

Ephesians

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 0 0] Well, fellas, we are going to be introduced to a subject this morning that I can honestly say has had a greater impact on my own preaching and teaching and understanding of the Word of God than anything else since the time that I became a believer back in 1956.

And I don't mind telling you, I'm somewhat embarrassed to say that I had adopted as a life verse when I was but a student, I think probably in my sophomore year back at Cedarville College, and this would have been probably 1958, when I adopted Ephesians 6.19 as my life verse.

And Paul's request for prayer in that verse was that, and that for me, he was writing to the Ephesians, and we'll get there eventually in chapter 6, and he says, as he's closing out this letter to the Ephesians, he requests prayer on his own behalf.

And what he asks them to pray for regarding him is that utterance may be given unto me that I may speak boldly the mystery of Christ for which I am an ambassador in bonds.

And I must admit that that verse really sounded good to me. It sounds even better to me now, but now I have some understanding of it that I didn't have then. And yet, I knew that I was very much a victim of what so many Christians are, and that is a fear to speak out, to vocalize what you know about Jesus Christ, because it's very easy to be intimidated into silence, where you just keep mum.

[1 : 5 6] And here is a man who is giving a prayer request, and he is saying, in effect, by the way, the reason that I am a prisoner, the reason I am in bonds now, and he wrote this from the position of house arrest in Rome when he had his own hired villa, he is chained to a guard 24-7, and he says, the reason I am in this circumstance is because I have spoken forth the merits and the finished work of Christ.

And that is what has resulted in my being a prisoner. And now, the request that I am making to you is that when you pray for me, pray that I will be given boldness to utter forth this mystery, which is the very reason I am in the situation I am in now.

He was asking for the power and the encouragement to keep on proclaiming that which was responsible for him being a prisoner.

I guess one might think that humanly, if there is anything that might cause you to go tight-lipped, it would be the fact that it was your loose lips and your promoting this work that got you in the mess you're in.

And now you're praying for more of the same? Yeah, that's exactly what he's praying for. And I'll tell you why. Why? Because he recognized that absolutely nothing apart from the proclamation of the gospel means anything of value.

[3 : 4 5] This is where it's all at. And it is essential that this word go forth. And yes, it will very likely lend you some heartache.

And it will land you in difficulty. And you may pay dearly for your insistence on speaking forth the truth.

But so what? Because nothing else matters. And that's the position that he's taking. And that's the basis for his prayer request. Yeah. Now, the reason Paul was behind their house arrest and had the problems with it was because it was an illegal religion that he was preaching at the time.

The Romans didn't allow a new religion to come on. And therefore, is that why he was a jail? Well, that was part and parcel of it. But I don't want to go into an elongated explanation here.

But this actually started when he was proclaiming the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah.

[4 : 51] And he was proclaiming this to the Jewish constituency. This is way back in Acts 22 or 23.

And this is when he was in the temple area. And he was accosted by a number of Jews. And they accused him saying, Hey, hey, this is the guy that brought a Gentile into the temple.

And the people said, What? What? And they came upon him physically. And they started pummeling him. It was an actual riot.

I'm tempted to go back to that passage. But we better not. We'll be stuck there. And immediately, a Roman contingency of soldiers saw that there was a riot down on the area.

And they sent the troops in. And they came in and started parting the ways. And the people were literally going to take Paul apart. And the Romans were insistent on keeping the peace and not allowing this riot to increase.

[6 : 00] And they came upon him. And they broke up the thing. And the Jewish authorities were saying, This is the guy who is teaching against our religion and blah, blah, blah.

And the soldier, the captain of the guard confronted Paul. And he said, Listen, I think I can explain this whole thing. Just let me talk to the people a little bit. And they gave him an audience.

And he preached. And he came again to the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And everything broke loose. And Paul was going to turn them loose. I mean, sorry.

The Roman guard was going to turn Paul loose after he questioned him. He saw that he was not guilty of violating any law as far as the Romans were concerned. And they didn't have any reason for holding him.

And they were going to turn him loose. And the Jews out there are licking their chops. Because, yeah, turn him loose. Turn him loose. We'll take care of him. And Paul's only salvation was he turned to his Roman guard and he said, I appeal my case to Caesar.

[7 : 18] That changed everything. Yes, it did. And when they found that he was a Roman citizen and he appealed his case, the situation to Caesar, that put him in an entirely different category.

Now he is under Roman protective custody. That's right. And they were not able to turn him loose. They had to take him actually all the way to Rome.

And it's going to be over two years before he gets there because he's going to spend a lot of time in the prison in Caesarea under Roman arrest. Then there will be the voyage to Rome. And that's when the shipwreck takes place.

