



Sermon – July 26, 2020
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Ephesians 6:21 – 24

Ephesians 2:14 – 16

Ephesians 3:17 – 19

Ephesians 2:4 - 9

Well as you grab your seats, let's grab out Bibles. We're going to be back in Ephesians chapter 6 today as we finish this book. And if you are a guest with us for the first time, we just want to take a moment to welcome you home. We've got more information for you out at our information desk in the lobby after the service. And I just want to say a word of thanks to many of you for your prayers this week. You can tell how much pain I was carrying in the pulpit last Sunday. As those of you that were here are aware, one of my best friends in the whole world, John Powell, who pastors a church in New Caney, TX, I learned that he passed away just hours before the service. And the Lord has sustained the Powell family and all of us who were close to John over the course of this past week up until his funeral ceremony on Friday. And I know that part of what God used to do that was your prayers and I'm genuinely grateful for it.

Now here we come to the end of this passage, the end of this book. And think about what's happened over the course of the last two years we've been travelling through Ephesians. Ephesians has spanned two years, two pastors, and two time periods. Both B.C. and A.D. Before Corona Virus and after Disease. It's been with us this entire time. And as we come together this morning and look at these final four verses, what we're going to see is that Paul brings together several threads that have permeated the entire book and weaves them together into this finish that begins in verse 21 if you'll follow along with me.

²¹So that you may also know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. ²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all of you who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

So back in 2017, a group of our college students from right here at Central travelled an hour and a half down the road to the New Caney area of Houston to help out a new church plant. Our longtime friend of Central, Nathan Lino, and his church Northeast Houston Baptist Church, was sending out a church planter named John Powell to plant Emmanuel Baptist Church. And over the course of a period of time, they helped, our college students helped John and his new church go door to door canvassing to let people know about the church and to let them know about Jesus Christ. And as we gathered this week with 500 in the room at Nathan's church and thousands watching online for the service, I was just overwhelmed by the response. Because it was the same from person to person that I talked to. Every person remembered John as someone who cared for others. Who sacrificed himself for the sake of the good of others. And that came because he was both intentional in his efforts to connect with others and he clung to foundational convictions that shaped his life. And what we're going to find this morning as we turn our attention to Ephesians 6, when we hear about this man Tychicus, a beloved brother, a faithful minister of the gospel, he embodies many of these things that we celebrated in the life of my friend John Powell this week and what this Scripture calls us to. To be intentional in pursuing community in two key ways. And we're going to notice that as we come to the end of this text, what was common in that time period is that when a letter was written in ancient days, often the person writing the letter used a scribe. And they would dictate to them and explain to them what they wanted to say. But at the very end of that letter, what they would often do is take up the pen themselves and write the final lines of it to validate the authenticity of who it was that was declaring the letter and that was sending it to them. And that's what we find here in verses 21 through 24.

And what we're going to see is as we bring this whole section about fighting the good fight of the faith through a spiritual warfare that takes up the armor of God. What Paul is going to lay out for us is this: if we're going to fight the good fight of the faith together, we need to recognize that there are two keys to growing in gospel community. And we're going to see the first one in verses 21 and 22. Where what Paul says to us first is that gospel community grows through intentional connections. So look back at 21. It starts off by saying,

[So that you may also know how I am doing and what I am doing.](#)

Now this would have been a challenging reality in the ancient world. There wasn't social media. There wasn't text messaging or e-mail where it was easy to update. He wasn't living in an environment like now where you cannot really know anybody at all but keep up with their life. In fact, it was the exact opposite in that time period. And Paul wants them to know how he is doing. And so who is he going to send to help him do that? You see in verse 21 it mentions this man Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord. Well who is that? It seems that the Ephesian church had some awareness of who he is. And there's a reason for that. It's because he was from this region in Asia. In fact, some scholars believe that he was from Ephesus himself. He was a known commodity to them. He was one of their own who was going to come now and bring a word of encouragement to them. And I couldn't help but think about how fitting that is that we are coming across this today on the same day we're bringing back one of our own in view of a call in Tim. Because in the same way that Paul describes Tychicus as a faithful beloved brother and a faithful minister of the gospel, that's what the Lord is bringing back to us in Tim Skaggs. We see that picture that's there laid out for him. And I was reminded of that when I was going through some of my old journals from college. And I was looking

