

Praying for Paul – Ephesians 6:19-24

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE END OF EPHESIANS

Well, it's a big day today: we're finishing our study of the book of Ephesians! Today, we'll be tackling verses 19 through 24 of chapter 6, so go ahead and turn there in your Bibles, if you would. I trust that in our journey through Ephesians you've been encouraged and grounded in your new identity in Christ; you've begun to understand the high calling you've received as saints and children of God; you've received some incredibly practical guidance about God's way of living and how to walk worthy of your high calling; and, most recently, you've learned how to be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might by putting on the full armor he's made available to each of us. Ephesians is an incredibly practical guidebook on the new life to which God has called us, and it's been a great privilege and blessing to preach through it and grow together with you.

Last week we completed our study of the full armor of God with prayer, what we called the secret weapon. Paul encouraged us not to just offer up a couple prayers here and there, but rather to live life in constant communication with our God. He told us to pray at all times in the Spirit. Andy Baxter says it this way: "Enjoy a spontaneous and continual conversation with God." And I like that word, "enjoy," in the context of prayer. It helps transform our often negative perception of prayer as a duty or a drudgery. Instead we recognize that prayer is a gift, a lifeline to God, and we learn to enjoy being with him at all times and cultivating an awareness of his constant presence with us. Enjoy God in prayer!

We're also reminded that prayer should be spontaneous and continual. In prayer, we live life with God and remember that he cares about every detail. We bring his power and wisdom to bear on every challenge we face. We keep our eyes and ears open for his communication to us. We praise him continually for the both the blessings and challenges of life because we know they all have a purpose and are part of the story he's writing for our good and for his glory.

Prayer is in its essence is simply living life with God, sharing all of it with him, depending on him and listening carefully for his voice and guidance. This is how we walk by the Spirit and live life in the very power of God, learning to operate in that realm of the impossible we've talked about. Prayer is an incredible gift, not a drudgery or religious duty we need to perform.

So this is where we left off last week, and be forewarned, I may spend a little more time on prayer in the coming weeks after we wrap up Ephesians today. We'll see where God leads us! But let's begin our conclusion of Ephesians by reading verses 18 through 24 of chapter 6:

18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. 21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. 23 Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

II. PAUL'S PRAYER REQUESTS AS AN AMBASSADOR IN CHAINS

So as we pick up in verse 19 today, we first of all notice that Paul, the devil-stomping, unstoppable, snake-bitten, stoned, ship-wrecked, persevering, fearless apostle of God, needed prayer just like you and I do. In fact, the reason Paul had such an amazing ability to communicate God's truth; persevere through the worst of persecution; endure incredible hardships; survive being stoned; and be effective in building God's kingdom through it all, is that *he fully recognized his inability to do it on his own and was deeply aware of his desperate need for the power of God operating through his prayers and the prayers of other saints.*

You see, Paul was convinced that apart from God he truly was nothing and would be completely ineffective. And if you read Paul's letters, you'll see this conviction clearly and hear his repeated requests for prayer and his firm commitment to praying for others.

Now Paul identifies himself here, in verses 19 and 20, as an ambassador in chains for the gospel...for the good news of salvation through Christ. God had set Paul apart before the foundation of the world to be the one who would share his message of salvation with the Gentiles, those who formerly had been on the outside looking in. The Ephesians themselves were among these Gentiles who had now been brought near by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). And Paul recognized this special call as God's ambassador to the Gentiles as his life mission and knew that the spiritual forces of wickedness would be rallying their troops to prevent him from fulfilling that mission.

Paul was also well aware of his own inadequacy to argue the Gentiles into the kingdom of God by his own speaking abilities or by creating convincing arguments. He knew that God is the only One who is able to do such a thing and make his words penetrate to their hearts. These are just a few of the reasons Paul knew he needed prayer. And if you think about it, it takes a certain amount of humility, doesn't it, just to ask other people to pray for you? In asking for prayer, we're admitting that we're inadequate in some way and we need God's power.

So let's consider praying for Paul today. What did Paul want believers to pray on his behalf? What did he think was important to pray about? What did he most need in his calling as God's ambassador to the Gentiles? These are some of the questions we want to answer today. And as we look at verses 19 and 20 of Ephesians chapter 6, I see Paul sharing one primary prayer request that he knew would enable him to do two things and do them well.

A. That words would be given to him

Paul's primary prayer request, what he wanted the Ephesian believers to pray for fervently, was that words would be given to him in the opening of his mouth. Now you might think: how could this be? From what I know of Paul, he never seemed to be short of words or to have any trouble communicating clearly. Well, I'd like you to consider today, that there just might be a really good reason for

that. Perhaps the reason Paul was able to communicate the truths of God so clearly and concisely is because he and other saints were praying that God would give him words. Maybe it's because God answered those prayers in a very big way!