And then eventually they get to Rome. And then Paul is able, because he is a Roman citizen, he hasn't had his day in court. He's not put in prison.

But he is in house arrest. And we know what that's like today. House arrest, they put a little electronic bracelet on your arm or on your foot. And they keep track of where you're going.

[8 : 18] Well, his electronic bracelet consisted of a Roman guard that was handcuffed to him. And they would change the guard every six hours so he had four different guards. And you can imagine what Paul talked about when he's changed his Roman guard.

And this is how he writes to the Philippians. And he says that my imprisonment has turned out to rather the furtherance of the gospel. And that many in Caesar's household have heard the gospel.

And those of Caesar's household was the Praetorian Guard. And they were those chained to Paul. So anyway, this whole situation boils down to it is Paul's proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in whatever venue he was found that ultimately ended in his arrest.

And nothing, nothing will cause the adversary to incite opposition among the people more than the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

And that's exactly what's taking place here. And this is why he is a prisoner. So we're going to open with chapter 3.

[9 : 26] This is 3A on the sheet that you've got. And I want to go back just a little bit like we've been doing right along. I've already blown the study for the morning. So we might as well finish it that way.

In verse 1, when Paul says, For this cause. What cause is he talking about? He's talking about the cause that he just laid down in the previous chapter.

And let me remind you again, at the expense of being a broken record, ignore the chapter divisions in the Bible. There's nothing inspired about them. And they often interrupt the continuity and the flow.

So let chapter 2 run into chapter 3 and just keep right on going because Paul is on a roll when he is writing and we ought to be on a roll when we are studying.

And this goes all the way back across the page. Look at verse 17 under 2C. Verse 18, Gentiles.

[10 : 47] They were outside the commonwealth of Israel. They had no hope and were without God. But now they are fellow citizens with the saints. And verse 20, And they are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

We talked about the implications of that. And the cornerstone. In whom all the building fitly framed together grows into an holy temple in the Lord in whom you are also built together. And for this cause.

This is why. Because of all of the reality that has just preceded. This is why I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.

In other words, he is saying, listen. It is essentially you Gentiles. And my commission to go to the Gentiles. It has gotten me into all the trouble that I am in.

This is why I am a prisoner. Because of what he was preaching to the Gentiles. And verse 2 is going to open a subject that, as I mentioned at the outset, has been more responsible for my appreciation and growth and development, I guess as a student and as a Bible teacher, than anything else since I came to faith in Christ.

[12 : 08] And I am going to begin sharing with you this morning something that some of you appreciate. And some of you, I know, probably aren't able to connect.

And I understand that. Because I certainly didn't connect the first time I heard it. In fact, the first time I heard this truth, my inclination was to reject it. And the reason for that was because that is not what I had always been taught.

And it created a conflict within. And my initial response was to reject it. I had been a believer for about...

Well, let's see. I came to faith in Christ in December 8, 1956. And it wasn't until 1969, 70.

Okay, about 13 years before I came to an appreciation of what I'm going to begin sharing with you now. And up until that time, I just didn't get it.

[13 : 19] Wasn't able to connect the dots. And I draw a parallel between a believer who comes into grace truth compared to an unbeliever who comes into the truth of salvation.

And I know that this probably is true of more than one of you here. And that is the likelihood is the first time you heard the gospel, it didn't connect.

This is common. I remember having heard vaguely some truths about the gospel and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

But I never really was able to make the connection. And it was only after some repeated hearings that it started to make sense.

And I actually understood it enough to be able to make an intelligent decision. And that was after repeated hearings of the gospel. And what I'm saying is, I think in the very same way, the truths that we are going to begin looking at this morning may well not enable you to connect the dots.

[14 : 45] And I remember, it's kind of hard for me to express this because I'm trying to relive what I was thinking and what I was going through at the time. But I know the reality of hearing something and thinking that you understand it, but you don't.

And it is only after repeated hearings that you're able to look back on it and say, I remember my initial exposures to that.

I didn't get it. Didn't see it. Didn't accept it. Didn't mean that much to me. And I thought, oh, what's the big deal about that anyway? But after some more repeated exposure, eventually it hit me like a thunderclap.

Oh, wow. Yeah. And I trust that some of you may have the joy of the same experience.

I don't know. But it's an individual thing. And what I'm talking about is an appropriation of the doctrine of the grace of God in a way that is seldom appreciated by most believers.

[16 : 00] And for me, it was life changing. For me, it caused the Bible to start making sense like it had never made sense before.

I mean, things really started falling into place. And thereafter, when I would read the Bible, I would get a, wow. Oh, okay. Now I get it.

Now I get it. Now this makes sense. Now this falls into place. And what you're doing is connecting those dots. You're seeing the connection, the way these things fit.

