

ST MARY'S, HAILSHAM
Sermon Series - Summer 2007

Ephesians - Living Truth

It is hard to imagine what it must have been like to live under the shadow of the temple of the Roman goddess Diana which dominated the city of Ephesus. The cult of Diana was enormously powerful and widespread; Diana was called - saviour and lord, the goddess of life and fertility. In fact Ephesus was in many ways a hot bed of Greek/Roman paganism, with a sprinkling of Egyptian and Jewish influences thrown in and seemingly with a fear, even an obsession, with spiritual powers and forces. However the goal of this paganism was as ever, the very material attainment of wealth, success and power.

What must it have been like to be a new Christian in such a city?

(Read - Acts 19:1-20:37 for details of Paul's two visits they'll give you a good picture of how difficult it must have been).

Our experience as 21st century Christians may not be so threatening but the similarities are surely obvious. A society dominated not by Diana but certainly by the same very materialistic goals she enshrined - of personal success and fulfilment. Yet alongside that materialism our society is also fascinated by the 'supernatural'; horoscopes, the occult and new spiritualities (look in any bookshop if you doubt me!)

As Christians today we're often frightened by the sometimes hostile changes taking place and by the multitude of beliefs and ideas all around us. However, this is not the first time Christians have faced such a situation. It was precisely such a world in which much of the early church came to birth and why Paul writes this letter.

Note : We need to be aware that some of the earliest manuscripts of this letter don't include 'Ephesus'.

This together with the lack of any personal remarks in the letter (compare with Romans 16 and the fact that Paul had lived in Ephesus for three years, Acts 20) have raised doubts about the link to the city. However very early on the letter came to be linked with Ephesus and most probably it was a circular letter taken by Tychicus, the only person mentioned by name, (6:21) and delivered to a number of Gentile churches in the Ephesus area (Ephesus, Smyrna, Laodeacia, Sardis, Colossae). This would account for its less personal tone but equally explain its major theme of Christian identity in Gentile pagan world

Now when you understand that background you begin to see something of the purpose of this letter. Read through the letter and notice the phrases that recur again and again, "in Christ", "with Christ", "in the heavenly realms". Paul is reinforcing for these relatively new Christians their Christian identity; he's affirming who they are, what they have become, what God has done for them - their new identity 'in Christ'. They may live under the shadow of Diana but they belong to the Lord Jesus and they reign with Him, the exalted King (2:6). It doesn't end there for Paul sees Christians not as individuals but as God's new international community, 'saints' (1:1), 'God's household' (2:19), 'a holy temple in the Lord' (2:21), Jew and Gentile united as fellow citizens in Christ. However even then there is more for Paul insists not only that as Christians we are together in Christ but we are caught up in God's purpose for the whole universe, to bring everything under the 'one head' Jesus Christ (1:10). Great news, not only do we belong to the real King, but in Him we are on the winning side!

Now that of course has some very practical consequences. If we are Christ's distinctive people then Paul calls on us to demonstrate it, to live a life consistent with the people we have now become (4:1) in our lifestyle and our relationships.

It's so much easier isn't it to make a journey when you know who you are, where you live and where you're going and all the more if the roads seem pretty confusing on the way. Paul wants his readers to be sure of who they are, to know the truth of who they are in 'Christ' and to live that truth even when the shadow of Diana seems very dark. So even when Paul is writing at the beginning of the letter of the great truths of the Christian gospel he does so to equip and uphold his readers to live those truths, to live as Christ's people in this world, 'in Ephesus' and 'in Christ' (1:1).

As John Stott writes, "all Christian people are saints and believers and live both in Christ and in the secular world or in the heavenlies and on earth. Many of our spiritual troubles arise from our failure to remember that we are citizens of two kingdoms. We tend either to pursue Christ and withdraw from the world or become so preoccupied with the world that we forget we are in Christ."

A letter then to help us live the truth, to live as the people of Christ yet in this world.

We are going to take a number of weeks over this letter, a chance to let the Spirit of God soak its message into our thinking and living, may we approach it with real expectancy that the Lord will speak to us.

April	15	Know what God has done!	1:1-14
	22	So get to know Him better	1:15-23
	29	Saved by grace, raised with Christ	2:1-10
May	13	One new family	2:11-22
	20	The mystery made known	3:1-21
	27	So walk this way - in unity	4:1-16
June	17	So walk this way - in purity	4:17-5:2
	24	So walk this way - in purity some more	5:3-20
July	8	So walk this way - in submission	5:21-6:9
	15	So walk this way - in readiness for battle	6:10 - end