

25th July || 9th Sunday after

You're being watched



by the heavenly hosts



Main Point:

God's mysterious plan has finally been revealed to us. God always intended for Christ's body, one unified multi-ethnic community, to display his wisdom and grace to all the rulers and authorities in the unseen realm.

God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

(Ephesians 3:10)

Intro | Do you remember back in the 90s there was a movie called "The Truman Show"? The movie tells the story of how a kind-hearted insurance salesman, named Truman Burbank, discovers that his perfectly manicured neighbourhood is the set of a television series, watched by millions ... and even worse, he is the main character of the show!

He learns that he is surrounded by thousands of cleverly hidden cameras which watch his every move. Whether he is asleep, taking a bath, or going to work the world is watching him. Can you imagine what it would be like, to know that every move you make, every word you utter, every mistake you make ... was being watched by millions?

You couldn't get away with much! You couldn't get away with doing something you know you shouldn't do – because millions of people are witnesses to how you are living your life!

It would be pretty unsettling, wouldn't it! Such a mindset, however, would have been very beneficial to David, when we reflect on his disastrous decision to stay behind in Jerusalem, and NOT go to war with the rest of his army. What started as an innocent midday siesta, quickly degenerated into the most well-known illicit affair known to the ancient world.

Point 1 | David's disastrous decision had dramatic ramifications, not only in his own life, but for the monarchy and the entire nation of Israel

Although we won't spend too much on our OT passage, it quickly becomes obvious as we read through the Biblical record, the Holy Spirit never allows the inspired writers to flatter its heroes.

All the men and women of Scripture have significant weaknesses and vulnerabilities. And always, when they are faced with evil temptations and don't succeed – it is recorded! Today, we read how the man after God's own heart, King David, succumbed to the temptation of adultery, then in an attempt to cover up his sin, allowed violence and murder to control his life. At the end of the chapter, David *thinks* he has got away with his sin. But, we read, what seems like a massive understatement, "**But the LORD was displeased with what David had done.**" (2 Samuel 11:27)

Before David was confronted, as we'll learn about next week, I don't think he had any idea of the significant ramifications his dive into sin would have.

God's judgment upon David and the repercussions of his sins do not end with the death of the child, they lay the foundation for a whole series of tragic events—rape, murder, and insurrection. The shock waves that began with a lustful heart on a rooftop were still being felt when David lay dying and was being pressured to make Solomon his successor on the throne.

Sin always causes cataclysmic ramifications in the lives of everyone around us.

Point 2 | God has called us to live as a community of righteous people, who are no longer carried along by the evil powers in the unseen realm.

As we move to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he brings to our attention the importance of us being vigilant to live as God's holy people! As we discussed two weeks ago, Paul goes to great lengths to focus our eyes so that we realise our lives are on display to a whole host of beings.

First, he shows them the importance of us recognising that we are no longer under the power of the evil one.

He told them, **"²You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God."** (Ephesians 2:2)

But now because of God's rich mercies, **"For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus."** (Ephesians 2:6-7)

Let's not miss what Paul is saying. God is going to point to us as examples of his incredible wealth and grace! That is why it is so important for us to know about the spiritual authority we possess in Christ Jesus. The Ephesians were learning how they were no longer to be tossed to and fro by the antics of the evil powers that lurk in the unseen realms.

Rather, they were to recognise their new identity in Christ, as God's citizens in the kingdom of light who live from the spiritual reality that the evil powers in the unseen realm are not able to dominate us, because we are now living under the headship of Christ (v. 10). We are seated with Christ, who is far above all authority and power (v. 21).

Point 3 | Because we are seated with Christ in heavenly places, our lives are designed to be a showcase to the angelic realm of God's wisdom.

So, God is pointing to us as examples ... but who is he showing us to? That's what Paul clarifies in today's reading. After explaining to them God's great mysterious plan that he has been called to preach throughout the region, he writes:

"And this is God's plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God's children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:6)

But, he doesn't stop there ... he goes on to say something even more mind-boggling.

"His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10).

Paul is saying that God has arranged things so that the church of Jesus Christ (that's us) was designed to display the manifold wisdom of God to the angelic realm. Several theologians, when expounding this passage, explain that Paul is describing the Church as the university for angels, and each saint a professor. What mind-blowing insight! It's telling us that what happens to us on earth has a purpose that goes far beyond us personally.

God intends to use the events of this life, the good and the bad, the happy and the sad, the positive and the negative, all of it together and each part individually, to make a display for all the universe to see. He does it so that the angels scattered across the universe, in all their various ranks and orders and levels, will see something of God's wisdom worked out through what happens to us here on earth.

