

Chained, and imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, awaiting a trial (for which he had no date), sat the Apostle Paul...

And it was in these circumstances, that Paul produced some of the most wonderfully enlightening, encouraging and challenging, documents, which now make up a large part our New Testament.

You know, God's purposes, are far better planned out than what we ever give Him credit for. I'm pretty sure that if Paul was one of us, and was locked up for his faith, we'd be praying for his release. But it was God's plan for Paul to be locked up. And Paul himself knew it. Acts 21 tells us what happened when Paul was in Caesarea.

### Acts 21:10-14 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

<sup>11</sup> And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

<sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to

be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

And anyway, Paul **was** arrested in Jerusalem, and eventually he was sent to Rome for his case to be heard by Caesar. And it was while he was in chains, that Paul wrote so much of the New Testament, including Colossians; Ephesians; Philemon & Philippians... And so in hind-sight, I thank God that Paul **was** imprisoned for 2 years (or maybe even longer).

Now, some of the letters Paul wrote, it's pretty obvious that word has gotten back to him that there's some kind of trouble brewing in one of the churches that he's founded, and so he writes to them to 'set 'em straight.' ..... And you can see that flavour coming through in a lot of his letters, but not in his letter to the Ephesians. In this regard, it's notably different... It doesn't seem to be addressing any particular problems. As I read his letter to the Ephesians, I can just see a preacher over-flowing with good news to tell someone, and there's no one to tell. And so he writes a letter.

When you're confined to the one spot, and you're not allowed out, you've got plenty of time to think... And when the Apostle Paul had time to think about God, he

had plenty to share, so he spills over with all his praise to a God who has given Him so much – who has poured out so many spiritual blessings....

And this, I believe, is what results in the letter to the Ephesians.... So, let's begin.

Ephesians Chapter 1, and this morning we're taking the first 10 verses... and whammo – these first 10 verses just bubble over with spiritual insight and wonder and Godly truth... I actually had a tough time trying to work out where to start and where to end for today's message. If I was to cover it all properly, these 10 verses contain enough material for 17 separate messages.... But you think it took us a long time to get through Matthew – imagine how long it would take to get through Ephesians at a rate of 1.7 sermons per verse.....

So we're really only going to be skimming through some of this stuff today.

**1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,**

Now, the title “apostle” isn't one we use much today. An apostle is someone who is sent – it's someone who's been sent out on mission, to plant churches, and to spread the Gospel... But Biblically, an Apostle is even more than that: the office of ‘Apostle’ (to be designated an Apostle), is not something that anyone could choose

for themselves. Jesus gathered his multitude of disciples together, and from them, he designated 12 of them to have the authority of 'Apostle'. After Judas had hung himself, he was replaced... And an apostle had to be someone who had followed Jesus for the length of his ministry, and had to have seen with their own eyes, the resurrected Christ. ... So they prayed about it and set apart 2 likely candidates, and cast lots and let God make the decision who was to be the new apostle, and Matthias<sup>i</sup> was chosen by God.

But Paul was a bit different. Paul used to persecute Christians, but on the road to Damascus, Jesus appeared to Paul (Saul was his name then – Jewish) and called him into ministry...

Now I want to be very clear here: Always be very wary of **anyone** who **claims** to be an apostle today. In my experience, most of these people, are claiming for themselves an authority, that no man should have. The apostles were responsible for getting the truth about Jesus Christ 'out there' and known and available. And an apostle (One chosen by God for this purpose), had the authority to nail down the truth about Jesus Christ.... And today, the apostolic witness is found right here, in the words of the Bible....

So Paul was an apostle, chosen by God. Paul had the authority, to make known the truth about Jesus Christ. And as we read Ephesians today, the apostolic truth (eye

witness testimony – God-given understanding) about Jesus Christ, is being revealed to us by Paul, in the power of the Holy Spirit....

The words of the Scriptures, are powerful. They are authoritative. They are a gift from God, to be cherished by us, and studied, and (not to be worshipped), but to reveal to us the God who is to be worshipped.

You mightn't like some of the stuff that Paul says, and one day, one of my ministers said from the pulpit "I'm going to take Paul to task one day, over some of the stuff that he says"... (and I shuddered) That's very dangerous ground to tread on... You mightn't like some of the stuff Paul says, but the Apostle Paul, was chosen by God, to reveal God to us, and I thank God for it.

So we know the author – the apostle Paul. Who are the recipients? Well, Ephesians is a letter, and it's addressed: **To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:**

Most of our bibles have that full address, including **To the saints who are in Ephesus**, but some of the earliest manuscripts of this letter, in existence today, don't have the words "in Ephesus". You see, Paul probably wrote this letter, originally, to one particular

church, and we know that church to be the church in Ephesus.... But when one of the Apostles wrote a letter, it was recognised as something of authority, and something valuable, for the whole church – not just that one particular church. And so they were copied... No photo-copiers back then, and so it was hand-written out, word-for-word, on Papyrus, and sent on to other churches. And that's what we're doing today – we're reading someone else's mail. It was originally written to an individual church, but we know it's value for us today, and so we're reading it today, in a little church, thousands of kilometres and thousands of years, from its original destination... And it is just as relevant to us today, as it was to the church in Ephesus, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Well, some of you might feel, “Well it's to the saints – that cuts me out...” Don't be too hasty. ... A saint, is the biblical word, for a Christian. Because of the influence of Roman Catholicism, and their “canonisation” of “saints”, we generally have a **wrong** idea of what a saint is. Biblically, a saint is someone who has been made holy. A saint, is somebody who knows they're a sinner, but by the grace of God, and in His mercy, our sins are forgiven, as we put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ...