As we read Scripture, we see an often repeated scenario within its pages. We see multiple people who recognized their inadequate speaking abilities, but were then empowered by God to speak boldly and clearly and with authority. Moses, of course, sticks out as a good example of this. Probably no one had more doubt about his speaking abilities than Moses. He was so worried about it in fact that he tried repeatedly to get out of the call God had on his life, even when God promised to give him the words to say. As a result, his brother Aaron became the speaker at first, but what we see happening as Moses grows in his confidence in God and walks into his call as the leader of the Israelites, is him being transformed into a very bold and effective speaker. God makes him such a great communicator, in fact, that he ends up writing the first 5 books of the Bible.

I was also just reading in the book of Jeremiah this week, how Jeremiah responded to God's calling of him as a prophet. Listen to how Jeremiah first responded to God's call (Jeremiah 1:6):

...“Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.”

But how did the Lord respond to Jeremiah? Well this is what God did and said in Jeremiah 1, verse 9:

Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth...”

What both Jeremiah and Moses found out was that God has no problem giving people words to say and the courage to say them. And we can all take a lesson from what they learned. Because what we'll find is that our inadequate speaking abilities or fear of sharing God's Word are no problem for God. In fact feeling weak in this area is a much better place to be than thinking we've got the skills within ourselves to convince other people of something that can only be spiritually discerned.

Humility is always the place to begin and continue with God, and it opens the door for His power to come in and accomplish things we could never do on our own.

Are you afraid of speaking God's truth to other people or sharing the good news about the hope you have in Christ? Well, I'd like to encourage you to not let that fear keep you at a stand-still. Instead let it turn your eyes to the One who has absolutely no problem putting words in your mouth or giving you courage to say them. Pray with perseverance that he'll do that within you and ask others to pray the same. If Paul needed the prayers of others to be able to speak God's truth, so do we!

B. That with these words he would make known the mystery of the gospel

So Paul's primary prayer request from the Ephesians was that God would give him words when he opened his mouth. But he didn't want these words so he could impress other people or be respected or be thought of as incredibly wise, but rather, he wants these words for two specific reasons. The first reason he wants God's words to come out of his mouth is so that he can make the mystery of the gospel, known.

As an ambassador of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul's calling was to explain a mystery...to take something confusing and hidden and make it understood and revealed...essentially to shine bright light into a dimly lit area. Paul describes this process of unveiling a mystery beautifully for us in Ephesians 3, verse 8 to 10. He says:

8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; 10 so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

It can feel like an overwhelming task to be responsible for adequately explaining a mystery that affects eternal destinies and that if understood and accepted can bring life from death. Paul recognized the significance of this responsibility and

knew that the only way he could be effective in adequately explaining the mystery of the unfathomable riches of Christ, was if God empowered him and gave him the words to say...if God gave him the ability to make the mysterious, known and understood. This is why Paul needed the Ephesians to pray fervently that words would be given to him. He knew he was inadequate to do this in himself and that only the power of God would enable him to carry out this task. Paul needed God's words and the power of the Spirit working within the hearts of his hearers so that this incredible mystery now revealed in Christ could take root within the hearts and minds of lost people.

This responsibility to explain the mystery of Christ to those still in darkness can be overwhelming to us as well. And Satan loves to cultivate within each of us a belief that we just don't know enough about Scripture or that we're not eloquent enough to actually share the mystery of Christ with other people. He wants to keep us convinced that we simply can't do it. He wants to keep us from spending any time memorizing a few key verses so that we'll be ready to share the gospel when the opportunity arises. Believe me, he kept me there for a long time, and even now I still have to battle his attempts to keep me quiet when opportunities arise or to convince me that the reason someone didn't accept Christ is because I didn't explain it in just the right way.

You see Satan loves to keep the focus on us and keep us thinking that it's our communication abilities or lack thereof that determine whether someone accepts the gospel or not. He likes it this way, because he knows we'll either be frozen in fear or fruitlessly trying to save people through our own communication abilities. What Satan really doesn't want to happen is for us to start relying on God here...to learn the Scriptures and be ready to share them, but to earnestly seek God for the courage to speak them and the ability to explain the mystery of the gospel clearly. Only when we recognize that it's God alone that enables us to communicate the gospel clearly and that he's responsible for the fruit, will we see the need to pray for this to happen in our lives and in the lives of others. And when we learn to share the gospel by God's power, we'll also be at peace with the result as we learn to leave it in his hands.

