

You've Got Mail: A Journey Through A Few of Paul's Letters

STRONG – A Letter to the Church in Ephesus

Message for August 18, 2019

North East United Methodist Church

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Ephesians 1: 1-2 (NKJV) – *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Paul wrote these words, his letter to the Ephesians, while imprisoned in Rome around 60-61 AD.



Paul had visited Ephesus earlier (Acts 18:21) in 55 AD. In Acts 19: 8-10, Paul ministered to the Ephesians for over two full years.



This is the theatre in Ephesus where Paul spoke and shared about Jesus Christ.

Ephesians has been called “The Alps of the New Testament” because of the majesty of Christ revealed through Paul’s words.



Christ is the **Redeemer**

Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV) – *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”*

Christ is the **Resurrected Lord & King**, who has power over death and hell, who is the head of the church

Ephesians 1: 20-22 (NKJV) – “...*He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.*”

Christ is the **Peacemaker**, who has reconciled God to man and also makes possible reconciliation between individuals

Ephesians 2: 13-14, 18 (NKJV) – “*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation...For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.*”

Christ is the **Chief Cornerstone** of the New Temple consisting of His people, who are being fitted together

Ephesians 2: 19-20 (NKJV) – “*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.*”

Christ is the **Treasure** in whom life’s unsearchable riches are found

Ephesians 3:8 (NKJV) – “*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*”

Christ is the **Indweller** of human hearts, filling us with the love and fullness of God.

Ephesians 3: 17-19 (NKJV) – “...*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*”

Jesus is the **Giver Of Gifts** to His people for the work of the Church

Ephesians 4: 7, 11-12 (NKJV) – “*But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift...And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*”

Christ is the **Model Husband**, unselfishly giving Himself to enhance his bride – His church

Ephesians 5: 25-27 (NKJV) – ***“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse with the washing of water by the word, that He might present Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”***

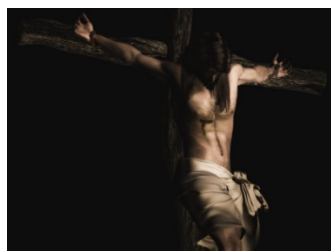
Christ is the Lord, **Mighty in Battle**, a resource for strength against spiritual warfare

Ephesians 6: 10-11 (NKJV) – ***“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”***

Paul wants the Christians in Ephesus to understand that it is around this one person, Redeemer, Resurrected Lord and King, Peacemaker, Chief Cornerstone, Indweller...this one person, who is the Giver of Gifts, our Model Husband, Mighty in Battle, and a Treasure of endless worth...this one person, Jesus Christ, is around whom we must center our lives...around whom we must be unified, one body, one spirit...

Paul addresses, as he did in his letter to the Galatians, the animosity going on between the Gentiles (those outside the Jewish faith) and the Jews who have accepted Christ. The Jews, now Christians, are still holding on to many of their traditions and trying to require the newly converted Gentiles to conform to their ways. The Gentiles are feeling excluded.

Paul says, *“For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility used to separate us. By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from two groups.”* Another translation, The Message, puts it this way: ***“Christ brought us together through his death on the cross. The cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility.”*** It is in Jesus Christ that we are united, that we are one.



And Christ is the one thing that does not change.

Paul wants the Ephesians to be clear that what unifies us is not what is on the outside – the outer trappings of our religion – our traditions, our views on politics, our ideas on controversial issues, our churches, our lifestyles – these things cannot unify us, hold us together, because they change.

The only thing that does not change is Jesus Christ. What must unify us is Christ and His mission to reach people for Him

Ephesians 2:8-9 - ***“God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”***

Brennan Manning, in The Ragamuffin Gospel, writes, *“Faithfulness to Jesus implies that with all our sins, scars, and insecurities, we stand with him...”* The Good News is that it doesn’t matter who you are, how many errors you’ve made, how many times you have struck out...it only matters whose you are.

I remember something I came across a few years ago titled “IT DEPENDS WHOSE HANDS IT’S IN”

A basketball in my hands is worth about \$19



A basketball in Michael Jordan’s hands is worth about \$33 million
It depends whose hands it’s in

A baseball in my hands is worth about \$6



A baseball in Mark McGuire’s hands is worth \$19 million
It depends whose hands it’s in

A rod in my hands will keep away a wild animal
A rod in Moses’ hands will part the mighty sea



It depends whose hands it's in

A sling shot in my hands is a kid's toy
 A sling shot in David's hand is a mighty weapon.



It depends whose hands it's in

Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in my hands
 is a couple of sandwiches.



Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in God's
 hands will feed thousands It depends whose hands it's in

Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse
 Nails in Jesus Christ's hands will produce
 salvation for the entire world.



It depends whose hands it's in

As you see now it depends whose hands it's in.
So put your concerns, your worries, your fears,
your hopes, your dreams, your families and
your relationships in God's hands because

It depends whose hands it's in.



It is whose hands we are in that gives us our worth. It is whose we are that gives us strength and confidence... It is whose we are that leads us to be unified, that leads us to recognize, as Paul writes in Ephesians 4: 4-6 (NKJV) – ***“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”***

We must be focused on Jesus Christ... we must be unified in Jesus Christ... we must allow His hands to cover us, hold us up, surround us... for as Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, ***“For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against the wicked spirits in the heavenly realms.”***

As Max Lucado writes, *“God never promises an absence of distress. But he does promise the assuring presence of his Holy Spirit... When you accepted Christ, God sealed you with the Spirit. “Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.” When hell’s interlopers come seeking to snatch you from God, the seal turns them away. He bought you, owns you, and protects you. God paid too high a price to leave you unguarded. As Paul writes later, “Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.”*

Paul tells the Ephesians and us to put on the armor of God *“that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

We are to focus on Jesus Christ... daily, we must stand for truth and righteousness in a world that often goes in the other direction... daily, we must move our feet, sharing the gospel of peace with our neighbors, forgiving one another and loving as Christ commanded... daily, we must hold the shield of faith, trusting in God's Word and His promises, in His Son... we must take the helmet of our salvation, knowing that we are children of God, sealed by His Holy Spirit, guarded and protected, no longer separated from our heavenly Father because of whose we are... and we must wield the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God... for it is the Word that speaks truth to us,

through us, and in us...it is the Word of God that keeps us on the right path, that convicts us when we are straying away, that encourages us when we feel lost...

Every day, like Paul, let us cry out, Ephesians 3: 14-15 (NKJV) – ***“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...”***

Every day let us, Ephesians 5:8 (NKJV) – ***“Walk as children of light”***...

That we might be found by Christ, Ephesians 5:27 (NKJV) – ***“...holy and without blemish...”***

That we might be, Ephesians 6:18 (NKJV) – ***“...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...”***

VIDEO - Dick & Rick Hoyt – take time to look them up on Youtube – They also have website – www.teamhoyt.com

Might we be strong...resting in God’s hands...in whose we are...The Creator of the Universe, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are ready to be your strength...