Brothers and sisters, you know, that's why you and me and all of us, we are the church. And we fight against each other.

No peace. No unity. Where is Christ? So I said, what is the church? The church is Christ in Peter minus Peter plus Christ in John minus John and plus Christ in James minus James equal to the church.

Now you get it. And that's the reason why. So also is the Christ.

In other words, the church is nothing but the corporate expression of Christ. You and I have to be eliminated by the working of the cross in our lives. So what's left is nothing but Christ himself.

It is his corporate expression. He expresses himself, the fullness of Christ. The church is the body of Christ, the fullness of Christ, who feels all and in all.

He feels you, he feels me, he feels all and in all of us. Nothing but Christ. So anything that is not of Christ has to be eliminated by the cross before you enter into the reality of the church.

So dear brothers and sisters, what is the church? The church is the Christ. The mystery of the Christ is the church. When we talk about the church, usually we begin with Pentecost.

Because on the day of Pentecost, two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit came down and a hundred and twenty who gathered in that upper room, they were baptized in the Spirit into one body. So we say that is the beginning of the church. Why? The church begins before the foundation of the world.

Even before the world was, is. God has already purposed in Christ Jesus that purpose, that he is going to have a church for his son. So actually you find the church is conceived in the heart of God, even before the ages began.

It has its origin in God. The church is not a result, product of history. Today we look at the church as a product of history.

So when we write church history, you'll find we look at it from that viewpoint. But we have to remember the church is heavenly in its origin. And therefore it is spiritual in nature.

It is conceived in the mind of God before the foundation of the world. But one day it appears upon the earth, and that is the day of Pentecost. When you look into the gospel according to John, you know the whole gospel of John tries to tell us that our Lord Jesus, he came into this world for one reason.

Now if you read maybe Luke, you'll find that he came to seek and to save the lost. Because the gospel according to Luke is the gospel of grace. But when you read the gospel of John, you will find the reason why our Lord Jesus came into this world.

Yes, he came to seek and try to find, but it's more than the lost. He came to seek for his bride. That's the gospel of John.

That's the reason why the first miracle, first sign he performed, is in a marriage feast. See, as the bridegroom, he came into this world, try to seek and find his bride. John the Baptist understood that.

Because he said, he is the friend of the bridegroom. When he hears the voice of the bridegroom, he's happy. He, the bridegroom, must increase, and he, the friend, must decrease.

So the purpose of our Lord Jesus coming into this world is to find his bride. You know, just like Adam, our brother mentioned last night, God brought all the animals before Adam. Now, why God did that? Because God knew Adam was lonely.

So he brought all the animals before Adam, and Adam gave names to all these animals. But he could not find his like. And because of this, God put him to sleep.

And out of his sight, God took out something, and used that something that came out of Adam to make a woman. And the word make is an architectural word, to construct. And you remember, Adam woke up.

God brought that woman to Adam. Adam looked at her and said, this is me. And they joined together in one.

You know, this is just a type. The anti-type, the fulfillment of that type, is Christ and the Church. Because you'll find in Ephesians chapter 5, Paul says, this mystery is great, but I'm speaking of Christ and the Church.

So, brothers and sisters, when Christ came to this earth, he's looking for his bride. But you'll find not the animals passing before him. You'll find all the men, people, passing before him.

The sick, the blind, the lame, even the dead, passing before him. He couldn't find his counterpart. He couldn't find anyone that answers to his heart.

Because man had fallen into sin, unfit to be his bride. And for that reason, he had to go. He had to die.

And our brother mentioned also last night, the soldier came and found the Lord has already died. To make sure that he did die, he thrust a spear into his side. And out of it comes a water and blood.

And John was there. And he make it very emphatic. He said, I saw it.

I witnessed to it that out of that side came a water and blood. Now why he testified to it emphatically? Mention it, because the blood for the remission of all sins, the water is his life. He gave us a new life, his own life.

And with himself as the material, he built the church. Brothers and sisters, that is what the church is. How? When our Lord Jesus was on earth, he mentioned only twice about the church.

One in Matthew, chapter 16, verse 18. You know, when he asked his disciples, who do men say I am? And they brought to our Lord all these good reports. They purposely withheld all the bad reports.

Try to please the Lord. Oh, you are John the Baptist coming into life. You are the prophet.

You are Jeremiah because you wept a lot. But the Lord was not satisfied. The Lord said, whom do you say I, the Son of Man is? You who are with me, you who should know me.

Who do you say I am? And Simon Peter said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And our Lord Jesus blessed on you, Simon by Jonah, because this is not something shown you by flesh and blood, but it is my Father who is in heaven, who has revealed it to you. And I say unto you, you are Peter, a little stone, a living stone.

I will build my church upon this massive rock, myself, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. That's the first mentioning from the mouth of our Lord about the church. Then the second mentioning is in Matthew chapter 18.

And they say, if your brother sin against you, you go to him. Try to restore him. If he didn't listen to you, you get another one or two brothers with you, and try to convince him.

If he doesn't, then you tell the church, and the church will have to deal with him. Now, of course, from these two mentionings, you can see very clearly, in Matthew 16, it gives us the spiritual principle of the church. Because everything is spiritual there.

