



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 6:18-24

Ephesians

"Prayer and Benediction "

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well our text this morning is Ephesians 6:18-24, and we are concluding our study in the Book of Ephesians this morning. It's been a very enjoyable study for me, and now we come to the end. So if you have your bibles open, follow along beginning with verse 18. Paul, you know, has been describing the spiritual conflict and the armor of God that we are to put on. And now he comes to the subject of prayer.

“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, 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.” Now that word mystery is one that we're familiar with, at least we covered it at some length back in chapter 1 and then in chapter 3. It's one of the main subjects of this book.

The mystery is that Jews and gentiles are now coheirs. That we are equal with the Jew. Gentiles are not second class citizens in the church. But through faith based on the work of Christ, we are equal with one another. And so Paul describes himself as an ambassador of that mystery. Verse 20, “For which I am an ambassador in chains.” That's an interesting expression that he uses there. I'm not going to develop it in the lesson itself, but I would like to make just a few comments on it.

It brings together two very opposite words. Ambassador on the one hand, chains on the other. Ambassador is a very exalted title, a very high privilege to be an ambassador. He is a representative of Christ. Here an ambassador of the mystery. He's the one that's been entrusted with the mystery. And yet, this very lofty position that he holds is one that has brought him into chains.

And that is the view of the world toward the ambassadors of Christ. We come with the good news. We come with the message of the gospel, but yet it is received by the world in this way. The world takes the Ambassadors of Christ, those with the great message of freedom, and puts them in chains.

And so Paul speaks of himself as an ambassador in chains, referring to his imprisonment. But it is really a very exalted title in and of itself because he is suffering for Christ, and that is a privilege. "For which I am an ambassador in chains that in proclaiming I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." So that's his request, that they pray that he would speak boldly and declare this mystery.

"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. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and that he may comfort your hearts. 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 a love incorruptible."

And with that, the apostle concludes this epistle to the Ephesians. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and Heavenly Father we do begin with praise for you, for your greatness, for your sovereign authority and control of all things. What a comfort it is to know that You are in control, that You manage the affairs of this world, and You manage even the details of our personal lives. And so we have not been born

into a world, a rule of by chance we have not been cast to fate, but we are under Your sovereign control and the god who controls all things is a pure god, a holy god, an infinitely good, merciful, gracious god. We praise You for that. Thank you that You, in your grace, have set Your love upon Your people. Have chosen a people for Yourself from all eternity. You brought us into Your family through the work, the ministry, the shed blood of your son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we thank Him for His work. We thank You for the grace that sent Him into this world. We thank the Spirit for bringing us to a saving knowledge and faith in Your son. And we pray Lord that as we consider these final verses of this epistle to the Ephesians that You would guide and direct us. One of the great truths that we are reminded of in this book is that our hearts have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. He dwells within us.

And as John tells us, He is the anointing who teaches us. And so we pray for that teaching ministry this morning. Open our eyes to the truth that is before us. Help us to understand it and to know how it applies to us in our own personal situations, situations which vary from person to person, and yet situations to which this text speaks very directly in different ways, but it is relevant to each and every one of us. And I pray, Father, that You would make that known to us. Teach us and build us up in the faith.

We are a needy people. We are constantly in dependence upon you. Remind us of that. Move us to look to You for the help that we need spiritually and also materially. We pray for those with special needs. We pray for the sick. We pray for those who face surgery, or those who are recovering from it, and we pray You would give healing. We pray specifically for **Sara Sirian**. Pray that You would continue to give her recovery and relief from pain, and pray for her family.

We pray Your blessing on others. We pray that You would encourage them in times of difficulty. Remind each of us of all that we

have from You. That the times of comfort and ease that we enjoy, and enjoy so often, we enjoy from Your good hand, and to make us thankful.

We pray, Lord, for our time in study this morning, that You instruct us. We pray that You build us up in the faith, prepare us for the week to come, remind us that we are in a great spiritual war, and that we go out into it. And we are in it now, so help us to continually put on that armor that we are to put on.

Bless us this evening when we return and celebrate the Lord's Supper. And remember His death on our behalf, and remember that He's coming again. And may we look forward to that day and live earnestly, diligently in light of it.

