

Sermon: Proclaiming the Gospel  
Ephesians 6:18b-24

We are at the close of our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

We started this book in September of 2019 and are finishing it right before we begin the Advent season. Our plan for Advent is to study Isaiah and then during Christmas, we will move to Matthew's gospel. We plan to be in Matthew for foreseeable future. But now we must first conclude Ephesians.

At the close of Ephesians Paul asks for prayer regarding a specific issue.

He wants them to pray that he would be **bold** to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel as he ought. If you're like me, you have such a high opinion of Paul that you would imagine his commitment to Christ is almost automatic.

But just like every follower of Christ alive today, Paul was not 'there' yet.

He was not yet perfect in his flesh.

He still needed prayer because he still struggled to be faithful.

So let's read God's word from Ephesians 6:18-24.

We will pick up half-way through verse 18.

**Ephesians 6:18b** To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

**21** So 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. **22** I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

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

***This is God's word.***

***The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.***

What is your life wrapped around?

What is really at the center of your life?

Maybe you haven't asked yourself this question in quite a while.

Most of us are so consumed with the busy-ness of life that we seldom take the time to ask ourselves why we are ultimately doing all that we do.

Often we're just thinking of the next thing that needs to be done.

Yet Paul is in a different place than all of us because he is in prison.

In prison, your activities are greatly limited.

There are only a few things that you can do.

And so, in addition to writing letters to churches, praying for them and having conversations with guards and guests, there really wasn't much else that Paul could do.

He inevitably had a great deal of time to think.

And in the verses we have just read, we see what was on Paul's mind.

You have a sermon outline and the first point there is...

### I. Paul Requests Prayer for Boldness

Paul's life was wrapped around Christ and the gospel. In Ephesians, Paul isn't very autobiographical.

He doesn't reveal all that much about himself and his mission in life in this letter.

But in Philippians, which I believe he wrote during this same imprisonment, Paul tells us very succinctly what his life is all about.

He writes in **Philippians 1:21** "**For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**"

His purpose in life was to please Jesus and serve him with every ounce of his being.

And yet, such service and faithfulness was not automatic.

It was very possible that Paul could fail to honor Christ in an important way at his trial.

And so, he requested that the Ephesian church pray for him, that he would be as bold and clear as he should be in proclaiming the Gospel.

He writes:

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

One describes the challenge that Paul faced:

"As Paul pens this letter, he is about to face the greatest opportunity of his Christian ministry: to stand in a tribune before Emperor Nero and all of the magistrates and defend himself against the charges brought against him. Paul's motivation goes far beyond presenting the best defense possible to escape death or further incarceration; he sees this as an extraordinary opportunity to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the most influential and powerful people in the world. No doubt this is a profoundly intimidating atmosphere, and most assuredly the evil one is attempting to assail Paul in the most effective ways he can devise to prevent his testimony from being heard. Paul is in the midst of an intense spiritual battle and recognizes his need for prayer from his fellow brothers and sisters."

Paul is in the midst of a struggle.

It would be so easy for him at his trial to speak the gospel in a smooth way so that it goes down easier and is not so offensive.

He could round off the edges of certain words and concepts like **sin** and **judgment**.

Regarding sin, he could speak rather of "broken-ness", "imperfections" and "mistakes" rather than speaking of rebellion against a holy God.

Sin is such a harsh word so why use it?

And regarding judgment, he could choose to keep things positive and talk only of the rewards of heaven while neglecting the reality of eternal condemnation.

Hell is such a harsh concept and even though Jesus clearly taught it as a reality, does it really do anyone any good to scare them with hell.  
Won't that just turn people off to the gospel?

These are two ways that Paul could have compromised his presentation of the gospel.  
Yet perhaps the most offensive aspect of the gospel that Paul was to proclaim was **the Lordship of Jesus Christ**.

Remember to whom he would speak.  
His audience might possibly be Nero himself.  
He, with all the magistrates and officers, would be a collection of the most powerful people in all the world.  
And so, if Paul proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord, then what would be the implication for Caesar?  
The Gospel would offend Nero by telling him in no uncertain terms that Caesar really isn't Lord after all.

And Paul knew that he would be tempted to be less confrontative with the gospel.  
He knew there was an easy way out that involved compromising the message.

And so he prays for boldness and for words to be given to him in opening his mouth so that he would speak as he ought to.

