

MBC - 6/3/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"The Heart of Paul"
Ephesians 6:19-24

This morning we come to the close of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. We began our study a year and a half ago. And it's been such a rich time, hasn't it? But we need to get back to Matthew's Gospel, so let's look at Paul's final words as he asks the church to pray for him—

- ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. ²¹So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. ²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

I want to talk through v.19-22 and show you some precious truths about Paul, the man. Then I want to close by focusing on two words in his final benediction that sum up this letter.

I. Paul and the Gospel.

After Paul tells these believers to pray, all the time, for everything, and for all the saints, he asks for prayer for himself—

- ¹⁹and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Would that be you would ask of your friends if you were in jail, chained to a soldier, 24/7? Don't you think it would be: "Scrape together the bail and get me outta this place! At least send me some soap and clean underwear!" Paul didn't even ask them to pray for his release. That's amazing.

- When Erroll and I got to the Philippines I think my first text to Janice was, "We have no hot water or showers. Pray that I can get some sleep before I have to preach tomorrow."

But Paul's only concern was that the Gospel go forth. That consumed him. Turn with me over to Philippians. From this same jail he said this to the believers in Philippi—

- Philippians 1:12 ¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.

That's all that mattered to Paul - the Gospel of Christ was being proclaimed! He's actually *happy* to be right where he is because of all that God is doing, not just in spite of his chains, but *because* of his chains. Let's read on—

- Philippians 1:13-14 ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

He says, “Not only am I able to share the Gospel with people in Caesar’s own palace, but other believers are catching fire too. At the end of this letter Paul sends a greeting from the “saints in Caesar’s household.” Because of Paul’s Gospel jail ministry, people were getting saved right under Nero’s nose. And Paul rejoiced. His only concern was, *“What impact will this have on the name of Jesus and the advance of the Gospel?”*

The last time he had seen the elders from the church of Ephesus, he told them—

- Acts 20:24 ²⁴But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

And later he encouraged Timothy in Ephesus—

- 2 Timothy 2:8-10 ⁸Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, ⁹for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! ¹⁰Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

The only question to Paul was *“What impact will this have on the name of Jesus and the advance of the Gospel?”* That enabled him to rise above earthly circumstances, pain, stress, problem people - like the people in Philippi who wanted to make Paul miserable in jail. What did he say? *“Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice!”* He really meant that. Christ was building His church, bringing in His elect sheep - it was an unstoppable mission, and Paul had a part in that? Heaven on earth to Paul - even in jail.

*There is a lesson here for us: When your heart is set on fire for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that glorious calling overwhelms earthly things, earthly desires, even earthly needs. Last week we read from John ch.4 (turn there - I want you to see this) where Jesus spoke with the woman at the well. After He told her about living water, she rushed back to town to tell others—

- John 4:31-34 ³¹Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” ³²But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” ³³So the disciples said to one another, “Has anyone brought him something to eat?” ³⁴Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. (And He looked up and saw crowds coming from Samaria to hear Him. . .)

I think Jesus literally meant that the joy of seeing people respond to the Gospel overwhelmed His physical desire for food! Beloved, Jesus was a real man, with a real stomach - He got hungry just like you and I do. But He had a greater satisfaction in doing His Father’s will than satisfying His hunger.

- That happens to me, infrequently, when I’m pouring myself out for the Gospel. I want it to happen more often than it does. But my counsel to you if you are feeling “under the circumstances,” of physical pain, stress, world news, people problems - is to rise above it by getting a greater joy and a greater satisfaction in serving Christ and His Gospel. Until you can say *“Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice!”*

So Paul’s prayer request was really selfless. It wasn’t for himself, it was for the sake of the Gospel. That’s why he wanted boldness to speak as he ought to speak. If you think about it, it’s amazing that Paul would ask for prayer in his speaking. In Acts 14, when he and Barnabas were in Lystra, he was so eloquent that the crowds thought he must be Mercury, the god of

oratory! But he asks here for the saints to pray because Paul *never* wanted to do anything in his own power.

- 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 ¹And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵*so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

That's what Paul wanted! That's why he asked for the believers in Ephesus to *pray* that he would be weak in himself that he might be strong in Christ.

And I believe that Paul was asking this because he wanted a shot at witnessing to Nero himself. Remember in Acts that after he was arrested, he appealed to Caesar, and that's why he was in Rome, awaiting his trial. And I think he actually did appear before Nero. And here's why—

- Acts 27:23-24 When Paul was in that horrible storm on his way to Rome: “For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar.’”

Now we have no record of this. We know that Paul was released from that imprisonment, and preached for several more years (maybe he even went to Spain) until he was arrested again, and was executed. But based on what that angel said, I believe the Apostle Paul eventually stood before Nero. Face-to-face. Can you imagine? And at that moment, the prayers that Paul had asked the Ephesians for, were answered, and Paul proclaimed Jesus Christ to Nero.