Dallas Willard gives us good perspective on this. In speaking of the struggle he had feeling he was responsible for changing people's hearts through his sermons, he said this: "One of my great joys came when I got up from a chair to walk to the

podium and the Lord said to me, ‘Now remember, it’s what I do with the Word between your lips and their hearts that matters.’” Dallas goes on to say that “If you do not trust God to do that, then he will let you do what you’re going to do, and it’s not going to come to much. But once you turn it loose and recognize that we are always inadequate but our inadequacy is not the issue, you are able to lay the burden down.”

This is also what Paul recognizes in asking the Ephesians to pray for him. He’s well aware of his inadequacy to communicate in such a way that changes people’s hearts, and knows this can only happen through God’s working and God’s communication abilities. He needs God every step of the way, just like you and I. With this recognition he’s drawn to prayer and dependence on God, truly believing that only God can bring the fruit and make him adequate as his ambassador. And he’s also released from the pressure of thinking he’s on his own in trying to save people by saying things in just the right way.

C. That he would speak the mystery boldly

The second reason Paul wants God’s words to come out of his mouth is so that he can speak boldly. In fact, he repeats this request twice in verses 19 and 20: first, that he would “***make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel,***” and second, that in proclaiming it he “***may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.***” Paul desires to leave timidity and fear behind in his sharing of the gospel, and walk into bold and fearless proclamation of its life-giving truths. And Paul knows that the only way to get this boldness and conquer Satan’s efforts to keep him quiet and timid out of fear of rejection or fear that he won’t present it quite right, is through the working of God brought about through prayer. This kind of boldness comes only through the power of the Spirit working within us as we walk in dependence on him in continuous prayer.

Do you believe God can create this kind of boldness within you? Are you praying with perseverance that he will do just that? Are you praying this for your fellow believers and for your pastor and others who are ambassadors in chains? I want to share with you a couple Scriptures that show us that boldness truly does come through prayer and the power of the Spirit within us.

The first is in Acts, chapter 4. Peter and John had just been arrested by the religious leaders ***“because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”*** After spending the night in jail, they were brought before the chief priest and interviewed about a miracle they had performed. In response, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke boldly and with confidence the mystery of the gospel, saying, ***“...by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by this name this man stands before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”***

Now I would call that a pretty bold proclamation of the gospel, wouldn't you? It confronted the religious leaders about their responsibility for crucifying their own Messiah and it identified Jesus as the one and only way of salvation. That would take some boldness and courage to say to the people who could probably coordinate your own crucifixion as well, wouldn't it? And in verse 13, we see that the religious leaders were amazed at the confidence of Peter and John even though ***“they were uneducated and untrained men.”*** God had given them boldness and confidence beyond their own human abilities by the power of the Spirit within them. And this is something he's also happy to do for you and I! It's not something that's only available to apostles or evangelists.

We see this as we continue further on in Acts, chapter 4, where the same boldness and confidence of Peter and John is spreading to all the other believers. And it came to them as a result of prayer. Verses 24 through 31 record the prayer that the believers prayed together, lifting up their voices to God with one accord. And they ended their prayer with this request: ***“And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus.”***

We see here that they are praying together for confidence and for God's miraculous working. And what happens as a result? Well we find out in verse 31: ***“And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness.”***

God is more than able to answer our prayers for boldness in proclaiming his Word and he does it with great power! And notice that they were ALL filled with the Spirit and began to speak with boldness, not just the 12 disciples. This tells us that God can and will do the same for you and I as we seek it together in prayer.

The second Scripture I want to share with you relating to boldness is in 2 Corinthians, chapter 3. In verse 2 of chapter 3, Paul begins with that recognition we've already talked about: that it's God by the power of his Spirit within us that makes us effective in proclaiming the gospel and that he's the One who brings new life, not us. In speaking to the Corinthian believers, he says this: ***"You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."***

Can you see in these verses Paul's dependence on God and the power of His Spirit, rather than on his own communication abilities or human wisdom? Clearly he recognizes that the salvation and growth of the Corinthian believers is all God's work. Paul and his fellow workers have been privileged to play a part in the process and to care for the Corinthians, but the new life and growth and the confidence they have to proclaim God's word comes only by the power of the Spirit.

Paul goes on to contrast the ministry of death and condemnation, represented by the Law and human effort, with the ministry of the Spirit and righteousness, which comes with great glory. Such a great glory in fact that it makes the former ministry of the Law look like nothing, even though the Law, when it was given to Moses, caused his face to shine so brightly that the Israelites had to look away. How much greater glory and power is available to you and I now as we learn to walk in new life and freedom and boldness through the power of the Spirit?!

