

The Letter to the Ephesians

Day One (1:1-23)

The Plan of God Revealed

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES.

- What are we trying to achieve this week?
 1. **First, a better knowledge of the *content* of the Bible.** What is it actually saying to us.
 2. Second, experience in working with others in **how to *study* the Bible.**
 3. Third—and most importantly—a **deeper spiritual grasp of what God has done for us in Christ through the Holy Spirit.** We want to grow in our knowledge of God and love for him.

Image: Mimoon's Jug, everflowing water, you can always go deeper...

- What is the plan of action?
 1. The first track is a daily study with me, working through the whole of the letter to the Ephesians.
 - Just a note on this: we will go through the whole letter, but we want to pay special attention to the 'landscape' of the book.
 - What I mean by this is that we don't want to just look verse to verse—we want to see how the whole design of the letter is presented.
 2. Our second track will be led by our team. Here, the aim is to work with the material some more, learn some basic steps of Scripture study, and begin to apply it to daily life and to the world we live in.
 - Computer tools
 - Group creative application
 - Personal meditation
- Disposition for the study of Ephesians:
 - Some of you come with quite a bit of knowledge of the Bible; others have less, and some perhaps have almost none. This is actually quite helpful for working together on a study of the Book.
 - 'Go as deep as you can'.
 - Image **a diver** looking to touch the bottom of the lake.
 - The story of one participant over the course of three years: only a little the first year; real depth the second; greater breadth in the third.
 - A word on note taking
 - Our starting point tends to be "entertain me". That's where many of us live when we approach life. If I'm not entertained, I move on. If that is your expectation, I will sorely disappoint you. Don't treat these sessions as TV. Let me offer you an alternative approach...
 - I want to encourage you to treat these sessions as if you will be

The Letter to the Ephesians

giving them to someone else in just a short time. Take notes, like someone who has to find his way home draws a map. Details so that you can remember them.

- This will also increase your attentiveness and experience of value in these sessions

B. INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER.

- There is no disguising it, this letter is *dense*.
 - It contains great and elevated truth, and it is cosmic in its scope.
 - I hope to make it clear to us, but you can't turn it into a comic strip.
 - Let me call us here to stretch ourselves, to raise our minds, and to seek for the revelation of what God has done in Christ.
- Background to the letter:
 - Question of its destination: probably an **encyclical** letter.
 - Is it the letter mentioned in Col. 4:16?
 - Question of its **authorship**: is it by Paul?
 - Seems fairly clear that it was written by Paul
 - More than half of modern day scholars don't think that Paul wrote this and many of them don't think that it was directed to Ephesus
 - If not, then someone who really was a man after Paul's mind, (FF Bruce) it is such a good summation of Pauline thought
 - Close link with Colossians in content and language: the two are paired.
- Rough **division** of the letter:
 - (1) chaps. 1-3 on the announcement of the gospel (*kerygma*);
 - (2) chaps. 4-6 on the way of life that follows from the gospel (*paranesis*).
- Summary of the letter according to the three postures: Sit-Walk-Stand.
 - (**Watchman Nee**: 1903-1972 Chinese Christian author and churchbuilder)

Warm-up Groups:

- Get into small groups
- Assignment: try to figure out what 'sit-walk-stand' means as a way of describing the letter to the Ephesians.

The Letter to the Ephesians

2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, ...made us alive ...and made us **sit** with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

- We begin by understanding that we 'sit' with Christ in what he has accomplished on our behalf;

5:2 And **walk** in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- we then are called to move on to a way of 'walking' in him;
 - walking – a way of life

6:3 Therefore take the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**.

- and finally we are exhorted to '**stand**' for him and for the gospel against our enemies.
 - For the victory has been won
 - We cannot stand in his power until we have first learned to sit and walk

CHAPTER ONE.

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints [who are at Ephesus], who are also faithful in Christ Jesus:

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The greeting (vv. 1-2)

- This is a very standard greeting:
 - Paul names his calling, addresses the faithful as the saints (the 'holy ones' of God),
 - wishes them peace and grace from the Father and the Son.
- We have already mentioned the issue of the destination
 - **Ephesus** or perhaps several different Christian communities.

Gentile Christians

Jewish Christians

Jews

3 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, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us.

9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which

The Letter to the Ephesians

he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

2. The opening proclamation (vv. 3-10)

- Blessed be the God...
 - baruch atah adonai....
- To **bless God is both to praise him and thank him**, by recounting what he has done for us (that he has blessed us). This is a **very typical Jewish form** of prayer that we see throughout Paul's letters.
- 'every spiritual blessing' (v. 3): this is a comprehensive statement of all that will follow. **God has not given to us by measure but fully in the Son.**
- Note the priority of God's choice which is always linked with his love (v. 4).
 - For God to choose is to set his love on someone.
 - To be chosen is to be loved
 - what every man says to his wife on the wedding day (mit Gottes Hilfe!)
 - Sometimes we struggle with this idea of being "chosen"
 - It simply means to be "loved"
- **To what are we called and chosen** (v. 4)?