If I get to heaven before you do, I'll ask Paul about it. Look at what he says next—

II. Paul and people.

- Ephesians 6:21-22 ²¹So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

I want you to look at the man behind these words. This is literally one of the greatest men who ever lived. I don't know if anyone has ever been closer to Jesus Christ than Paul. And yet, he comes to the end of this great letter and hardly mentions himself at all - and when he does, it's all for the sake of the believers there at Ephesus. Paul is sending beloved Tychicus for *their* sakes, because he knew how concerned they were for him.

- They don't need to cheer him up because he's in chains, but he wants to cheer *them* up by sending Tychicus to tell them that he's doing just fine in chains. He kinda likes the way they look on him. He's “*an ambassador in chains for Christ!*” Maybe he sent them a selfie.

And Paul sent the saints in Ephesus his best: **Tychicus**. Look at how Paul describes him: “the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.” How would you like to have Paul say that about you? Tychicus was probably saved under Paul's peaching when he was in Ephesus, and then he accompanied Paul all the way to Jerusalem where Paul was imprisoned and writing

this letter. What that means is that Tychicus was with Paul from Acts 19 all the way to the end of the book in ch.28.

And what means is that he was right by Paul's side for all of the dangers he faced in those chapters. Tychicus shared everything Paul experienced when he wrote about it in—

- 2 Corinthians 11:25-27 . . . a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

But he was faithful through it all. He never deserted Paul, like John Mark did. And he never deserted the Lord, like Demas, later did. So Paul could trust this loyal, godly man to take this letter to the church at Ephesus. He also took the letter to the Colossians to that church, and the letter to Philemon, since he was part of the Colossian church.

- If you were here a couple weeks ago, you heard Malachi explaining the situation between Philemon, a Christian slaveowner, and his runaway slave, Onesimus, who had gotten saved under Paul's preaching in jail. Now what this means is that Tychicus was with Onesimus and together they took Paul's letters to the Ephesians, the Colossians, *and* to Philemon. Imagine what that meeting would have been like! Paul trusted Tychicus enough to be there and be a peacemaker and mediator between Philemon and Onesimus when he read Paul's letter. And Philemon knew that Tychicus would report back to Paul how he responded to his letter.

So Tychicus was a man of courage and impeccable character for Paul to trust him with all of this. He trusted him to communicate his circumstances and his own heart to these people and churches. He was probably the one who read these letters to these churches for the very first time, and he knew Paul's theology and his heart so well that he could explain the hard parts in these letters and answer their questions.

*Paul sent his best when he sent them Tychicus which goes to show how much he loved his churches. And it shows how much he valued person-to-person contact - if he couldn't be there, he wouldn't just send a letter, he would a person with the letter because there was no substitute for people who could flesh out what he had written. Remember what he said to the Philippians: *"What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - practice these things."* Paul sent Tychicus to deliver the message and exemplify the message.

- After Erroll and I got back from our trip, someone suggested that we could save a ton of money and time if I would just skype myself giving messages to the people in the Philippines instead of actually going there. That's not a bad idea - but I couldn't have shaken Pastor Noel's hand, and prayed with those pastors, and hugged my Filipino brothers and sisters. . . And I would never have learned the correct technique for drinking milk from a coconut.

There are some things that technology will never replace. Jesus said that if your brother sins - go. He said that to make disciples of all the nations, we need to - go.

Now let's look at Paul's closing benediction—

- Ephesians 6:23-24 ²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

I want to point out that in v.23, “brothers” here is *adelphoi*, and it means brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul isn’t just addressing men here. And later in this verse, the preposition “from” before God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, means that peace, love, and faith come down to all believers from one God in two Persons. Jesus is equal to the Father in every way - never let anyone tell you otherwise.

Look at those three words in v.23: peace, love, faith - these are gifts from God to His people. These are part of the “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*,” from 1:3, that Paul said belong to every Christian. He’s reminding them of what is already theirs in Christ, but he is also asking God for even more peace, love, and faith.

III. God’s grace to us.

Turn with me back to the very beginning of this letter - I want to show you something interesting. This is the way he begins his letter—

- Ephesians 1:1-2 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then the very last verse of this letter—

- Ephesians 6:24 ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Paul wrote 13 letters in our NT - all of them begin with some version of “Grace to you,” and they end with some version of “grace be with you.” Now of these blessings include mercy, or peace, or love, but the one thing they all have in common is “grace.” Every letter begins and ends with grace because the Christian life is about God’s grace from beginning to end.