Application | Let's make it practical: Our holy lives are to reflect the unseen atmosphere of God's heavenly kingdom so that it can be seen in this earthly realm.

All this talk of angels and the unseen realm is making some of you whisper to yourself, 'Oh, I don't know, it is all a bit mystical for me! I mean, how does this impact my everyday life?'

Remember the Truman movie I talked about at the beginning of my message?

Illustration | When Truman discovered that the whole of his life was on display in front of the world, he longed to be free. He wanted to be removed from the spotlight, just be 'one of the crowd', an anonymous face, no longer the centre of attention.

He wanted to escape the limelight where every aspect of his life was open to scrutiny and review and comment by others. We can be like that too. We want to hide behind the walls of the church, or in our houses, not letting ourselves be exposed to the comments or opinions of those who we are vividly aware think very differently from us.

But ... unlike Truman, this passage gives us a completely different perspective with which to live our lives. We are being called to acknowledge that our lives are being watched!

Parents know that their children are always watching what we do and what we say – we learn that when they so skilfully copy us!

Those of us who have been teachers – know that our students watch everything we do – and love to mimic our idiosyncrasies and mannerisms.

And, to some degree we are already aware that God watches everything we do.

To some degree we are already aware that our community is watching how we conduct ourselves, how speak to each other, how we relate when we disagree with each other.

But, today there is a whole other dimension of responsibility placed upon us. Today, Paul wants us to recognise that the angels are watching us as well. To heighten our awareness of the presence of the angels of God who are most certainly here with us today, let us do a very biblical activity.

I'd like you to close your eyes and I want to you to ask the Spirit of God to open your spiritual eyes, by activating your godly imagination to see all the angels that are currently filling our worship space today. *[PS: for those reading this message in your homes – the angels are there with you also!]*

They are here! In Hebrews we read, that the angels are ministering spirits sent forth from God to serve those who will inherit salvation – that's us! (Hebrews 1:14)

It is a spiritual and biblical reality that this place is filled with angels – I wonder what they see as they watch us live our lives? They see us struggle, they watch us grapple with tragedy, they see us deal with setbacks, they watch us decide to pray when all around us everything is going wrong. They see whether we pick up the sword of the Spirit, declaring God’s word and promises with our mouth, or whether we leave our sword lying on the ground beside us.

They hear us either using words which are filled with love, joy, peace and encouragement, or allow our words to be hijacked by the enemy, when they contain criticism, bitterness, accusation or slander. The angels see very clearly how we are living our lives.

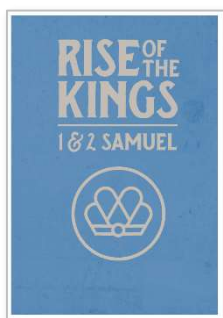
So, let us be very vigilant to live pure lives which steward the atmosphere of the kingdom of heaven. When people walk into our shops, our ministry centre, our worship space – what is the spiritual sense they perceive? Do they sense peace, joy and warm fellowship between us? Or do they sense an uneasy, prickly, uncomfortable atmosphere?

It is our responsibility, every one of us, to ensure they sense the atmosphere of heaven in our midst. That’s why Paul told the believers at Philippi,

“For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you. Live clean, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.” (Philippians 2:13-15)

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. How is your awareness of the biblical and spirituality that there are angels in your midst?
2. How does the presence or reality that the angelic realm are watching how we live our lives alter your sense of responsibility to live holy lives?
3. When you imagine the “family of God” do you imagine a multi-ethnic community of saints, with many skin colours, personalities, sizes and shapes? God’s church is truly diverse and worships him in a myriad of ways.
4. When you pray do you imagine yourself sitting in heavenly places with saints from all the ages praying for God’s people to be strengthened with spiritual wisdom and knowledge? Intentionally imagine this and pray the prayers Paul wrote. (see Ephesians 1:15-23, 3:14-21)
5. Have you been tempted to feel you’re being tossed around by the evil powers which lurk in the world? Ask the Lord Jesus to give you a revelation of your spiritual authority you now enjoy in Christ because God has included you in the kingdom of his dear Son. (Colossians 1:13-14)



Pentecost Devotional: The Rise of the Kings | 1 & 2 Samuel

As we are giving attention to the New Testament series of Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth our devotional will focus on the Old Testament lectionary passages which journey through 1 and 2 Samuel.

New Devotional: Ephesians

As we study Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, a daily devotional has been made available for your use. While this daily devotional does not follow the lectionary readings exactly, it will enable you to progressively work through the entire letter within the same period of time.

