

Intro to Ephesians - May 29, 2022

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Well, good morning, everyone. And I did want to say happy Memorial Day to all of you and perhaps to some of you.

It's a special meeting today for those family members, relatives that maybe gave the ultimate sacrifice for this country. And we do recognize that and we really do appreciate that.

This morning, we're going to be starting a new series for our Bible Hour. And so if you have your Bibles, please turn with me to the book of Ephesians. And while you're doing that, I'd like to tell you about this story that I heard.

It's about this young man from Kentucky. And one of his favorite things that this young man would like to do is he would love to buy his father these unusual gifts.

And so for Christmas, he would buy his dad various things like, for one thing, season tickets to Church Hill Downs. And that's because that's where the Kentucky Derby was held every year.

[1:11] He also bought his dad one year a complete history of Daniel Boone and all the travels that Daniel Boone made. But I'll tell you what, this young man, he really outdid himself this last year.

He bought his dad this rare talking bird. And I'll tell you, this bird was amazing. This bird could speak in five different languages.

This bird could sing the song, My Old Kentucky Home, while standing on one leg. Oh, my dad will love this. So he has this bird sent to his dad at Christmastime.

He calls his dad a few weeks after Christmas and he says, Dad, how did you like the bird? And the dad says, Son, that bird was delicious.

You may be asking, what does that have to do with the book of Ephesians? I'll tell you what, everything.

[2:14] Because this book was written for believers just like that dad. Those who don't know, who fail to appreciate all the riches that they have in Christ Jesus.

This book is about riches. It's about having fullness from the Lord. And so you talk about that word riches. It occurs five times in this book.

The riches of his glory. Chapters one, chapter three. The riches of his grace. The riches in Christ. How about fullness and being filled?

That occurs six times in this book. The fullness of God. The fullness of Christ. The fullness of him who fills all in all. And all of this is by grace.

That word grace, that occurs 12 times in this book. It means undeserved kindness. Grace is behind all of the wonderful things that God does for us.

[3:18] All the things that he lavishes upon us. And all of this is because believers are said to be in Christ Jesus. In or with Jesus.

That's mentioned 34 times in this book. In fact, more than any other of Paul's letters. To be in Christ is actually a technical term.

And it refers to all the blessings that we have. In that when we're placed in Jesus Christ. We have a new identity in Christ.

We have new blessings. We have we're united to Christ. We have a new existence in Christ. If you are not in Christ. You are a poor destitute beggar.

But if you are in Christ. Then you are rich. Beyond your wildest imagination. And so you can think of this letter. To the church of Ephesus.

[4:18] As a balance sheet. Showing us where you and I can come. And see all the blessings. That we possess in Jesus Christ. This morning I just want to introduce this letter to us.

And I want to look at why it was written. And what we can expect as we go through this study here. First of all, let's go ahead and go to the Lord. Our Heavenly Father.

We are so grateful for all that you have done for us. And for who you are. And we thank you for this letter, Lord. And I do pray, Father.

That the eyes of our hearts would be opened, Lord. To see all of the wonderful things. The truths. The promises. The glories. That you have expressed in this book.

For us who believe in Jesus Christ. Lord, may we be changed and encouraged by our study of this letter. We thank you so much for it.

[5:16] We ask for this grace. In the name of Jesus. Amen. First, I want to talk about just when did Paul write this. Well, Paul wrote this letter during his first Roman imprisonment.

That would have been around the year 60 or 62 A.D. It's the same time that he wrote his other prison epistles. Colossians, Philippians.

And then he wrote a personal letter to a man named Philemon. Paul was, at this time, chained to a Roman soldier when he wrote this. No doubt he dictated it to a helper who was by.

But he was allowed visitors at this time. And the scripture tells us that he could minister without any hindrance. I want to ask this question. What's Paul's connection to this church?

Why would he be so concerned about this city in Asia Minor? Well, on his third missionary journey, he briefly visited this city of Ephesus while he was on his way to Corinth.

[6:19] But he returned to Ephesus. And it's in Acts chapter 19, verse 1. And immediately we're told he finds a Jewish synagogue. And he begins teaching there for a few months.

But we also read that the Jews became hardened against Paul's message. And so he moved his teaching to this place called the Hall of Tyrannus.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for three years, longer than any other place where he stayed. And so he would have known the city of Ephesus well.