Bless us now, Lord, as we sing our final hymn. May it be a good preparation for our hearts as we prepare to study together. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We are at the end of our study in the Book of Ephesians, and Paul now comes to his last subject before concluding this great book with a benediction. It is the subject of prayer. Paul has been describing the spiritual conflict that every Christian is in, and has urged us to take up the full armor of God and stand firm in the struggle against a great vast unseen army.

He has listed six pieces of armor that we are to wear. And the close connection between the armor and prayer has suggested to some that prayer is a seventh weapon. That may be, but Paul doesn't list it as such. And really, prayer is more than a weapon. I think it's fair to say that it is a weapon in the spiritual conflict, but it is far more than simply one of the weapons. It influences every aspect of our warfare. It is the means by which we put on the whole armor of God.

A soldier can have good equipment, but if he doesn't have the energy to put it on, or he doesn't have the wisdom to use it, then it will

be useless. That's true in the spiritual conflict also. That's why prayer is essential. Prayer has been called the energy that enables the Christian soldier to wear the armor and wield the sword. It is through prayer that we have our communion with God. And so, that makes it essential.

If we are to remain steadfast as Paul has encouraged us to do, and steadfast in the strength of his might, then we must be in constant fellowship, constant communion with the Lord from whom we receive that strength and might.

I think we get some sense of the power and necessity of prayer from an episode in Israel's history in Exodus 17. We read in that chapter of the Amalekites and their attack upon Israel. When that occurred, Moses commanded Joshua to lead the army of Israel in the fight while he went to the top of a mountain or hill that overlooked the field of battle. And there Moses lifted up his hands to heaven.

That was a gesture of seeking God's help. The lifting up of his hands to heaven was a symbol of prayer. And as long as Moses had his hands lifted up, Israel prevailed. But when Moses let his hands down, the Amalekites prevailed. The problem for Moses was the battle was long. It lasted all day and, with time, as you can imagine, his arms grew tired. And so two men Aaron and Hur supported his hands until sunset, and the results was Israel triumphed. That's an example from the Old Testament of the power of prayer, what it accomplishes.

But we have examples in the New Testament as well, and none better than the example of our Lord and the importance that He, himself, placed upon prayer. As the Son of God, He possessed immense knowledge and perfect skill in living, and yet He was a great man of prayer. Go through the gospels and you read of him spending whole nights in prayer and rising early in the morning to pray. He knew that it was essential for His ministry, and it was essential for His

life as a man of God to be a man of prayer, to keep in close communication with His father.

And so it is certainly necessary for us to be men and women of prayer. And we see that all the more in this context of warfare. A soldier needs direction. His weapons are of no use if he is not in the right place at the right time. If he is not able to use those weapons in the right way. And that too is why it is important for us to be in consistent constant communion and communication with our God and with the captain of our salvation.

And so the very circumstances of the conflict that we are in. The example of our Lord and other examples underscore for us, make it very clear the importance of prayer to our lives. There is power in prayer. Wisdom and direction come through prayer. And Paul leaves no doubt about its importance for the Christian life and spiritual conflict. He mentions prayer four times in verse 18, and discusses it first in a general way, and then in a particular or a specific way.

He begins, we are to pray in all ways, and we are to pray always. We are to pray at all times, he says, and we are to pray with all prayer and petition. So first, Paul says we are to avail ourselves of all kinds of prayer, and he mentions two types – prayer and petition. Now the distinction between these two seems to be that the first word, prayer, is general, and refers to all ways of addressing God. And the second, petition, refers strictly to requests.

So in its general meaning, prayer includes requests for help. It includes confession of sin, as well as praise and thanks giving. One way to remember the different aspects of prayer is by the acrostic acts, as in the book of Acts, A-C-T-S. A for adoration, C for confession, T for thanks giving, and S for supplication or making request.

We have examples of these different types of prayer in many of the prayers of the Bible. In Acts 4:24-30 we have an example that if you were here last Wednesday night we covered in some detail, not

greatly. But you will remember if you were here that the context of that prayer was a moment of conflict, or a day or two of conflict that Peter and John went through as a result of preaching the gospel in the Temple. They were there in the Temple. They had healed a lame man, and then began to proclaim Christ, proclaim Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, who had been rejected by the people but had been raised from the dead by the Father.

