

Sermon Series: *The Book of Ephesians*



## To the Saints In Ephesus

What would you do if you had over \$1,000,000 in cash and jewels? How would you spend your days? What would you do with your time? Where would you go? Would you spend your time each day sitting on the sidewalk and holding out a tin cup and begging?

A year ago, in the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah, a 100 year-old blind lady named Eisha died.<sup>1</sup> Everyone in the city knew who she was. She was a beggar. She had spend the last 50 years of her life sitting in the same spot begging on the streets. She had no family. Her mother and her sister had also been beggars and had died several decades before. After their deaths, she was alone in the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20140316198749> accessed 28 Feb 2015.

After her death it was revealed that she had entrusted into the care of her only friend, Ahmed Al-Saeedi, all of her earnings from begging. She had \$800,000 in cash, \$266,000 in jewelry, and she owned four buildings (which she allows poor families to live in rent free), yet she spent every day sitting in the same place begging from passersby.

She was sitting on a small fortune but it did not benefit her because she did not use it.

We Christians have in our hands one of the greatest treasures ever given to humanity—the Word of God, the Holy Bible. And yet so many of us never benefit from it because we don't use it.

We don't take the time to read it and meditate on it and so all the life-giving jewels of truth found within do us no good. We fail to treasure it and so all the golden truth freely given to us by God goes untouched because we fail to dig into it.

Psalm 19:7-11 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> The **law** of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;

The **testimony** of the Lord is sure,  
making wise the simple;

<sup>8</sup> the **precepts** of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;

the **commandments** of the LORD is pure,  
enlightening the eyes;

<sup>9</sup> the **fear** of the LORD is clean,  
enduring forever;

the **rules** of the LORD are true,  
and righteous altogether.

<sup>10</sup> More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey, the drippings of the honeycomb.

<sup>11</sup> Moreover by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

One of the sweetest and most rewarding books I have lately read, is the book of Ephesians. My soul, over the past several months, has been nourished, strengthened, challenged, and blessed by Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It's like a treasure chest newly discovered. Each verse is like one rare jewel in the chest. Each one is picked up and turned over and investigated. You know you're holding something immensely valuable, and yet you don't feel qualified to rightly value each jewel, and yet you know you're holding a great treasure in your hand.

That's how I feel about this letter.

## Why A Sermon Series in Ephesians?

I want to open the lid on this treasure chest and lift up before you some of the jewels I believe you'll find within. I want to throw up some of the good nuggets you'll find as you go through it. I want to do this in hope of answering the question, "Why should we journey through this little letter?"

1. First, of all it's part of a balanced biblical diet between the OT and the NT. Back in the fall we went through Hosea, and during Christmas we spent time in the book of Isaiah. Now it seemed good to us elders to spend time in NT.
2. It's a book I've not preached through before here.
3. I have personally been immensely and deeply blessed by this book. We've been studying Ephesians in our Wednesday morning study and it has been wonderful.
4. This little letter will force you to wrestle with the question "in whose word do I place more trust, in the word of God or the word of man, in the Holy Bible or the New York Times?"
5. This book will help you understand why and how you were saved and what exactly it is that will keep you saved.
6. It will lead you deeper into an understanding of God's amazing grace and cause you to praise him for it.
7. It will help you answer the question, "Who is God and what is he really like?"
8. It will tell you of the "unsearchable riches of Christ" and the innumerable benefits of being a child of God, through faith in Jesus.
9. It will lay out before you the doctrine of election and explain why that doctrine is good for you to understand and believe.
10. It will prepare you for the intensification of opposition against the Christian faith, which is already happening in the world and will most certainly get worse.

11. This letter will help you understand why jihadists cut off the heads of Christians.
12. It will also unfold mysteries about how God has worked in this world in the past and what he intends to do in the future.
13. In this letter will be revealed God's purpose for creating this world.
14. You will also find revealed very clear aspects of God's will for your life.
15. It will remind you that there is a powerful, wicked spiritual being called Satan who is real—not merely some fictional creature—who has numerous other wicked partners, called demons, who along with him, are constantly opposing God and his people and it will give you weapons for how to oppose him.
16. It will help you grow and mature in your faith and give you stability and security in your relationship with Jesus.
17. It will cause you to think deeply about your daily choices, both at home and at work, and force you to ask who exactly who it is that you are most striving to please.
18. It will cause you to think about your use of language, the words you use, and whether or not your words are pleasing to God and edifying to those who have to listen to you.
19. It will help you understand God's purpose for marriage and how husband and wife are to relate to each other.
20. It will address sexual sins.
21. It will help you think rightly about alcohol.
22. It will help you learn how God wants you to live with other believers—how we as fellow Christians should live together.
23. It will repeatedly offer you hope.
24. It will offer advice on how parents should relate to their children and how children should relate to their parents.
25. It will reveal God's will for how you should do your work and relate to your employer.
26. It will reveal God's will for how you should supervise those over whom you have responsibility in the workplace.
27. I predict, if you stay faithful through this series, all the way through to the end of this letter, you will be angry at what you hear, and you may at least once be angry with me at least once. disagree with me, at least once and I do not doubt that you will be offended by this letter in some way.