And I explained this one time. I took a couple of hours talking with a pastor some years ago. And he was coming from much the position that I was. And I was trying to explain to him this doctrine of the grace of God.

And what had been committed to Paul was an entirely new thing. And we spent a couple of hours discussing it. And I was dumbfounded.

[17 : 02] I was shocked at his answer. And I said, so you see, after all of this, an explanation and everything, I said, do you see how this really makes things fit?

How they really fit in the scriptures? And his response was, yeah, fits too good. What?

That was his response. It made too much sense. Well, I would be the first to agree that there are mysteries in the scriptures.

The depths of which I've never plumbed. Things that I've never yet gotten a handle on and probably won't until I get to glory. But for everything, for every dot that allows you to make a connection, it's just like an epiphany.

It's just like you turn the corner and there's a new vista. Oh, yeah. And all I can say is, for me personally, this thing has been absolutely invaluable.

[18 : 08] It is the second most important thing that has ever happened to me in my life. From a spiritual standpoint. From a spiritual standpoint. And of course, the first was coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

And the second was an appreciation and an understanding of what Paul is going to be talking about right here in this chapter. That I remember reading over and over and over again.

And never got it. Never got it. Never saw it. Never made a connection. And I hope some of you will be able to make that connection as we move through this third chapter.

It is a monumental chapter. I'm sorry to say that for a lot of Christians to read this, it's just scripture content. But it doesn't grab them like it did me.

So, let's look at chapter 3, verse 1. For this cause, which we've already tried to elaborate on. I fall, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.

[19 : 12] Now, that's really important to remember from the get-go. Saul of Tarsus was not raised up to be an apostle to Israel.

Although, that was part of his commission. And it is made very clear in Acts chapter 9, in the account of the Damascus road.

It is there made clear that Saul of Tarsus is raised up to be a testimony to the Gentiles and to Israel and to those in authority.

That is, the Roman world, etc. In other words, in contrast to the twelve apostles whose ministry was specifically to be limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Now, that's very important, guys. These aren't just words. I'm talking about Matthew chapter 10. We won't go back there, but we're told that very early in his ministry, Christ called twelve of his disciples.

[20 : 26] And he probably had hundreds of disciples. But twelve of those disciples are going to undergo, I guess, what we could call a promotion. They were going to be promoted from the ranks of disciple, which simply means learner, student.

They're going to be promoted from the ranks of student to a rank of apostle, from disciple to apostle. And the easy way to keep that in mind is all apostles are disciples, but not all disciples are apostles.

An apostle is one who is sent with the authority of the one sending him. A disciple is simply a learner or a follower. In reality, every believer in Jesus Christ ought to be a disciple.

And in a sense, is a disciple. If he is in Christ and if he is following the Lord. But when Paul is called to be an apostle, that is really different.

The twelve, and I can't believe how I read over this as a Christian, young Christian, and I just never saw it. But the twelve in Matthew chapter 10 are called by our Lord, and he very specifically tells them, Don't go to the Gentiles.

[21 : 48] Don't go to the Samaritans. Confine your ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. That's another way of saying, limit your preaching and teaching to the Jews.

Don't go to anybody else. This certainly does not mean that Jesus Christ didn't care about anybody else. But it does mean that Jesus did not come to the world.

He came to Israel. Exclusively to Israel. In fulfillment of the promises God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So while Jesus did not come to the world, he came to Israel for the world.

Because the game plan was to get Israel on track, and then Israel would be the ministering agents to all the rest of the world. They weren't interested.

That's why they demanded the crucifixion of Christ. And that's why they entered this mode of rejection, because they did not see Jesus as being the Messiah whom God sent.

[23 : 01] And everything begins falling apart right there. So, when Paul is raised up, he is the very first one.

He is the very first one who is called of God for a specific outreach and ministry to non-Jewish people.

And in a very real way, we can say that the twelve were called to minister to the nation of Israel. And Paul is called to minister to the entire world.

And that will include everybody, Jew and Gentile. And this is why whenever Paul reached a new town, the first thing he always did was head to the synagogue. He would go to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

He knew he had an intelligent audience there insofar as the scriptures were concerned. Because in the synagogue, they would have the reading of the Torah, the reading of the law of Moses, and of the other books of the Old Testament.

[24 : 07] And these people had a reference, had a ready-made reference that he could plug into. And what he would do is the same thing that Jesus Christ did on the road to Emmaus in Luke chapter 24.

He opened the scriptures and he explained to those two disciples everything from Moses and the law concerning himself. Where he was found in the Old Testament.

Same thing Paul did when he went into the synagogue. But when he went to the Gentile, the Gentiles did not have the advantage of knowing anything about the law of Moses.