And when the authorities got word that they were preaching that, they put them under arrest. Put them in jail for the night. And then that next day brought them into the Sanhedrin, where they went through a kind of inquisition. Well Peter and John were bold and they proclaimed the truth of God in the midst of those rulers and leaders of the people. The rules rebuked them, told them not to preach in that name anymore, and then allowed them to leave.

And Peter and John immediately went to their brethren, they went to the church, and there the Church of Jerusalem had a prayer meeting. And in that prayer, they began by praising God. They began with adoration. They praised God as the God of Creation who made the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them. And then praised Him as the God of Scripture, the one who inspired the writer of Psalm 2, which predicted the opposition that the apostles had experienced and the opposition that our Lord received. And then they pointed out and praised Him for His governance of history, how He is the God of history. How all that occurred, occurred according to His predetermined will, according to His hand.

And so they filled their minds with the thoughts of God's sovereignty. He is one who is in complete control. He knows the end from the beginning. He has ordained all that takes place, and so they look to Him and had great confidence.

And of course one could have that kind of confidence when one realizes that our God is in control. He is in control of history. He is in

control of the details of life. And so with that confidence they then make their request, and the request is very simple. They pray for boldness, that God would give them the boldness to proclaim the word of God in the midst of a hostile world.

It's very similar to the request that Paul makes. He's an ambassador in chains, and yet he will pray that they, they last, that they pray that he be bold in proclaiming the mystery that had been given to him, the gospel.

Well that's what the early church prayed for. They didn't pray that God would destroy their enemies and make their life easy and comfortable. They recognized that conflict was coming, and so they prayed that they would stand firm in the midst of it and declare the truth with boldness, just as Paul does. ___ pray that God would take away his chains and release him, that he might retire somewhere. He prays that he would be bold. He prays that he would be effective in the ministry.

And so the early church prays that, and God answered their prayer. After they made this request he shook the building in which they were in and filled them with the Holy Spirit.

They prayed with adoration. They prayed with supplication. And God answered their prayer. They went out from that place boldly proclaiming the truth of God.

There are different kinds of prayer. There's public prayer or more formal prayer, and there is private prayer, a prayer that is well ordered like some of the great prayers of the Bible. Like that prayer in Acts 4. But also a prayer that is not so carefully ordered. Prayer doesn't always follow the structure of the Lord's Prayer or the Model Prayer, as it's more appropriately called in Matthew 6.

Sometimes prayer is unplanned. It can be sudden and brief. It can be for a specific concern of the moment. Sometimes in times of

great stress we don't order our thoughts well. We don't have time for that. We don't have the clarity of thought to do that. Sometimes we don't really know what to pray or how to pray. We're overwhelmed by the circumstances, and all we can do is just sigh or groan from the heart. Well that's a prayer to God. That's crying out to Him.

There are all kinds of prayers, all kinds of circumstances. And Paul urges the Ephesians to busy themselves with all of them. Pray with all kinds of prayers and at all times on all occasions, and that's his next point. Pray at all times, he says. Prayer is not to be an occasional activity, but one that we continually engage in. Pray at all times is very similar to Paul's instruction in 1 Thessalonians 5:17, pray without ceasing. And yet we, you read that in 1 Thessalonians or here in Ephesians and you wonder, how can we do that? How do we pray ceaselessly? How do we pray at all times?

And of course it is impossible to carry on a constant dialog with God. You can't conduct your business at the office on your knees. You can't listen to a lecture at school in the midst of intense prayer. But it is possible for us to always be living in the spirit of prayer. So often we reserve prayer for moments of dire need or in times of crisis, or catastrophe; that's when we pray. But the reality is we are always living in time of need. Always in need of God's care regardless of our outward circumstances.

There is a danger for the Christian that is inherent with times of ease and comfort. That danger is a complacency about our circumstances, or a confidence in those circumstances, as though they'll always be what they are, as though things will always go on as well and as nicely as they are. So we'll always be financial stable, or we'll always be in good health.