Ephesus was a busy port city. It was on the west coast of modern-day Turkey. It was a commercial hub. It was the leading city in the richest part of the whole Roman Empire.

It's been estimated that Ephesus would have been either the fourth or fifth largest city in the world in Paul's day. Imagine that, living in such a city.

[7:22] The city boasted of athletic events that they held, similar to our Olympics. There were lots of civic buildings, temples that were erected to various Roman emperors.

They had this grand theater there, which was circular and outdoors, called an amphitheater. And that could hold some 24,000 spectators.

And from there, there was this path leading to this temple of Artemis. The temple of Artemis is one of the seven ancient wonders of the world.

And so this was also the headquarters of the cult that worshipped the Roman goddess Diana, or Artemis, if you use her Greek name. We might want to ask, what happened to Paul while he was there?

What I already mentioned, when Paul was forced to leave the synagogue, that he brought his teaching to the hall of Tyrannus. Tyrannus was a Greek. There's no indication that he was a believer.

[8:29] He's just a guy who was interested in knowledge. And so he had this lecture hall where people could come and listen to various teachers and sophists and learn from them.

But Paul took over, and he taught there on a daily basis. It says in Acts 19, verse 10. You don't have to turn there. Let me just read this. This took place for two years.

And so all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Boy, what an example of how God could take this guy like Tyrannus and use him to carry out his purposes.

God's purposes to get his word out. And this arrangement helped do that very thing. Near the end of Paul's three-year time in Ephesus, he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians.

And listen to what he said here. This is in chapter 16 of 1 Corinthians. I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost. For, get this, a wide door for effective service has opened to me.

[9:39] And then he adds this. There's many adversaries. So Ephesus, what kind of adversaries? Well, one, Ephesus was known for its paganism.

They had magic, the occult, strange doctrines. And some of these religions, we can consider them as kind of sleazy. Like they would be brothels linked to pagan rituals.

Others were more sophisticated, you know, more high-browed. Ephesus, for instance, Ephesus was the home of the emperor cult.

And that's where the Roman emperor was spoken of as a god. And they would have coins and statues and temples erected to such. Paul says to Timothy in his first letter, Are there any sophisticated religions today?

Yeah, I think there are. Any works-based religion can be made appealing, can be made sophisticated, as long as it involves us doing something and thinking pretty high of ourselves.

[11:01] It says in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 that Paul fought against wild beasts in Ephesus. I wonder what that's about. Can you imagine that?

Well, I think it's possible, but there's no record of him fighting against a wild beast. Most likely, it's a figure of speech for the fierce adversaries that Paul had to deal with.

Here's an example. There's this major incident that takes place in Acts 19, beginning in verse 28.

And it involves a certain man named Demetrius, who made silver shrines to Artemis.

What was going on, you see, is that because so many Ephesians were turning to Christ, they no longer purchased any of those silver statues that this guy made.

And that didn't go over too well with Demetrius and the others in that guild, because it was said that Paul is dishonoring the goddess Artemis.

[12:04] And so it's recorded that there's this mob scene that takes place in front of the theater. And it says that the people were filled with rage. And they began crying out, Great is Artemis! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!

And that went on for two hours. And it says that the city was filled with confusion. And they rushed into the theater in one accord, dragging two of Paul's traveling companions with them.

A guy named Gaius and a guy named Aristarchus. And they dragged them in. And they nearly killed these guys. The other believers kept Paul from getting involved in that.

But these guys, they almost lost their lives. How about this? Then you have the plots and schemes of unbelieving Jews.

When Paul finally left Ephesus, and this is in Acts 20, he heads for Philippi, which is in Macedonia. And it's recorded that he called for the elders of Ephesus to meet him in a town called Miletus.

[13:14] And there he gave his final address to them. Because he's sensing that this might be the last time you guys see me. In Acts 20, he says, You yourselves know from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility, and with tears, and with trials, which came upon me through the plots of the Jews.

You can read about that in Acts. These Jewish plots against Paul, they seem to occur with amazing frequency. It seemed like his life was always in danger.

But the Lord was with Paul. If you want to get an idea of Paul's relationship to the Ephesians, this is recorded in Acts 20. Let me read this.