They knew nothing about the Old Testament. So he had an entirely different kind of message that he would preach to those who had no frame of reference for what he was going to say. And this made Paul unique.

He is the first one who was raised up to go specifically to Gentiles as well as to others. And they are going to be included in a way that is just sort of remarkable.

[25 : 06] And you remember who the groundbreaker was for this? Anybody remember? Groundbreaker for Gentiles. Peter. Peter.

Peter. Cornelius. Remember Cornelius? And this is so neat because up to this time, Peter and the twelve were preaching exclusively to Jews.

Now with this sheet let down from heaven, he is commanded to go to... In a way, you wouldn't call him a full-fledged Gentile.

He was kind of in between. And this is really kind of neat because we are talking about Acts chapter 10 and Cornelius. Because Cornelius was a Roman army officer.

Now that is Gentile for sure. Not Jewish. But, but, but, he was referred to as a God-fearer. A God-fearer is the first step one would take from being a Gentile toward being a Jew.

[26 : 15] And Cornelius, being a Roman army officer, was a thoroughgoing pagan, like all the other Roman soldiers were. Worshiped many gods.

But, Cornelius had come to a conclusion that the God of Israel was the only true God. That in and of itself was very unique.

He was called a God-fearer. And Dr. Luke, in his text in Acts 10, refers to Cornelius as being one who has given much alms to the temple, to the treasury.

He had supported financially Jewish causes. He was in sympathy with Judaism. He had embraced Jehovah as being the God, the true God.

And he was praying. He was praying for more light. And more information. Remember? And, and I'm, no, I'm not going to go back there. But, but as he prayed, this angel, angel appeared to Cornelius and said, Cornelius, your prayer has been answered.

[27 : 26] And here is what you are to do. You are to send men to the city of Joppa, which is right up the coast. You see, Cornelius would have been at Caesarea.

And Caesarea is right on the Mediterranean coast. And that was the Roman garrison. That was the headquarters. That's where Pontius Pilate hung out there at Caesarea.

And the only reason he was in Jerusalem to conduct the trial of Jesus was because it was the feast of Passover. And, and he needed to be there because there was likely to be a ruckus arise.

And that's certainly what happened. So, Cornelius is told by the angel, you send to Joppa up the coast. Send men up there and inquire after a guy by the name of Peter and bring him back here.

And he will tell you what you need to know. This is obviously an answer to Cornelius' prayer for information and for more light.

[28 : 29] And Peter, when he got that message and the sheet let down from heaven, he didn't want to go. Because that sheet contained animals that were clean and unclean animals in that vision.

And Peter was told to rise, kill, and eat. And Peter said, I couldn't eat any of these animals. These, some of these are unclean animals.

And remember when we went through that, the point we made is, these were not representing animals at all. They were representing Jews and Gentiles. Clean and unclean.

And after the third revelation, Peter finally got the message. Peter finally still went reluctantly. And he took a bunch of Jewish men with him for safekeeping.

And they went down to Cornelius. And they walked into Cornelius' house. And Peter looks around and the first thing he says is, you understand how it's unlawful for a man who is a Jew to be here in this setting.

[29 : 31] I mean, you all are Gentiles. What am I doing here anyway? And he told them about this sheet let down from heaven. And what was I going to do? And he preached to Cornelius, the person of Christ, death, burial, and resurrection.

And Cornelius got it. And so did the people there with him. And he's thinking, this is the information I've been waiting for. And to authenticate and demonstrate that God was in this, the gift of speaking in languages they did not know was imparted to those people.

And there were no doubt multiple languages involved. And Peter saw the accuracy and the authenticity of what was happening. And he was dumbfounded. He was bowled over.

Because Cornelius was a Gentile. And I wasn't sent to Gentiles. I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. What's this all about? And what it is all about is that this is the initial preparation that God is providing for opening the way of access, not just to Jews, but to everyone, to the whole world.

And this is a bridge. Cornelius is a bridge from Gentile to God-fearer, which is not quite a proselyte, but to Gentile.

[31 : 01] From Jew to Cornelius to Gentile. And it is a step. There is a progression. He's moving from exclusively Jewish to, well, kind of Jewish in a God-fearer.

And then the Gentile. And after that is accomplished, guys, Peter passes off the scene.

You don't read any more about Peter after chapter 13 in the book of Acts. He's gone. And who takes over? Who picks up the rain and takes over from Peter?

It is the Apostle Paul. And it is amazing how many Christians today have not seen that transition. And keep in mind, that of which we've been speaking from the book of Acts is doctrine on the move.

It is developing. It is changing. And the Acts of the Apostles involve 30 years of history from beginning to end. All of that is key.

[32 : 07] And we'll pick this up in chapter 3 of Ephesians in our next session.