Grace comes down from God. The word “grace,” is the Gk. word “*charis*,” which means “gift.” God’s grace is the biblical opposite of something you work for or can take any credit for—

- In Romans 11:6, Paul says that God’s election - His choosing certain ones to be recipients of His mercy and forgiveness is by grace: ⁶But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

And because grace is something you don’t earn or even deserve, you can’t take any pride about receiving it. Paul asked the Corinthians—

- 1 Corinthians 4:7 What do you have that you did not *receive*? If then you *received* it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

I.e., How can you boast about what was *given* to you by God? If you had earned it, you would deserve it. If you had worked for it, God would owe you. And you could boast. But as Paul says in Rom.3:27: “*Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.*”

Grace is purely a gift given by God out of the overflow of His free goodness to give to whomever He chooses without any obligation at all. And I want you to think with me: God's grace is the overflow of His own *self-sufficiency*. God needs nothing. You have to really focus your thoughts to get a hold of this: He literally has no deficiency that we can remedy with our own works. He is not missing anything that He needs us to complete.

Every Christian should read A.W. Tozer's classic, "The Knowledge of the Holy," and if you only read one chapter you must read his chapter of *The Self-sufficiency of God*. Here's just a sample—

"Almighty God, just because He is almighty, needs no support. The picture of a nervous, ingratiating God fawning over men to win their favor is not a pleasant one; yet if we look at the popular conception of God, that is precisely what we see.

Twentieth Century Christianity has put God on charity. So lofty is our opinion of ourselves that we find it quite easy, not to say enjoyable, to believe that we are necessary to God. But the truth is that God is not greater for our being, nor would He be less if we did not exist. That we do exist is altogether of God's free determination, not by our desert nor by divine necessity."

Go *needs* nothing you have to offer. We talk about *servicing* God, as if He is somehow incomplete without us. Beloved, we don't serve God! He serves us! Paul said this to the Athenian philosophers in Athens—

- Acts 17:24-25 ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

We don't serve Him because He doesn't need anything. He is the One who serves us and gives to us because we are the needy, deficient ones. He is the all-sufficient One.

Now I want you to see what this has to do with God's amazing grace: It's because God is self-sufficient - He has all He needs within Himself, that He never needs anything from us, therefore, we can never do anything for Him that puts Him in our debt. This is so clear in what Paul said at the end of Romans 11, after expounding on God's free, electing grace for 3 chapters—

- Romans 11:35-36 ³⁵“. . . who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?" ³⁶For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

Everything comes to us from Him! We are in debt to Him for His gifts to us. But He is never in debt to us for our gifts to Him!

Grace was at the heart of who Paul was, and it was at the heart of the message he preached. And oh, how we need to proclaim the Gospel of God's grace! We are the ones in need, in sin, in debt. We are poor in spirit, bankrupt before God with no means to repay what we owe Him. But He has sent us a Savior, Jesus Christ, the very fullness of the all-sufficient God, to *grace* all those who trust Him with abundant life - eternal life—

- John 1:16-17 ¹⁶For from his fullness we have all *received*, grace upon grace. ¹⁷For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

We drift so easily away from grace. It's in our flesh to want to offer something up to God and then expect that He owes us something in return.

- I heard of someone recently who said that God answered his specific prayers because He had kept His commandments. That man was wrong on two counts: First, he didn't keep His commandments - only Christ kept God's commandments perfectly, earning us His righteousness. And second, even if he did, God is never obligated to any sinful human being. He never owes you anything.
- When we were in the Philippines, and it was during some of the Q&A's, some of the folks there seemed stuck on sin and consequences, one gal asked if it was a sin for her husband to breed the birds used in cockfighting - he didn't actually participate in that, but he bred the birds . . . and then an older woman stood up and asked Nilo how he could say that a Christian can still sin. She was convinced that true Christians don't sin. And I leaned over to Erroll and said, "This sounds more like legalism than grace."

And then we sang a song that said, "Oh Jesus, I lay down my life for you, I give you my all." And I practically shouted out, "No you don't! *Jesus* laid down His life *Jesus* gave His all for you!"

Sometimes, we try to bribe God with our own goodness. But if we could do that, then grace would evaporate. What we received from God wouldn't be grace, it would be a payoff. Elihu got it right when he said to Job—

- Job 35:7 ⁷If you are righteous, what do you give to him? Or what does he receive from your hand?

Answer - nothing and nothing. God is the Giver, we are the receivers, anything else isn't Christianity. It's all about what God gives to us through Christ, not what we give to Him. It's about what Christ has done for us, not what we do for Him. The rich young ruler asked Jesus, "Good teacher, tell me what I must *do* to inherit eternal life." And he walked away from eternal life, because the Gospel isn't a message of "do," it's a message of what has been *done*. By Jesus.

You should come to church looking upward, not inward. And you shouldn't leave church weighed down by what you should do, but *set free* because of what Christ has done! That's grace. You don't work to earn it, you receive it by faith.

- Janice was talking to a Christian this week who was talking about church, and morality, and God, and being a better person, and staying out of trouble - and it just left her with a cold feeling - he was leaving out Christ, and grace.