When he said these things, this is to the Ephesian elders, it says that he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they all began to weep aloud, and they embraced Paul.

And they kissed him repeatedly, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

[14:33] Paul boards this ship. He eventually lands in Jerusalem. And the first thing he does is he goes to the temple, where he's arrested by unbelieving Jews.

And eventually, he ends up in this Roman prison. And it's here where Paul writes his prison epistles. With that, let's go ahead and look at the first two verses of Paul in Ephesians.

If you turn with me to there, chapter 1, verse 1. And what we're going to see here, as I said earlier, this book is about riches and about fullness.

We're going to see that here in these first two verses. Look with me here. First, Paul describes his authority. And he gives them a double dose of authority.

Look with me. He says in verse 1, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. Now, just to stop right there, he's an apostle.

[15:39] That means that he's one who has been chosen and been commissioned. One who's been sent. Sometimes we see that word used in a general sense.

And you might want to think of that as like a small a, apostle. Just to give you an example, in Acts 14, verse 14, Barnabas is referred to as an apostle.

Similarly, Titus and Epaphroditus are called messengers. But if you look in the text, in 2 Corinthians 8 and Philippians chapter 2, the word used there for messenger is apostolos.

So they were apostles with a small a. But how about a capital A? Well, there's only about 14 men who I would think fulfill that role as apostle with a capital A.

You have the original 12. Of course, Judas defects. And so then you see a 13th added. That would be Matthias. And later on, Paul is added as an apostle.

[16:49] These apostles were chosen for a special era of time. They were what you'd call foundational men. They were the ones who laid down the apostles' doctrine.

What we read in scripture today. And so Paul, by reminding them that he's an apostle, he's saying, in other words, hey, I'm not just another guy with an opinion out there.

I received my call from Jesus Christ himself. I belong to Christ. I represent Christ. My message is from Christ.

And that message is for you folks. Secondly, we see in his next authority here, notice, by the will of God. God had a special purpose for Paul.

And in this letter, he's going to explain this. And we're going to be spending some time with the doctrine of election. Oh, that's a great doctrine. What a great one.

[17:54] He was chosen by the will of God. We know that when Paul was Saul, that he had no intention of becoming a Christian.

No, in fact, he was on his way to persecute Christians. But the Lord got his attention. Paul was knocked off his high horse. And the Lord revealed to Saul who he was.

And it radically changed Saul's life. And this was, but the main thing is that this was not Saul's choosing. God did this.

God appointed him. He says, Saul, an apostle, or Paul, an apostle by the will of God. And so that's who the sender is of this letter.

How about the recipients? He describes them also in two ways. Notice here, look with me. He calls them to the saints who are in Ephesus.

[18:59] Let's ask you this question. What's a saint? I remember growing up, and if you would have asked me what a saint was, I would have said, well, look at those pictures in the stained glass windows.

That's who a saint is. No, that's not a saint. Maybe it is. You know, but I'll tell you who saints are. Saints are dead sinners who are now alive in Christ Jesus.

Anyone who's been made holy is a saint. And that's what that word means. Hados. It means set apart. Holy. Saint. Any time you see those words in Scripture, that's the same word that's used there.

And this describes a believer. Friends, you and I are positionally holy right in this moment.

And it's because God declares it. It's not based on whether you've had a good day or not. It's not based on how good you've been this whole week.

[20:06] You are holy because God says so. God does not bring us halfway there and then says, well, it's up to you to complete the process.

No. God did it. Holiness is not the end. Holiness is the beginning of a new life that we have. And we're called to live out this holiness throughout our lives.

We are called to be what we are. And that is holy. Secondly, notice, they're faithful. He says in verse 1, to the saints who are at Ephesus who are faithful in Christ Jesus.

Now, that word doesn't mean trustworthy. Notice it says that they're faithful in Christ. They're not faithful to Christ.

Paul's acknowledging them as believers. And that's because they trusted Christ for their salvation. Only in Christ Jesus can a person have access to all of those spiritual blessings that I talked about earlier.

[21:21] And collectively, believers, those who are saved, make up the church. The church is not a building.

It's a collection of those who are believers. And in this letter, Paul's going to talk about the church. He's going to talk about what it is, how it functions.