I will build my church. It is my church. Build on the rock, myself, that confession.

Build with living stones, like Peter. And there will be spiritual conflict. But Hades gates shall not prevail against it.

So you'll find everything is on a spiritual realm. That's the church universal. And then in Matthew 18, you'll find it is being condensed and applied practically on earth.

What happened where the churches are. You will find there will be sin against each other. And there has to be forgiveness.

Has to be love. Try to restore. There has to be discipline.

And there has to be prayer together. So, brothers and sisters, there you'll find it is the practical application of the spiritual heavenly principles. Now, even though our Lord mentioned the church only twice.

Now, why is it so? Because there's no church. He's not ready yet. He has to die for the church.

And only after he died, then the church becomes a reality. Now, let us go to the beginning of the history of the church on earth. We say that it is Pentecost.

But actually, you'll find the birth of the church. We have to go back to the cross. Because as we have already mentioned, that it is on the cross that our Lord Jesus, how he prevailed.

We notice how our Lord Jesus, knowing his time, has now come. So he set his face towards Jerusalem. You know, his disciples were amazed, frightened, because they knew that the Jews were going to kill him.

But our Lord set his face towards Jerusalem. And you remember that night, how he was agonizing in the garden of Gethsemane. He said, I was sorrowful even unto death.

He was oppressed in his spirit. He told his three disciples, wait with me. Watch with me.

And he went forward and he prayed, Father, if it be possible, let this cup be removed from me, but not my will. Thy will be done. Brothers and sisters, the scene in Gethsemane is so sacred.

There you'll find our Lord Jesus, the Holy One. He who knows no sin. He who pleases the Father, even from eternity.

And yet there you'll find he was going to be the sin offering. No wonder his holiness, his purity, his righteousness, rebelled against all the awfulness, the wickedness, the sinfulness of sin. How could he be

defiled? He who knows no sin to be made sin itself, as it were.

He could not bear it. The temptation is tremendous. He can ask the Father to remove that cup, if he insists.

But he said, not my will, but thy will be done. And when he was praying, he agonized. His sweat comes down like blood drop.

He was so weakened physically that an angel has to appear to support him. Brothers and sisters, we cannot understand how much he loved us, how he gave himself so much for us. The travail of birth.

It is through his travail that the church is born. You remember on the cross, the first three hours, he suffered from the hands of man and of the enemy, Satan, and the evil forces. How he was surrounded by evil, seen and unseen.

They attacked him, but the Father was with him. So he can pray, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. But then at 12 o'clock, suddenly the sun was gone.

Darkness filled the place. And for three hours, he was there alone. Towards the end, he cried out, my God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? During those three hours, he tasted eternal death for each one of us.

Separated from the Father, out of the travail of his soul, he shall see a seed, and he shall be satisfied. Brothers and sisters, the church is not something that man can make. The church has to be born.

And it is born through the travail of our Lord Jesus. But sometimes, I think, when our Lord Jesus was crying, my God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? Is he the only one who is in travail? No. The Father is in travel too.

The Father had to hide his face. He couldn't see his Son. He had to give up his Son for us.

What travail it must be to our Heavenly Father. On the day of Pentecost, when 120 were there praying, suddenly a sound. In the original, it says, like a wind.

But it is a hard breathing. You know, when a woman is in travail to give birth, she has to have hard breathing. It is the travail of the Holy Spirit, the Triune God.

They travail together for the birth of the church. So how precious it must be to God. You know, we today look at the church as nothing.

We play the church. But if you really see what the church is, what a great price our God has paid to bring it about. And because of this, brothers and sisters, you'll find, even in the early days, the 120, they also travail with God for the birth of the church.

They saw the Lord ascended, but the Lord said, go to Jerusalem. Wait. So they went back to Jerusalem.

At one time, 500 saw our Lord Jesus. But only 120 went back to Jerusalem. And they spent 10 days praying, travelling, waiting.

And through the travail of these 120 early believers, the church is born. You know, wherever a church is born, it has to come through travail. Even in our time, there must be some people who travail for the

church, for the testimony of Jesus.

And out of their travailing prayer, something is born. And that is the church. The Apostle Paul, he knew what it means, how he to travail, how he toil in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And he is willing to fill up that which is behind of the affliction of Christ for the church, which is his body. And because of this, you'll find the church in Ephesus was born. The church in other places are born.

And the same principle apply to us. So dear brothers and sisters, first of all, if God so loved the church, how about you and me? Do we love the church in the right way? Now, if our Lord Jesus himself is willing to travail for the birth of the church, then should we not also have fellowship with his sufferings? That we too are willing to travail, to pay a price, to pray, so that the church may become a reality, something that is Christ, something that is his like, that can be his helpmate. So may the Lord help us.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we do thank thee for giving us thy beloved son. He is everything to us.

Lord, we want to thank thee that you are willing to give yourself, your own life to the church, that it may be your like, your helpmate. Lord, pray that thou will open not only our understanding, but that thou will touch our heart. That we may love what thou lovest, and we may be willing to suffer for that which thou dost suffer for.

And to thee be the glory. We ask in thy precious name. Amen.

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