## Introductory Facts

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has been referred to as "the queen of the epistles,"<sup>2</sup> "the divinest composition of man,"<sup>3</sup> and "the Grand Canyon of Scripture."<sup>4</sup> It was John Calvin's favorite book of the Bible.<sup>5</sup> A former president of Princeton Theological Seminary described it as "pure music."<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice referred to it as "breathtakingly beautiful and apparently inexhaustible to the one who wants to take it in."<sup>7</sup>

My Wednesday morning Bible study has been going through it and I've found it to be exactly as they have described. We've been studying it for the past 5 months and we are only half way through chapter two.

(Ephesians 1:1-2 ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

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

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

## The Apostle Paul

The apostle Paul is the author of the letter. That Paul is in fact the author should not be doubted. The authorship of Paul was universally accepted by the early church and was never doubted for 1,700 years, until the late eighteenth century at which time all truth was doubted.<sup>8</sup>

Paul refers to himself as "**an apostle of Christ Jesus.**" In a general sense the term 'apostle' means "messenger," or "one sent out to declare a message." However, throughout the New Testament it refers to those who were specifically called by Jesus and commissioned with the task of taking the gospel out into towns and cities where the gospel had not been shared. Paul had been entrusted with that task by Jesus Christ. That message was to tell people who Jesus was and what he had done. Paul was an authorized messenger of Jesus who was chosen and appointed to speak on his behalf by Jesus.

Paul was not a self-appointed apostle. He was an apostle of Jesus appointed "**by the will of God.**" Paul emphasizes this fact in every letter. If you know the story of Paul's life, then you know that it was not Paul's childhood ambition to grow up and be an evangelist for Jesus.

---

<sup>2</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: St. Andrews, 1954), 71, 83.

<sup>3</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1979), 15–16.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Paxson, *The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian* (New York: Revell, 1939), 11–12.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), xxxiv–1.

<sup>6</sup> John A. Mackay, *God's Order: The Ephesian Letter and This Present Time* (New York: Nisbet and Macmillan, 1953), 9–10, 33.

<sup>7</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 1.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brien, 4.

When Paul first heard about Jesus he thought he was a liar. He believed him to be a dangerous revolutionary. At first, Paul did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed one, the long-awaited messiah. He thought Jesus was a false messiah, a wannabe who never was. Paul viewed the followers of Jesus, who were proclaiming him to be the messiah, to be deceivers and liars. They were twisting the truth. They were deceiving people and leading them into destruction. Therefore, they needed to be stopped at all costs. Even if that meant killing them.

And then Paul encountered the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Paul had previously thought that Jesus was dead. But when he bumped into him on the road to Damascus, he realized he had been wrong. It was true. Jesus was raised from the dead. He was messiah. He was the Son of God. And Jesus was the hope of Israel.

Jesus then revealed to Paul that not only was he the hope of Israel, but he was also the hope of all the world, including Gentiles. This was the message that Jesus sent Paul to proclaim. This was the great gospel message that Paul was to preach and teach everywhere he went. God is not only interested in the salvation of Jews, but he is also interested in the salvation of all non-Jew. And salvation comes through faith in Jesus. Jesus commanded him to go and preach this message. This was God's will for Paul. It was not Paul's will for Paul. God broke into Paul's world and changed him and set him on a new course. **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.**

Next Paul, as is his style in every letter, he states to whom he is writing.

**Ephesians 1:1b (ESV)**

*To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.*

The city of Ephesus was located in south-west Asia Minor, which today is Turkey. It was a port city and so it came to be a center of trade and commerce.



Now in this sentence we are presented with the a textual problem. In the oldest extant copies of the manuscripts we have, which date to about A.D. 150-200, the words "in Ephesus" do not appear.

A second problem is that throughout the letter Paul does not make any personal connections which we do find in his other letters.

We know from Acts 19:8-10 that while on his third missionary journey, Paul was in Ephesus for at least two and a half years, maybe three, somewhere around A.D. 55. So why would Paul not specify the particular church to whom he was writing and why would he not name any names of

people with whom he ministered while he was there? Some people see these two problems as justification for believing that Paul didn't write this letter, but is there an explanation? I believe there is, but we have to know the context of the city.



Ephesus was one of the most prominent cities of the ancient world. It was a commercial center for travel and trade for both Jews and Gentiles. It was the location of the great temple of the goddess Artemis, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. There is a replica of the temple in Miniaturk, Turkey.

It's massive amphitheater seated a reported 20,000 people.



The population of the city at the time of Paul was around 150,000.



The city supported a famous public library built to house 12,000 scrolls and the tomb of its benefactor, Celsus.