And we begin to be confident in the circumstances and, perhaps, in our ability to manage the circumstances so that our confidence begins to be placed in ourselves. That's a danger, and I think it's a

rather common danger. It's one that Paul warned the Corinthians about. They were a proud group of Christians and they were very confident, confident in their knowledge, which really wasn't that great, as Paul points out to them. Confidence in their spiritual maturity, which really for the most part didn't exist.

And so he says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." The man that thinks he stands, the man that is comfortable in his position is the man or the woman who is headed for a great fall. There is never a time when we can stand on our own.

Now Paul exhorts us to stand, to stand firm. That's one of the great exhortations of chapter 6 of the Book of Ephesians, but not in our own strength. We cannot do that. We are to stand in the strength and the might of our God. And Paul reminds the Corinthians of that, not in the same words, but having told them that the one who thinks that he stands is to take heed lest he falls. He then goes on to say, "God is faithful." In other words, don't look to yourself and don't take confidence in yourself, take confidence in God who is faithful. And all who look to him will be established. He will make us to stand, and so we should be looking to him.

That's what Paul wants us to do. And if we are conscious of our dependence on the Lord, and of His constant presence with us, and His will to bless us, and He is always with us, even when we are not in the kind of fellowship and communion with Him that we should be. And His desire is always for our good. That is His will for us. And even when times of difficulty and chastening come, they are for our good.

But with that realization that He's always with us, that His will is to bless us, then that understanding and spirit should overflow in prayer. It should, and it should become a daily habit for us to get down on our knees, at home or if we're away on business in the hotel room. But to spend private moments with the Lord praising Him,

thanking Him, seeking His help both for ourselves and for others. There is a discipline to prayer which we all need to practice. I think it's probably a general truth that this is one of the great struggles of the Christian life, to be a man or woman of prayer, consistent daily prayer. Ernest prayer.

It is a struggle for me. I think it's probably a struggle for most people. And yet, this is what Paul urges us to do, to practice this discipline of prayer. And we need to spend time in secret conversation with God, spend time in our prayer closet so to speak. But we also need to spend time in prayer when we are out in the world, in the car, or when doing dishes. So when doing those things that engage us in activity, or when walking down the street and temptations come, they come in the oddest ways and the most unlikely of times. They come to us and when they do, we can't go down on our knees if we are out in public, but we can pray with our minds. We can look to the Lord and call out to Him.

And so we are to pray continually. We are to be living in a spirit of prayer. And Paul adds, we are to pray in the spirit. That's Paul's next point. Prayer is to be directed by the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:26, Paul makes a statement that applies I think very directly to his comment here, and there in Romans he tells us that the Holy Spirit prays for us. We learn in Romans 8 that the Spirit prays for us here on the earth and that the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, prays for us in heaven. So we have the two persons of the God head praying to the first person of the God head on our behalf.

But on earth, with the Spirit of God within us, Paul tells us that He prays, or He helps our weakness. When we don't know how to pray, the Spirit of God within us intercedes with groanings too deep for words. He is constantly engaged in prayer for us, and we are to pray under His influence. We are to look to Him to guide us in our prayer

life. To do that, we must be in harmony with His will as it is revealed in Scripture.

Paul goes on to say in Romans 8 that the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And so our prayer is to be according to the will of God. If it is to be governed and guided by the Holy Spirit, then it will be prayer that is consistent with the Scripture. And so I think it's significant that the last weapon of armor that Paul mentions is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Having mentioned that he then takes up this subject of prayer, which would indicate that scripture and prayer belong together. Prayer must be consistent with the principles of scripture.

George **Mueller** gives an interesting and helpful example here. Many of you, I think, are familiar with George Mueller, a great saint of the last century. He lived through most of the 19th Century, lived to be in his 90s, and was a man who was well known for his faith and his prayer. He had missionary activity, particularly toward the end of his life, but through much of his life he traveled and preached the gospel. But he's most famous for the orphanages that he established in England.

And how he always looked to the Lord, never made public appeals for funds, and how through prayer and constant prayer God daily met the needs of those orphanages in amazing ways. So he was a man of great faith and prayer, and he records in his autobiography that early in his Christian life he made a discovery, or he was taught a principle by the Lord. And that is, and I quote him, "The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord."