*The message we proclaim to the world is not, self-improvement. It's not even, "Stop your sinning!" It's "Believe in Jesus!" The Good News of the Gospel is what Jesus has done so that sinful people can have forgiveness of their sins and a relationship with God. Our message is His grace.

And if you are a Christian, your salvation, and your entire life until you meet Christ, is grace from first to last. Not what you give to God, but all He has given to you, and is still giving you in Christ!

This is why Paul begins all his letters with "grace *to* you," and then ends them with "grace *with* you." He was saying, "Through the hearing of this Word from God, His grace is flowing to

you,” and at the end of this letter, “Now live in this grace, walk in it, and Christ will be *with* you.”

- Are you living in the grace of God this morning? Walking in it? Eating, drinking, and breathing it?

II. Our love for Christ. (chs. 4-6)

And then he ends with this amazing statement—

- Ephesians 6:24 ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Isn't that a beautiful statement? Incorruptible means permanent, undying love. This is our response to God's grace. *“Oh how I love Jesus - because He first loved me!”* You *didn't* love Him before He showed His grace to you! But now, as Peter said: *“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”* I want you to leave this morning understanding the message of this letter to the Ephesians—

The *reason* we love Jesus is in chapters 1-3: because He first loved us with an incorruptible love. Because He chose us to holy and blameless before Him in love and sealed us with His Holy Spirit. Because He adopted us as His children and brought us into His church. We love Him because of His grace toward us - that's the first three chapters of this letter.

The *way* we love Jesus is in chapters 4-6. We walk the walk, we fight the fight, we live differently than the world, our marriages are different, the way we do our jobs is different. We're people who have been radically changed by the grace of God, and we love Him in response by working hard to live out these changes. We want the world to see what Jesus can do with sinful, broken people. That's how we love Jesus.

And nothing you're going to hear this morning is more important than this: ***your love for Jesus Christ is the result of His grace toward you - not the cause of His grace.*** He doesn't grace you because you love Him. You love Him because He graced you. It's your *response* to His grace not the *reason* for His grace.

- And that is the difference between religion that takes you to hell, and the Gospel that takes you to heaven. If you're trying to earn God's grace and forgiveness by what you do - you are rejecting what Jesus did. You can't have it both ways. *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him - should not perish but have eternal life.”*

So the question for each of us as close our study of Ephesians is: Do you love Jesus Christ? This is the mark of the true believer - you love Jesus with an undying love. You might be in church every Sunday, you might have a Bible that is tattered and annotated, you might be a Bible teacher - but unless you love Jesus - you are not a Christian. Paul ended another letter by turning this statement around—

- 1 Corinthians 16:22 ²²If anyone has *no love* for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!

In the Gk. - “Anathema, maranatha!” Do you *love* the Lord Jesus Christ? I mean *Jesus* as He is revealed in the Scriptures, the true Jesus, not some cultural invention, or cult corruption. Do you love Him? Can you tell Him, “I love You, Lord Jesus!”

- When Jesus was alone with Peter on the beach after His resurrection, after Peter had denied Jesus three times, what did Jesus ask Him? “Peter, do you love Me?”

Jesus would ask you and me the same question this morning: “Do you love Me?”

The epilogue to this letter is very sad. About 30 years after Paul wrote this letter to this church, Jesus Christ gave a message to them through the Apostle John.

- Revelation 2:1-5 ¹“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ²“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. (their love for Him - but He pleads with them: ⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.

(Pray)

The Lord’s Table: We come to this Table as a *response* of love to the grace of God in Jesus. We do it to *remember* that Jesus offered up Himself in our place, as our Sacrifice, and our Substitute to take away our sins. And God raised Him from the dead to proclaim that He is satisfied by what His Son has done. It was enough! And when we come to the Table we are saying, “*It was enough!* Enough to completely take away my sins before God! I believe that has fully forgiven me, and accepted me as His child because of Jesus and what He did for me!” If you can say that this morning, you can join us at the Table.

(during the Bread—from Tim Keller)

“Do you realize that *it is only in the gospel of Jesus Christ that you get the verdict before the performance?* The atheist might say that they get their self-image from being a good person. They are a good person and they hope that eventually they will get a verdict that confirms that they are a good person. Performance leads to the verdict. For the Buddhist too, performance leads to the verdict. If you are a Muslim, performance leads to the verdict. All this means that every day, you are in the courtroom, every day you are on trial. That is the problem. But Paul is saying that in Christianity, the verdict leads to performance.”

“You see, the verdict is in. And now I perform on the basis of the verdict. Because He loves me and He accepts me, I do not have to do things just to build up my résumé. I do not have to do things to make me look good. I can do things for the joy of doing them. I can help people to help people - not so I can feel better about myself, not so I can fill up the emptiness.”