In fact, Paul magnifies the importance of the church perhaps more in this book, perhaps more than any other of his books. And friends, we need this because I think the last 20 to 30 years, the church has been so tarnished.

I mean, there are people who won't even go to a church just because it's named church. Have you noticed back around 20 years ago, groups started forming and they wouldn't even call themselves churches?

churches. There's a reason for that. It's because they found out that people don't like churches. And so, if you just change the name, don't use the name church, maybe people will come.

[22:28] Well, I don't know if that worked or not. Whatever God uses, I'm all for it. But friends, it's a privilege to be part of God's people.

Amen? It is. We are His church and we need to be taught of what the church is about. We need to be taught what the church is.

We need to be taught of what the church should be doing. Lastly, Paul gives, he gives a double blessing. So, double Paul, the sender, double recipients, and now he gives a double blessing.

See, I told you this letter's about fullness. It's about everything. He says, verse 2, grace to you. Let me just stop right there.

Grace runs through this letter. As I said, it's mentioned some 12 times. This is referring to God's love to people who don't deserve it.

[23:32] Just like the people in Ephesus. Just like you and me. Secondly, he says, peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You see some doubles there again? Peace is the result or the outcome that flows from grace. You all know the passage in Romans 5, verse 1, having been justified by faith, we have what?

Peace with God through Christ Jesus. Grace is the fountain of all the blessings. It's out of grace that everything flows, including peace.

And this letter, it deepens our understanding of the gospel. One of the commentators that I like looking at, he compared this letter of Ephesians to the opening scene of the movie that's called The Sound of Music.

Do you remember how that began? You've got this, the main character there. She's dancing on this mountaintop and she's looking out on all this beautiful scenery and these other mountaintops and these streams and valleys.

[24:47] Ephesians is like that. The only thing is, it's not a description of the physical creation. No, it's a picture of the believer and all the blessings that we have been given.

Here's a quote from him. He says, Paul's message throughout this book is that we might understand God's grace so that we might possess his peace because we are part of his church and we have as our possession his infinite riches.

What a great way to put this. Friends, we sure need that, don't we? Can you think of another time when something like this study would not be so relevant as it is now?

We all have heard about that shooting in Texas. What a tragedy that is. And if you listen to the news, everybody's trying to understand what happened.

Why did it happen? What would motivate this young man to go out and do such killing? And so people are looking at psychology.

[25:59] They're looking at guns. They're looking at, you know, all of these things. Friends, I'll tell you what. The answer is found in scripture. The answer is because we are depraved.

And the answer is not going to be found with more legislation about guns. It's not going to be finding more psychiatrists. Friends, we have, we are in a mess and we need the Lord Jesus and his power to transform us.

And that only comes when we turn our hearts toward the Lord. Consider what he says. What a great opportunity we have to study this and to perhaps talk to our friends about what Paul wrote to this wonderful church.

If I could ask the musicians to come up here, I just wanted to end here with just some of the benefits of this study. How do we benefit from this? Just three things.

Come with your Bibles. Come prepared. And I'd ask you, read ahead. You know, this is, it's only six chapters. It's 155 verses to read.

[27:17] You could read this book all the way through in 20 minutes. Come prepared. Secondly, place yourself in this pagan culture that Paul lived in, in Ephesus.

And that shouldn't be too hard for us, could it? Should it? Because we're in a pagan culture right now. Most of us live in a big city. Some of us don't. But you're exposed to it.

But the thing is, is that the times are getting darker and darker. Thirdly, ponder the promises and your status that you enjoy in Christ Jesus.

And just how amazing it is to be able to tell somebody that I am in Christ Jesus. You know, we do that in a water baptism.

We're proclaiming that we are bound to Jesus. We are bound to Him in His death. We're bound to Him as we rise up out of the water. Those are just, those are just expressions of the truth that we are in Christ.

[28:24] What a wonderful thing to lift up. We should not be like that Father who received this rare, wonderful gift from His Son only to just kill it and not fully appreciate what He received.

Friends, if you are here and you're not sure where you stand with Christ, don't leave here today without talking to somebody. They would be happy to talk to you. He would be happy in the future. He would be happy to take care of us on the trip. If you are there in Christ, take care of us who vine's for anyone and can be content on him coming. bliss, and ourimy bath creatin full and our■■■■■ is who he brushes on our way to go.

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