The way to do that according to him, or as he found in his own life, was not to begin the day with prayer. That had been his custom. But he changed, and he began reading and meditating the scriptures; that's how he began the day. In that way, he says, he was comforted,

he was reproved, he was instructed, and he was brought into communion with God. But he found that almost invariably within a few minutes of meditating on the scriptures, his soul was led into confession or into thanks giving, or into intercession for someone. So that while he didn't give himself to prayer, but to meditation, his meditation almost immediately turned into prayer.

Previously, he said, before he started this practice he would spend some time in prayer before he began really to pray, as he put it. And during these first moments of 15 minutes, sometimes 30 minutes, he says his mind might wander. He might not enjoy the kind of comfort that he should experience in prayer. But, he wrote, "I scarcely ever suffer now in this way, for my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my friend about the things that He has brought before me in His precious word."

How do we pray in the Spirit? One way is by nourishing ourselves on the word of God. And through that nourishment of the word of God, be led and instructed in the things that we should pray. As we study, the Spirit of God guides us in the right way to pray. And at all times we must be sensitive to the Spirit's promptings.

One of the great privileges that Paul has underscored in this book at the very beginning, is that as Christians we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the third person of the Trinity literally dwells within you. He is actually within you, and he is a person, and as a person he communicates, and he guides, and he directs. And one way is through his promptings. He may put people on your heart, lay certain concerns or issues on our minds. And we are to pray for those. We are to be sensitive to that.

It's really not enough to pray frequently. It's not enough to pray in various ways. Prayers can be formal. Prayers can become cold. We get into a rut, and I'm sure you've had that experience where you find

yourself on your knees and you say, I'm just mouthing words. I'm just saying things that I've become used to saying. And so we can get to that point where that's all prayer amounts to sometimes, a little more than uttering words.

Now that's a danger. That's a danger that Israel fell into. One of their problems in their long history was idolatry. But even when they weren't engaged in idolatry, another problem they had was simply being very formal in their worship, so that worship became a routine, a lifeless routine, a formality. And God said, "I hate your festivals." Those are strong words. The Lord, God, says, I hate what you are doing.

And He is not pleased with prayers that are lifeless routines; that are mechanically uttered. Prayer in the spirit guards against mechanical prayers. We are to walk by the spirit, and we are to pray in the spirit. We are to pray according to His will, and in His power. He creates prayer within us. He empowers us to pray properly.

Paul says, He helps our weakness and so we are to be sensitive to Him. But prayer not only calls for sensitivity, it calls for patience. Be on the alert, Paul says, with all perseverance. Perseverance in prayer is part of what makes the diligent, the successful prayer life. And yet, perseverance, patience in prayer is very difficult. We grow tired and discouraged quickly if we don't get an immediate answer to a concern that we have prayed about.

But perseverance is part of prayer, and the Lord illustrates this in His own teaching on more than one occasion, and illustrates and shows that the need to cultivate this aspect of prayer, this aspect of perseverance. He illustrates that on one occasion in a parable. The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge in Luke 18. "There was a judge," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about men. And a widow who kept coming to him with her plea." Now a widow was a person who had very little clout in that day. Didn't have a husband,

didn't have the kind of influence that might prevail upon a man of power like this.

And so the judge didn't pay much attention to her, didn't grant her justice. But the widow wouldn't give up. She kept coming to him. Finally the judge said to himself, "Even though I don't fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming." Now the Lord's point is, that's the way we're to approach the Father, who is not unjust, who is holy, just, and good, and who loves giving good gifts to his children. We are to be patient and we are to be persistent. We are to come to Him in that way.

Patient, because we know that God is good. He's faithful, faithful to all of His promises, and He'll be faithful to us. And persistent because we trust Him. Some people think, perhaps you've heard it said, that to continue bringing a request before the Lord shows a lack of faith. No, just the opposite is true. To continue coming to the Lord with a request is to show your faith in Him to answer it. And we're instructed to do that, to continually come before Him praying according to the will that He has set forth in Scripture and be persistent in that.

Well that's clear from that parable that he gives in Luke 18, but it's also clear from the Lord's instruction at the end of the Sermon on the Mount where he said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." Commentators have noticed a kind of ascending intensity to that instruction. We see a need and ask for help. There is humility there. There's submission there. That's one aspect of it. You can ask and you might receive immediately, but that's not always the case.