Don't ever get this confused with the Roman Catholic idea of saints. They pray to saints (or more specifically through saints), seeking a miracle from God.... Never do that. We have one intermediary between us and God, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ... You don't need a saint Christopher, or a Saint Jude or a Saint whatever.... Never pray, to any man or woman, living or dead... We pray to the one God, through the one intermediary, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the one Holy Spirit....

Here's the truth about saints: You, are a saint. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are faithful to Him, you are a saint. I could address you as saint (...) and saint (...) and saint (...). You are God's holy one. You **are** a saint. I am one of God's holy ones. I am a saint...

To you saints, <sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful greeting. Isn't that so much nicer than "Dear sir" or "Dear Madam", I hope you're well..?  
<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The traditional Greek way of beginning a letter, was to say "Grace". The traditional Hebrew way of beginning

a letter, was to say “Shalom” “Peace”... But in Jesus Christ, the two of them go together – Grace and Peace.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

Today, most people are very shallow in their quest for blessing. Most people are looking for some kind of physical, or earthly blessing... It’s shallow. Here was Paul in prison, and he was able to say, <sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places

That’s a faith that has depth to it... Anyone can recognise and desire earthly physical blessings and that’s what so many people today, seem to worship. Health; wealth; freedom; family; a long life.... Yeah, all these things are great, but essentially they’re shallow... God has blessed us with **spiritual** blessings in **heavenly** places... Do you know what that means? It means no matter how bad things are going for you, you’ve always got a reason to thank God. You’ve always got a reason to praise God with every part of your being... And that’s why Paul, bound by chains, can over-flow with praise for God.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Do you understand now, why I said we could get 17 sermons out of it? ...

One of the most beautiful, and yet maligned doctrines of the Bible, is the doctrine of predestination.

Before the world was created, God chose you, to be His adopted child.

Now, we've all done this, in some sort of a fashion... When we've gone to choose a puppy, we've chosen to bring one puppy into our love, over another... Now that doesn't mean that we've chosen to hate the other puppies – it simply means that we've chosen (and we have had a right to choose), to bring into our loving family, the puppy that we choose...

And before the world was even created, God chose you... How does that make you feel??? It's an honour. It's a privilege. It's love at its greatest....

We are chosen to **be holy and blameless before God....** (You might not be seen as holy and blameless by other people, but before God you are, and that's all that counts)

In love, He chose us. In love, He adopted us. According to His Will, He blessed us, in Christ....

He has bought us back, with His blood. He has forgiven us for all of the wrong things that we have done – He's given us a clean slate – He has expunged our record of wrong...

By His grace....

I didn't deserve this act of grace. You didn't deserve this act of grace... It is God's love; mercy; kindness; and grace, by which this is done...

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ

Have you ever noticed how the good news of Jesus Christ can be preached, and some people just don't get it??? Some are struck by the love and mercy of God, and it changes their lives – they discover a mercy that overcomes all of their sin; all of their wrong doing; all of their rebellion; and pride and shame,, they just leave at the foot of the cross, and they're changed.... But others just don't get it....

In God's wisdom and insight, God makes known to some, the mystery of his will.... Some will 'get it'. Others won't.

But what is the mystery of His will? What is God's purpose???

....according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

God's plan, is no little matter – it's far bigger than the individual. It's bigger than me, and it's bigger than you... We live in a fallen world, and God's plan, is to redeem the whole world. And when Christ returns, all that is evil, is going to be cast out, and burnt up with fire, and all that is good, is going to come under one head, which is Christ.

There will be no more sin; no more pain; no more rebellion... That's God's plan – that's what God is working towards...

You know, sometimes we might find ourselves feeling, "God what are you doing?"....

Times when we just see pain and sadness and suffering and uncertainty....

Well, in Christ, we **know** what He **is** doing – we **know** what He is working towards... His plan, (which we have no right to question, by the way, because we're just a bug compared to God) – His plan, is in the

fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth....

That's what we're looking forward to. That's the spiritual blessing... God has made us ready for it. He has already preparing us to be part of His plan, by making us His holy ones... Without holiness, we can never be a part of His eternal plan...

But you know what??? If we could only realise that His plan is **to unite all things in him**, then we've got some work to do...

Sharing Christ with others. Making known the mystery of His will to others.... You know, God has chosen a big family. God has chosen **many** people to be saved.... God has an enormous adoptive power...

*You know, when we go to choose a puppy, we choose one, or at the most two....* But the Scriptures tell us that it is not God's will that any should perish<sup>ii</sup>.... How many men and women, boys and girls, do you think God wants to adopt???? He wants all of them...

Sadly, many will reject Him. Many have rejected Him... But never give up... Keep inviting. Keep making known, the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ (that God is reconciling the world to Himself)....

I reckon that's enough for today. Who's head is about to explode with the enormity of the amazing plan of God???

Questions????

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<sup>i</sup> Acts 1:26

<sup>ii</sup> 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.