And this is Paul's conclusion based on these truths: ***"Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech, and are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the***

end of what was fading away.” As we come to God seeking boldness, the ministry of the Spirit will come with glory and power and fill us with that boldness and confidence and the consuming desire to share the hope we have in Christ.

Let’s seek this together in prayer! Amen?! Let’s not live our lives in timidity and fear. ***“For the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power”*** (1 Corinthians 4:20). Let’s believe that truth and seek together in prayer the boldness and confidence and power only God can bring. And as you walk into situations where you feel weak and fearful and like you don’t know what to say, ask God for the words and wisdom you need and watch what he does! The book of Acts is a record of what God can do when we live life this way. Over and over we see God’s ambassadors boldly proclaiming the good news of salvation through Christ and we see God bringing new life and freedom in power and glory!

III. THE TWO-FOLD MISSION OF TYCHICUS

So this brings us to the last few verses of Ephesians, where Paul tells the Ephesians that he’s sending the beloved brother and faithful minister, Tychicus, to them. Paul also offers his final prayers and encouragement to the Ephesian believers. Let’s look briefly now at the mission of Tychicus in verse 21 and 22. Paul says there:

21 But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts.

Now we don’t know a lot about Tychicus from Scripture. He’s actually mentioned more than you might think though, appearing in 5 different books of the New Testament. Clearly he was very involved and active in the ministry of the apostles. We do know that he was from Asia and that he often served as a messenger to the churches, updating them about how Paul and his fellow workers were doing. In this case, Paul was sending him on just such a mission, a mission with two primary and related purposes.

The first job of Tychicus was to communicate to the Ephesians how Paul and his fellow workers were doing. Paul was sending him to let them know about his

circumstances, how he was really doing and the practical daily challenges he was facing. Tychicus was to give them full information: he would make everything known to them. Paul recognized that the Ephesian believers were concerned about him and that information about how he was doing would be beneficial to them.

The second job of Tychicus was to comfort the hearts of the Ephesians. He was to communicate what was really happening with Paul and in so doing comfort their hearts and put their minds at ease. The mission of Tychicus was all about communication and information that would bring some peace and comfort to people who loved Paul and were concerned about his welfare.

This is an encouraging side of Paul where we see that he's a whole, real person who understands the daily challenges of life, our need for information, our struggle with worrying, and that all of life is important to God. We sometimes get to viewing Paul as this huge, spiritual giant who only talked about spiritual matters and was probably unconcerned about the mundane issues of life. But here we see Paul as a real human being who understands the concern of other people about his physical circumstances and welfare. And he takes steps to address these concerns and communicate information that will put minds at ease and bring comfort.

To me this is a reminder that God is also concerned about the details of our lives and understands our human challenges and struggles. In a way, it reminds us to be careful in trying to separate our lives into spiritual and earthly categories. Our relationship with God encompasses all we do and he loves to share it all with us and keep that continuous conversation going whether we're going to church, working at our job, going on a hike, washing the car, or reading the Bible.

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"
(1 Corinthians 10:31).

IV. PAUL'S FINAL PRAYERS FOR THE EPHESIANS

And this brings us, finally, to the last two verses of Ephesians, Paul's closing prayer for the Ephesians believers and indirectly to us as well:

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

Peace, love with faith, and grace. These are the things Paul desires to characterize the lives of believers, things which can only come through the powerful working of God within us: A heart at rest in God, his love taking root within us and flowing over to others as we walk by faith, and God pouring out his grace, his favor on us, enabling us to walk worthy of the calling we've received...in short, a life lived in complete dependence on God whereby our adequacy and power and boldness comes from him, he is glorified, and his kingdom comes in great glory and power. Even so, come Lord Jesus in our lives!

This is the overarching message of Ephesians: that we would live life not being strong in ourselves, but by being strong in the Lord and the strength of his might...that every moment of our lives would be lived reaching out for God's grace and power and wisdom, refusing to rely on our own. Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians with a prayer for God's grace to be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

Andy Baxter recently shared with the Monday night men a great definition of the kind of grace Paul is speaking of here. Andy said grace is "God's power working within us to make us willing and able to do His will." And, my friends, the only way we can walk worthy of the calling we've received is by God's grace doing just that within each of us. Do you love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love? Then let's live our lives reaching out for that grace and learning to be strong and bold and confident as God pours it out on us! Let's seek him with all that we have. Let's enjoy that spontaneous and continual conversation with God in every situation we face in life and watch with expectation to see what He does!