The next step, seek, involves additional action. It involves more effort, prolonged effort seeking. And the final step, knock, involves persevering effort. A person begins to knock on the door, and

continues to knock, and maybe even that knocking becomes a pounding on the door. There is a continuance that is suggested in all of that, because each of these words, each of these commands, is in the present tense. These are present imperatives, present commands which have the sense of a continuing action. We are to continue to do this. Exert continual effort.

And that's what Paul is calling for here; persistent prayer. That's what Moses demonstrated when Israel fought the Amalekites. His arms were held up until evening, until the battle was finally won. That took a day long effort. That took patience. That took perseverance. That's how we're to pray. Answers don't come immediately.

We don't always know why that is, but that's just the fact. They don't always come immediately. Often they don't come for a long time. And so we are to be persistent. And God has His reasons for that. And we are to be persistent and continue to pray. And then just the very nature of our situation demands that, because we are in continual need, and so we are to pray continually.

We are to pray for ourselves that God would supply our needs. That we might serve Him faithfully. That we might bring glory to Him in all of the circumstances that we are in. We are to pray that He would enable us to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. But we are also to pray for others, that they would do the same. That they would stand firm as well. Paul says that our prayers are to be for all the saints.

Charles Hodge writes, "No soldier entering battle prays for himself alone, but for all his fellow soldiers also. They form one army, and the success of one is a success of all." That's true. Your success is my success. And the same with all of us. When one saint prevails against a temptation, the church has prevailed. When one

saint presents the gospel, proclaims the truth of God, that's the church succeeding.

But a failing saint, a saint that stumbles, a saint that falls into sin, also affects the welfare of the church as well, and Paul was very much aware of that. How a little bit of sin can leaven a whole lump of dough. How it can affect a whole congregation. And so he says, pray for all the saints. Pray persistently. Pray continuously. And then adds himself to the prayer list. Verse 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." Paul was in prison when he wrote that, and yet he was still active in ministry.

The Book of Acts ends with the account of a visit by the Jewish leaders of Rome, the rabbis of Rome. And Luke says that Paul was explaining to them the Kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus. And he succeeded. God blessed his efforts. Some did come to faith.

We know from Philippians 1 that through his ministry many of the Pretorian guard had come to faith. In verse 20 of our text Paul describes himself as an ambassador in chains, a reference to the Roman practice of chaining a prisoner to a soldier. And it wasn't long, as you can well imagine, that the Roman soldiers became Paul's prisoners as they heard the gospel proclaimed to each and every one of them as they had their watch with him.

In Philippians 4 he gives greetings from Caesar's household. So it seems that the gospel given in Paul's cell penetrated even into that place. Paul was a prisoner, but he was active. And we're not surprised. He was the consummate Christian warrior who established churches across Asia and Europe. Perhaps the greatest missionary and evangelist the church has ever know who bore the scars of his conflict in his body. He speaks of them as the brand marks of Jesus. He was

whipped. He was beaten. He experienced great hardship. He's the author of 13 books of the New Testament. He is the apostle.

Augustine referred to Paul as the great lion of God. What more can we say. And yet he is asking for their help. He wants the Ephesians to pray for him that he would be able to open his mouth with boldness and make known the mystery of the gospel. That he would not be afraid to declare the free and full forgiveness for all who believe in Christ, Jew or gentile alike.

And that wasn't an attempt at humility on the part of the apostle. It was a genuine request for help, because Paul knew that he could only be bold, and he could only be clear by the power of God. He could only use his armor effectively through the Spirit of God. And so as he faced a possible situation of some Roman guard slamming the chain across his face for telling him about Christ or, of possibly standing trial before Caesar himself where his freedom and very life would be at stake. He knew that he might succumb to fear. He's made of the same stuff that you and I are made of; dust. He's weak. He knew that. He had a good assessment of himself. And so he asked them to pray for him; pray that he would be bold.