Paul's faithfulness was never automatic.  
Failure was a very real possibility.  
He knew that satan could get the upper hand. He also knew his flesh was weak.  
And so there was a temptation to smooth over important details so that he might win favor or ease his sufferings.

If he is clear and forthright about the gospel it will inevitably be offensive.  
The gospel is always offensive when it's rightly proclaimed and rightly understood.

If you have never been offended by the gospel, then you have never really understood it.  
Because the gospel knocks all of us off the throne.  
It tells us that we are not the rightful lords of the earth (like Caesar thought himself to be).  
And personally, it tells us that we are we are not the rightful lords of our own lives.  
Christ is Lord over all- and that includes every empire and every person individually.

And the bad news is, that each of us, by nature, sits on a throne that rightfully belongs to Christ alone.  
It is our sin that causes us to be so arrogant to think that we belong to ourselves and not to God.  
That we can do with our own lives as we please.  
Yet the gospel tells us that we are accountable to God for everything we think, say and do.

**Romans 14:10** For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; **11** for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." **12** So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.

Paul has to bring this offensive message before Caesar.  
Caesar is not Lord. Christ is.  
And Paul isn't ultimately accountable to Caesar. He's accountable to Christ.

And you know who else is going to have to stand before Christ in judgment?  
Caesar.  
And Paul has to break this news to him.

The most ironic detail in all of this is that Caesar is going to be held accountable by Jesus.  
And Paul is an **ambassador** in chains.  
He represents Christ on earth.

Now, if Caesar takes Paul's words seriously, then he going to make this connection, that this disheveled man in chains represents the Lord of Heaven and earth.  
And Caesar knows its never a good thing to mistreat another ruler's ambassadors.  
Especially when that ruler is more powerful than you.

By holding Paul as a prisoner, Caesar is offending the very ruler he will have to one day give an account to.  
And so we see that the stakes are high for Paul in proclaiming this message.  
If he proclaims the Gospel in an unvarnished way, it will inevitably be offensive.

Caesar could have him killed.  
(And later on, as we have traditionally understood it, Caesar did have Paul killed.  
Yet from this imprisonment, he will be released  
Yet here, Paul does not yet know how this will turn out).

And so he prays for courage, to be bold enough to proclaim the Gospel.

The gospel is the power of God for salvation.  
It doesn't just tell us that Christ is the Lord.  
It also tells us that Christ is the savior.

Yet for us to know him as the savior, we have to first recognize that we have offended him as the rightful Lord.  
This is no small detail that we can just brush aside.  
We have offended God.  
We naturally think that we are the Lord, at least in our own lives.  
And the penalty due to us for this sin is eternal condemnation in hell.  
But Christ came to take that judgment upon himself at the cross.

And so now, if we have faith in Christ, we are put into a right relationship with our Lord.  
He is no longer offended by us.  
Rather he accepts us freely.  
And this is not mere acceptance.  
When we have faith in Christ, God the father receives us as his very own Children.

So let me ask you, have you ever been personally convicted of your sin before God?  
Have you realized the eternal penalty that your sins deserve?  
And are you trusting in Christ now as your savior?

If this is true of you, then you have received the offense of the gospel.  
You've taken it in with faith.  
But if, when this message comes to you, you brush it aside, or you reject it as narrow minded or just plain

wrong, then you have rejected the offense of the gospel.

Again Paul tells us in Romans 14:10:

**Romans 14:10** For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God...

And the good news of the gospel is that we can meet Christ in faith before that day ever comes.

We can be sheltered by his grace.

But if we refuse him, if we brush him aside, then we will meet him at the end of our lives as a righteous judge whom we have offended.

**So I urge you, be reconciled to God.**

Paul wrote words to this very effect in 2 Corinthians 5:20 and 21.

**2 Corinthians 5:20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Do you know Christ in this way?

And if you do, are you willing to make him known?

Not everyone is called to be a preacher.

Be we are all called to **“always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”** 1 Peter 3:15

Christian, Have you ever been asked why you have such hope?

Have you ever been asked why you have joy or why you do the things you do?

If so, how did you respond?

Were you prepared to make a defense for the hope within you?

Did you represent Christ well with your words?

Or did you shrink away, fearing the shame of being identified with Christ?

You know, that's about the worst that can happen to most of us here in Germany or in the USA.

The shame of what Tim Keller calls “the sneer.”

If you identify with Christ, normally the worst thing that will happen to you is that you will get put into some sort of box in a person's mind.