All of this is helpful in understanding the context into which Paul was writing. This is the city in which Paul spent three years preaching. It was large for its day. It was the third largest city in Asia Minor. Paul's ministry here had far reaching influence. Paul preached in the synagogue for 3 months (19:8), then in the face of opposition, withdrew and began preaching in the lecture Hall of Tyrannus. Luke records,

**Acts 19:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> [Paul's preaching in the Hall of Tyrannus] *continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*

Many people, both Jews and Greeks, came to hear Paul in the Hall of Tyrannus. So many people came hear Paul preach that Luke—under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—could write that “*all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*” That is an incredible statement. Evidently people from every province in Asia heard Paul preach the word of the Lord. Since Ephesus was a massive center for trade and commerce, people from all the cities in Asia, while in Ephesus, most likely on business, came to hear what Paul had to say about Jesus.

Now, Paul tells us in Eph. 3:1, 4:1, and 6:20 that he is a prisoner when he wrote this letter. This is his Roman imprisonment. He is under house arrest and most likely wrote this letter from

Rome somewhere around A.D. 62. By this time, Paul knows that his death is fast approaching. He would be beheaded around A.D. 65 or 66.

As he was considering the end of his days, he wrote four letters, this one, the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon. In his letter to the Colossians (4:16) Paul instructs them to read the letter among them and then pass it on to church in Laodicea. It was not uncommon for Paul's letters to be circulated among several churches and here is an example where it was commanded.

## Solution to Both Problems

Since there were so many believers from Ephesus and many cities throughout Asia, Paul probably did not include a specific name so that the letter could be read to all of them. He sent the letter by the hand of Tychicus (6:21) and most likely he went to Ephesus since that was the center of Paul's ministry, the oldest and most prominent church, the mother church and from there the letter was circulated throughout the region.

There are only three manuscripts which do not contain the words "in Ephesus," while there are dozens of others which do. And by the end of the first century, the all the early church fathers such as Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35-107), Polycarp (A.D. 69-156), Clement of Rome (~A.D. 95), and Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202) referred to this letter as "the letter of Paul to the Ephesians."<sup>9</sup> Even their heretical opponents referred to the letter in exactly the same way.<sup>10</sup> Among those who lived closest to the writing of this letter, there was universal agreement that this letter was written by Paul and sent first to the church in Ephesus.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we should not doubt the truthfulness of this letter.

## To the Saints

Paul refers to those to whom he is writing as '**saints.**' The word does not mean those who are sinless. The last three chapters of this letter are filled with instructions on how they are to live and what God expects of them, what they are to do and not do. If these people were sinless, then Paul wouldn't have needed to write the last half of the letter. What Paul means by 'saint,' and what the word means throughout Scripture is 'a people set apart for the worship of God through faith in Jesus.' The word refers to God's people who were chosen by him and set apart to do his will.

The term does not apply to only a select few who have done great deeds for God. Paul uses this term to refer to *all* of God's people. We should think of the word as synonymous with 'believer.' The word refers to all who have put their faith in Jesus and committed their lives to obey him. He could just as easily have written "To all the believers in Ephesus." When Paul

---

<sup>9</sup> O'Brien, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> O'Brien, 4.

uses the word, saint, he's referring to all followers of Jesus in a particular place. When you read the word 'saint' in Scripture, don't think "mother Theresa," think "Me. He's writing this to me! He's talking about me." This was originally written to *all* the believers in Ephesus. However, we hold it in our hands today. For those of us in this who today who are believers in Jesus, we should read this, "To the saints who in Winchester."

## Grace & Peace To You From God & Jesus

Next Paul uses a greeting which he opens almost every letter he wrote.

**Ephesians 1:2 (ESV)**

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

Paul begins his letter with a kind of prayer. This is his goal in writing. His desire is that God's people would experience the fullness of God's grace and the peace that can only come through Jesus. Jesus is the supreme example of both. Jesus did what he did only because of God's desire to be gracious to us. None of us deserve all of the goodness of God's grace. Because of our sin all we deserve is his wrath. And yet in Christ we can experience God's grace. We receive what we do not deserve. He gives us life and peace with God.

Peace is that indescribable assurance that all is well. It transcends circumstances and allows you to remain calm during the worst of days. It is a quiet assurance that says, "God is with me and I will get through this." Grace and peace are the two aims of Paul as he is writing this letter. And both are to be had if only we will be faithful and expect the LORD to give them to us. Trust him and he will act.

You have in your hand (or on your phone) an immeasurable treasure. You have a letter that Paul wrote, but that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is a letter that was written for the encouragement of the people of God. This was written for your encouragement. This letter is a treasure.

Will you receive this treasure? Will open up this letter and dig into it? Or will you sit on it and pretend it was not given to you by God. Don't be like Eisha and possess a treasure but never benefit from it. Open up this letter and read it.

For next Sunday, read verses 3-10. Read it once every day for the next week.

Father, let this letter from Paul to the saints in Ephesus be received by us as a literary treasure. May we receive it as it truly is, the word of God and not merely the words of man. Open our eyes to see the breathtaking beauty and inexhaustible sweetness that is found within it. Please come and help us as we read. Give us understanding and give us a hunger for your word. May it strengthen our souls and ground us in our faith. Amen.