For worship sacrifice

- **We are called to be 'holy' and 'blameless'**—these are words linked to priesthood and the vocation to worship.
- Just as the people of Israel were delivered from Egypt so that they could 'serve' God on the mountain, so we are redeemed from sin and death so that we can stand before the Lord and worship him.
- Lambs for sacrifice were "spotless"
 - without blemish

For Relationship

- **Next we see the call to be sons** (vv. 5-6), the grace of sonship freely bestowed on us in Christ.
 - sons = *huiiothesia* – normally translated sonship
 - only occurs 5 times in NT
 - always in ref to the calling of God to be made in his image and likeness
- He is pre-eminently the beloved Son, and we are also given this favoured status in him.
- We are sons, in the son

The Letter to the Ephesians

- This is a very key truth throughout the Scripture.
 - We are the adopted sons and daughters, in Christ the Son.
 - Often we use the term “son” as it more clearly denotes **inheritance**
- Let’s not pass over the *work* of Christ for our salvation (vv. 7-8): he has redeemed us by his blood on the Cross and won for us forgiveness of our sins.
 - Very Christocentric prayer
 - How many times is Christ mentioned in 3-13?
 - 3: Blessed us in Christ
 - 4: chose us in him
 - 5: Destined us through Jesus Christ
 - 6: in the beloved
 - 7: in Him we have redemption
 - 9: according to his purpose in Christ
 - 10: in him
 - 11: in him
 - 12: in Christ
 - 13: in him
- Finally in vv. 9-10 we see the full scope, the entire mystery (secret plan) of God revealed:
 - Plan: *oikonomia* = economy, has to do with managing the household!
- that all things might be summed up, or united, in him.
 - The Greek word here can be translated ‘recapitulate’:
anakafelaiostai

	<u>6</u>
1	1
2	2
<u>3</u>	3
6	

Our Normal Approach

The Ancient Approach – summed up in the head

- it means that in Christ all of God’s purposes throughout salvation history now come together and are completed in him.
- He is the end point and fulfillment of everything in God’s plan.
- He is the summation – the **sigma**

The Letter to the Ephesians

- What is God's purpose??? To bring all things under Christ's headship.

11 In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

3. The second proclamation (vv. 11-14)

- We need to pull apart this very complicated sentence which begins in v. 11. Who are the two groups referred to here?
 - Those who first hoped in Christ are the Jews;
 - Those others who have been joined to this promise are the Gentiles.
 - *Key theme of the letter- we will revisit this.*
- Both groups are destined for God and his glory
 - there is no longer any who are excluded, but all are invited.
 - The Gentiles too have heard the Gospel, they have believed, and they have received the promised Holy Spirit.
 - All we have to do is to read the Acts of the Apostles to see just how astounding this fact was, even to the first apostles.
 - Huge issue in the early church
 - *Just imagine that a new practically unlimited source of oil was discovered in the North Sea and Scotland suddenly became the richest nation in the world – and then you found out that you were supposed to share it!!!*
 - Imagine the difficulty in getting your head around that as a Scot?!
- ‘sealed with the Spirit’: we are marked by the Spirit (reference to baptism here).
 - The gift of the Spirit is *real and genuine* right now, but it is only part of what we are to receive.
 - Now we have our own spirits and souls filled and transformed; at the resurrection of the dead we will also have our bodies made new and will be completely full of the Spirit (as completely as we can stand!).

Now: Guarantee, downpayment, e.g. a Will

Then: Fullness, e.g. The Land

- Sealed
 - In the ancient world you might “wax seal” a letter
 - Guaranteeing that you sent that letter and no-one else did

The Letter to the Ephesians

- Holy Spirit is the seal
 - When God comes and sees the Holy Spirit in us he sees his own stamp on us
- Guarantee of inheritance
 - Downpayment – the rest will come
 - First instalment of the inheritance to come

— Finally, can you see something of a Trinitarian working here.

The blessing of God
The work of Christ
The seal of the spirit

- It is God the Father who is blessed, and who accomplishes all these things in Christ.
- It is the Son who has redeemed us and in whom we have become adopted sons and daughters.
- And it is the Spirit who has come to mark and seal us, as a present downpayment of a much greater fulfillment.

15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might, 20 which he accomplished in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.

22 And he has put all things under his feet, and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

4. *Paul's intercessory prayer* (vv. 15-22)

- 15-22 is one sentence in the Greek!
- The close of this first chapter is in the form of a prayer—and it is **a real prayer, which Paul undoubtedly prayed frequently.**
- But it is written here in order to reveal to us what God has in store for us. It is a *revelatory* prayer, meant to teach us how to pray and what to expect from God.
 - Paul is saying: **this is what you ought to pray for** and expect from God.
- First, he commends them for their faith in Christ, and for their love of which he has heard from a distance.
- Then he gives thanks for them, but goes on to pray for even more to be given them. **Paul is not satisfied that they have effectively received and all that God has for them.**

The Letter to the Ephesians

- That they might be given greater **wisdom**, and a spirit of revelation of God more deeply than they have known. For these we need the **eyes of our hearts** enlightened.
 - That they might know the **hope** of what is theirs in Christ—what is theirs even now, but especially what awaits us all in eternal life.
 - That we might especially know the power that is at work in us even now
 - we have an **immeasurable power** at work in us who believe,
 - far beyond what we can see or what we can do.
 - Do we believe this? Do we need this prayer accomplished in us as well? I think so.
 - The underlying point is that truth is not found on the surface of things, but is often hidden below the surface, and we need to penetrate the surface to discover the truth.
- The chapter closes with a final hymn to the resurrected and reigning Christ, acknowledging his lordship over all creation and every authority.
- Not only does he reign over all things; he is also the lord of the church which is his body, and which now possesses a fullness and completeness in him.

This is quite a chapter. . . It is like a great symphony, full of all the instruments.

It presents the work of Christ in us and for us in the most elevated terms.

And yet it is also strangely complete and full. It is a sketch of the whole, not just of the parts.

- In summary
 - See what God has done in Jesus Christ
 - Understand what a great thing it is to have the life that you have in Christ and be able to live according to the call to which he has called you
 - Best way to understand that is look at Jesus Christ

Let's seek to plumb the depths of these words more fully, and let them have their full effect in us.

Follow-up: begin memorizing Eph. 1:3-10 (give some advice on this point).

The goal is to have the passage memorized by the end of the week.