Later, he wrote to Timothy, in 2 Timothy 4, that while at his first trial all deserted him. And he writes this book of Ephesians before that first trial. So Timothy is written after all of this. He says that all deserted him, all of his friends left him. None stood with him. He stood alone before these great powers of the world, before Caesar. He says, nevertheless, "The Lord stood with me and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear," might hear the mystery of the gospel. Hear of their equality with the Jews, and their acceptance by God through faith alone based on the personal work of Christ.

Well he declared that. He declared that boldly. Christ stood with him. So the Ephesian's prayers were answered and Paul was a

good minister of the truth. He triumphed. And prayer is the means to triumph. It is the means to success in the conflict. Its importance is underscored by the word all in verse 18. There are four alls. We are to pray with all prayer and petition, at all times, with all perseverance for all the saints. Prayers is all important for our success in the spiritual conflict.

The Christian soldier must be a praying soldier. And every one of us who put our faith in Christ, every Christian is a soldier. So we must be praying soldiers. History illustrates that. At one time in the 30 Years War it seemed that the Protestant cause was lost. The army of the emperor was marching all over Germany, rolling up victory after victory. When the King of Sweden, **Gustavis Adolfis** entered the war on the side of the Protestants, he was an evangelical Christian, a man who read his bible every day. He was also a great general who prayed.

On the morning of the decisive battle of the war, the Swedish army sang Luther's hymn *A Mighty Fortress* and then Gustavis knelt down with his troops and offered prayer, then personally led them into the battle in which he lost his life, but the army won the victory. Now that image of a warrior kneeling in prayer before battle is the picture that Paul has in mind. It's the way to victory. And he recommended that to the Ephesians, recommended that they pray always, pray for themselves, pray for all the saints, pray for him too. We all need prayer.

I need prayer. All of the elders, and the deacons, and the teachers of this church need your prayer. Some of the great encouragements that I receive, and I know this is true of others as well, is the knowledge that you do pray. You tell me that, you send me notes, and I know that this church is faithful in that regard. That is essential.

I think Paul would say that one of the greatest ministries that you or I can have is that of prayer, of spending time on our knees. If Satan

cannot keep us out of the word of God, then he will keep us off our knees, 'cause we get power through prayer. We gain success in the battle through prayer. And it is a great ministry.

Paul thought so. He urged these Ephesians to pray for him. He coveted their prayers. He needed their prayers. And so he puts great emphasis upon that, develops that final subject of the book, then concludes the letter with some news of other Christians, and then a benediction. He tells them specifically of one Christian, Tychicus, his helper, who probably brought this letter from Rome to Ephesus. Paul calls him the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord.

We know a little bit about Tychicus in Acts 20:4. He is identified as being from Asia, which was a western province in Asia Minor. That is where Ephesus was located. And so he may have been from Ephesus, and may have been a convert of Paul's ministry there. He was also one of Paul's companions on his third missionary journey. And because he was with him there in Rome, he may very well have accompanied the apostle on that dangerous voyage that ended in shipwreck. And so he had been through a great deal with the apostle. So Paul calls him beloved and faithful. He was a trusted friend. A man who had proved himself and the struggles that Paul had been engaged in. And so Paul sends him to Ephesus with the letter, and with a personal message. Paul says that you may know about us, and that He may comfort your heart.

Now that statement by Paul tells us a great deal about him. He was in chains, he says. And so if anyone needed comforting you might think it's the apostle Paul. But he doesn't say that. His concern was for them. He's not asking for comfort. He's not speaking of his needs. He does ask that they pray for him, that he be bold in his proclamation. But he's not saying, make my life easy. He's not asking for his comfort.

But he is concerned about theirs. He had a love for these people, and it shows us the kind of man that he was. He is a selfless man. He is a man who exhibits the very principles that he teaches here. One of the great lessons here is love in the Book of Ephesians. And he says in chapter 4 that we are to “walk in a manner worthy of our calling,” and then he explains that “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love.” We see that in Paul’s life. His concern was for these Ephesians.

You see it in this message that he sends with Tychicus and his reason for doing that, that they would be comforted. But his concern is also seen in these last two verses of the book where he pronounces a blessing on the Ephesians with a prayer for peace, love, and faith. Peace be to the brethren he prays. This is the peace of God. The peace that comes as a result of peace with God through reconciliation. A work that Christ has accomplished. Through His death He has reconciled the center with God. He has established peace between us and God through faith in the work of Christ.