It's a category of people they don't respect and so they sneer at them- the people in the box.

We don't like to be sneered at.

We want to be respected.

But if you identify as a Christian in our societies, and you speak about Christ as he really is, then you will be put into a box and sneered at.

So, do you gladly bear that reproach?

Now, if you are a believer and you are **never** asked to give a defense for the hope that is within you, **it may be** that you don't look all that different from everyone around you.

If you never catch any resistance for being a Christian, chances are that you are not living a distinct enough life.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:12** **Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...**

If we never face any resistance for our faith in Christ, then the chances are good that we are not living a life that is distinctly Christian.

So, we may not all be called to proclaim the gospel like Paul was or like pastors and elders are.

But we are called to bear witness about Christ in a myriad of ways in our lives and not shrink away.

Sure this may mean that we are sometimes sneered at. Yet every Christian's calling is to be prepared to give a defense for the hope that is within them.

So don't fear them.

Be gentle. Be respectful. And be bold.

Your words to them about the saving power of Christ may be the first time they hear the gospel in a way that makes sense.

So, after Paul requests prayer for boldness, he goes on to tell them about the messenger.

And this brings us to our next point:

## II. Paul Sends a Messenger

In verse 21, Paul writes:

**21** So 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. **22** I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Ephesians is unlike many of Paul's letter in that he does not greet specific people within the church or give specific details on how he is doing.

The reason for this is because he is sending his messenger, Tychicus.

He will relay all of the personal information and greetings.

**And it is important for us to note that Paul never did ministry alone if he could help it.**

**He always worked on a team.**

Even in prison, he was allowed to have guests who spent a great deal of time with him.

Paul's letter to the Colossians was written at around the same time he wrote Ephesians.

In many ways it is a sister letter.

And in Colossians 4:10-14, Paul mentions a number of people who were with him as guests in prison.

He mentions Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke and Demas.

Far from being alone, Paul was surrounded with brothers in the Lord who aided him in ministry.

**And this shows us that ministry us never to be a lone ranger enterprise.**

**It is inherently relational.**

When our family first arrived in Germany 9 years ago, we had the plan of starting a church.

Yet from the moment we landed, we had two other believers here who helped and encouraged us.

Cathy and Everett Hoekstra we Americans living in Wiesbaden. Their children were grown.

He was an American who worked for Boehringer Ingelheim and he was the first ruling elder in our church.

Their support and accountability in those early years was vital.  
And it was confirmation to those sending us from the USA that God was in this mission.

God seldom asks us to walk alone in ministry.  
Even Jesus surrounded himself with disciples.  
And so we ought to be rightly concerned whenever we encounter a minister of the gospel who is alone.  
It's not good for them or for those they seek to reach with the Gospel.

Finally after introducing Tychicus the messenger, Paul says goodbye in the form of a benediction.  
And this brings us to our final point in the outline.

### III. The Benediction

A benediction is a word of blessing.  
It literally means "a good word" and it was common for Paul to close his letters with a benediction.

In verse 23 Paul writes:

**23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

The **peace** Paul refers to is peace with God and with one another.  
The love with faith marks the heart that every Christian should have.  
We ought to have love for God and other believers because we have faith in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 24, Paul's final words to them are:

**24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.**

God's grace is what makes our salvation possible.  
Grace is no small theme in Ephesians.  
Grace is often mentioned in this letters most memorable passages.

In Ephesians 1:5, Paul wrote:

**5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace**

Our election serves the purpose of his eternal worship-praising God not just in a general way.  
But to the praise of his glorious grace!

And then perhaps most memorably, grace takes the center stage in Ephesians 2:4-9:

**4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—**by grace you have been saved**— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show **the immeasurable riches of his grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

**8** For **by grace** you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

God grace is something to celebrate.  
Because Grace is getting the opposite of what we deserve.  
We deserve condemnation. We deserve hell.  
But because of God's grace, he gives us life in Jesus Christ.

And because of his grace, and his work in us, we respond with love to our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

That the final phrase of the letter:

**24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.**

Do you have a love for Christ that is incorruptible?  
You do if God has put that love in your heart.  
At the core of every Christian is this one, incorruptible, and never dying affection.  
Love for Jesus.

So do you love the Lord Jesus?  
Is he more precious to you than anything you could ever compare him to?

This is His work in you.  
It's why he saved you, that you might love him who is most lovely.

Praise be to God.  
This concludes our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

Amen.