The result of that is the peace of God. It is the personal peace that comes with the knowledge that we who at one time were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. What a great truth that is. We were separated. We were outside of the blessings of the commonwealth of Israel, as gentiles. We lived in darkness. We were dead, as Paul says. But through the work of the cross, through the work of the shed blood of Christ, He has brought us near. He has brought us into union with God, and brought us into His family as equals with the Jewish people, the Jewish believers.

So that is a great comfort. Through the blood of Christ we have been brought near and that, as Paul explains in chapter 1, in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. What a thought that is. That God has predestined us to adoption His sons. That we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. That we are secure,

that we have been well provided for, and have an unimaginably glorious eternal future. Paul's wish is that all the great truths of this book would give them genuine comfort, genuine confidence. Give them peace, as well as love and faith or, as he says, love with faith. Love and faith go together as basic Christian attitudes. They come from God. They are produced by the Spirit of God in Venice, and yet they grow through our knowledge of scripture.

As we study, the Spirit gives these graces to us, increases our faith, increases our love for one another. This is what's to characterize us. And so this is what he prays will be characteristic of these Ephesians.

Finally, Paul concludes with a prayer for grace in verse 24. He began this epistle with the thought of grace, chapter 1, in verse 2, and reminds them of God's unmerited favor, and now he concludes with it. Grace is one of the most important words of this epistle; maybe the most important word of all of Paul's writings. Grace. He is the apostle of grace, of God's unmerited favor. And he describes those who receive grace as all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with a love incorruptible.

Now the stress here is on that word incorruptible. It is the last word of this book. The word that therefore should stick with us, because it is the last word. We are to love Christ with a love that is incorruptible, that is not shared with others or with other things. Christ is to be the supreme object of love in our lives. We are to be men and women who admire His person, as the eternal son of God. The second person of the god head.

We are to admire Him because of His perfect humanity, which He took to Himself in the incarnation. We are to admire His perfect work in His complete work of salvation. All great subjects of meditation. And we should be eagerly thinking on those things, and admiring Him for all of that, adoring Him for that, and desiring to see Him. Desiring

to know Him now, and desiring to see Him in the future. That should be a great objective, the great desire of our lives.

I think George Mueller was right when he made it his chief ambition to have his soul happy in the Lord. That's to be our ambition. Is it yours? Can you say that you love Christ with a love incorruptible? I suppose if we're honest, most of us would say no, I'm afraid I fall short on that. But can you at least say it is your desire to have that kind of love for Christ?

He loves us in that way. He loves us with an eternal incorruptible love, with an infinite love. God, the Father, loves us in that way, and sent His son to die for us, to save us from our sins because of that infinite, unconditional, pure love. And through our Lord's death, everyone who turns to Him in faith, who recognizes that he or she is a sinner in need of a savior, everyone is received. That death is effective for every believer. He accepts everyone who turns to Him regardless of their sin. He promises that though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they will be like wool. He will make us clean. That's what the blood of Christ does for every believer.

If you are here this morning and you don't know Christ is your savior, but you know you are a sinner, turn to Him and put your faith in Him, and you can know that Christ died for you and has cleansed you of your guilt. He got to help you to do that. May God help each of us to be men and women of prayer looking to Him to provide us with the power to stand firm, the strength to stand firm and resist the schemes of the devil.

Shall we stand now for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Oh gracious God and Heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great truths of this magnificent epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. We're reminded from the very beginning that all that we have, we have by grace, as a gift, an unmerited gift. We trace it back to His, to

God's, to Your predestination of us. To grace and eternity past. It was not moved, that You were not moved by anything you saw in us. We were lost, we were wrecked, we were ruined without anything to commend us to Your love and Your care, and yet You set your love upon us, then sent Your Son to purchase us and Your Spirit to draw us to Yourself.

You have sealed us with that spirit. You have given us great truth, great promises. And we thank You for all that we have. May we now live lives that please You. In midst of these great spiritual conflict in which we are in, may we stand firm and bring glory to You and be a blessing to one another. We pray these things in the Savior's name. Amen.