through sermon notes from Chris and from Greg Mott at breakaway and I came across a page on a sermon from Philippians chapter 1 right here in Central in September 2004 on Philippians 1, verses 9 through 11 by Tim Skaggs. And in my notes I jotted down a couple of things that relate to this call to community that Paul's talking about here. Where Tim said, "A lack of unity in the church often quenches the Spirit's work in the church." And he said elsewhere that as a church, we are called to love God and to love others. That's what undergirding Paul's call to community right here in this passage when he said, "I'm going to send Tychicus to you. It is for the sake of intentional connections that will strengthen the gospel community of the church." And what you notice is, when Paul speaks of Tychicus, he doesn't talk about his credentials, but his character. He doesn't talk about his qualifications, but his qualities. There is a focus on who he is, not what he's accomplished as a grounds for which he is sending him. It's because character matters in the building up of community in the church. That's what God commends. That's what he prays. And if we want to be catalysts for community right here at Central, then we need to embrace what we see Paul speaking of in Tychicus. He was both beloved and faithful. And what we mean when we're thinking of that is we need to be the type of people who are growing in being beloved by others and being faithful to them. That we can both endear ourselves to others and endure for the sake of others. We can love in a way that fosters unity and love within this congregation. We can sacrifice in a way and endure in suffering for the sake of others that we can build them up through our faithful ministry that's here. That's what Paul commends of Tychicus and that's what he desires for us right here at Central. And some of the ways that that plays out, how are we seeking to foster community in our congregation? Well the lynchpin of that for us is our life groups. We believe that if you gather together with groups of people for weekly Bible study and fellowship, if you invest in life together, that is where true community's going to happen. Especially in a church this large. And that's why we're gathering on Sunday mornings. That's why we're gathering by Zoom. And if you haven't connected with one, especially if you're feeling an extra sense of isolation right now during this Coronavirus moment, I would encourage you to take that step. There's more information about that on our church website about how to get involved with a life group. But it goes beyond that because we don't want people to feel welcome only when they settle in as members of the church. We want it from the moment that they walk in the door. When they park in the parking lot. And that's why Steve Holt and others lead our welcome team, to create a welcoming environment to reflect the kind of heart of intentional connection that Paul is speaking of here in Ephesians 6. And then beyond that, that's why we're investing in our student ministry. Their Wired @ Home camp focused on this theme of community a few weeks ago. And when we get ready in three weeks to welcome college students back here, we want to do it with the heart for community and intentional connection that we see Paul highlighting about with Tychicus in this passage. He speaks about who this man is, but then he tells us the purpose for why he's sending him.

Look back at verse 22. We're going to see that there are two reasons that he gives us.

²²I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

So one of the two reasons that Paul sends him to the Ephesians, it is both for information and inspiration. Both enlightenment and encouragement. He wants him to know how he is doing and then he wants to strengthen how they are doing. And both of those things, information/inspiration, are critical in fostering the intentional connections that strengthen

community. Because what happens? When you hear how God is at work in the life of someone else, when you see their faithful ministry, when you learn more about what they're doing to reach the nations or to reach their neighbors or to care for sick loved ones in their midst, what happens is it strengthens you. It reminds you how God is work. It fosters a unity that helps us to press on together. But it also brings about the type of encouragement to their hearts that Paul is calling for here. You know, he's spoken about all these incredible gospel truths throughout this book. But as he brings it to a close, it's as if he's saying it doesn't matter if you understand these things with your head if they don't encourage your heart. This man is going to be sent with this letter to them. He's going to bring a word of greeting. And when he does that, it's going to strengthen them in the difficult days that they are facing. Now I just have to wonder, how intentional during this pandemic season are we being in encouraging others? And seeking to strengthen their hearts like Tychicus was going to do for the Ephesian church. How can we go out of our way to foster intentional connections with others that will encourage hearts to be brighter in the midst of dark day? That's the picture that Paul is laying out for us in verses 21 and 22. That if we want to see genuine gospel community flourish in our church, it begins and it grows through intentional connections.

But notice with me the other part of this passage. In the second set of verses, in verses 23 and 24 we see a second big idea that Paul is laying out. Where he tells us that gospel community grows on foundational convictions. Look back at the way he says it. He says:

²³Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

So in this thread, these last two verses, Paul is weaving together themes and points of emphasis that have shown themselves throughout the book of Ephesians. And there are really four that he lays out there. Peace, love, faith, grace. And when he gives those words to them, and by virtue of them to us, what's happening is Paul is reminding us of the foundational convictions that we as the church must have if we're going to grow together in gospel community. Let's just think about each one of those. Because what's happening is there's a sense in which 23 and 24 perfectly summarize the whole letter. It's in a sense like Paul is saying this, that in Christ the grace of God leads us to saving faith that brings us peace with God and love for others. And as we wrap up our time in this book and we see these threads all coming together, I want us to be reminded of the way that Paul has spoken about them previously in the book of Ephesians. So hold your spot here, but slide back to Ephesians 2 in verse 14. You're going to see the way that Paul speaks about peace in this passage. He says in 6:23, peace to the brothers that God wants to bring about a restoration of the peace that was lost in the garden of Eden when sin entered into the world. And remember the way that he says it's going to happen back in Ephesians 2:14 when he says this speaking of Jesus.

¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

So you see what's happening there. Paul speaks about how Christ Himself is our peace. That separated from Christ, our lives are nothing but chaos, if we're being honest. Our hearts are unsettled. Our standing before God is in jeopardy. But through the blood of Jesus, God has made a way for us not just to be reconciled with Him, but to experience a peace that surpasses all understanding that guards our hearts in Christ Jesus. That peace is a central thread throughout Ephesians. But if you look back in chapter 6 in our passage for today, we see the second and third threads tethered together right there in verse 23 when he speaks of love with faith from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul bonds love and faith together. They're inseparable attributes. It's like peanut butter and jelly, salt and pepper, maroon and white. It's hard to imagine one without the other. There is a connection that is there, a combination of the two. And why is that? It's because faith fuels our love and love strengthens faith. And that's exactly what we'll see when we look back again at Ephesians chapter 3. Let's look at how this thread plays out in further depth in the chapter of chapter 3 beginning in verse 17. When Paul is giving this wonderful prayer for the Ephesian church, at the heart of it is a prayer connecting love and faith together beginning in verse 17. Here's how he says it.

¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So do you see what Paul is saying there? That when we come to Christ by faith, when we throw away the things of this world and put our trust in Him as our Savior, our Lord, and our treasure, that part of what God does is He reunites us with the love of God. We experience it in a fresh way. We are declared children of God. We are adopted into His family. We are reconciled, we are prodigal sons who are welcomed home. That love with faith comes together and it fuels us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. And the way that happens is by looking back at this fourth thread that we see in Ephesians 6 when in verse 24, Paul finally speaks about grace. He says,

²⁴Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

Grace is at the center of everything. You know what grace is, the way the scholars talk about it. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. We don't deserve any of this: the peace, the love, the faith. We don't deserve any of that. But God in His infinite grace has poured those things out to us in a way, if you look back again at Ephesians 2, we're going to see Paul speak of it. This is the last passage we'll look at this morning as we see how all these threads weave together in the culmination of this letter in the passage we're in today. Look at Ephesians 2 beginning in verse 4 and the way that Paul talks about grace.

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, He made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have saved – ⁶and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

You see the way he talks about grace? The way that God pours out His favor upon us in Christ? The way that God gives us all that we need to be made right with Him and to live in a way that is pleasing to Him. And as we turn our attention back to Ephesians 6, I want you to notice the way this passage ends. Because it speaks about loving our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible. You see that word? Incorruptible. In the original language, this is the kind of word that would mean that it is never diminished, never deteriorating, never dying, never distorting. It is a love that sustains its purity for the rest of your life because it is fueled by the grace that God has poured out for us in Jesus Christ. It's like an instrument that never goes out of tune. It's like a vehicle that never goes out of alignment. It's like a piece of metal that never rusts. There is no corruption to that love because God has given us the grace through His Son to love Him with a love incorruptible. And here's the danger in the Christian life isn't it. That we can be committed to following Christ. We can be committed to walking in His ways, but are you committed to loving Him? Or do you find yourself this morning for a season having left your first love? Or you can say, "I believe in Him, I'll follow Him." But can you genuinely say in the quiet of your heart, "God I love You." That joy, that affection, that commitment that marks love, do you find that in your heart towards God today? And the reality is that when Paul speaks of these truths, when he brings these threads together, he is reminding us of the gospel of our incorruptible King. So think about what happens. When God creates the world, He creates it uncorrupted, it is perfect, it is good, it reflects His holiness and righteousness. But as sin enters into the world, so does corruption. And everything in humanity is broken. The entire creation is fractured. That corruption, that curse, affects everything. And from that point forward, every person that lives fails to love God with an incorruptible love. But what does God do? While we are yet sinners, He sends His only Son as the greatest act of love, who lives that sinless life, who goes to the cross, who takes on the penalty for our corruption, who dies and is raised three days later, and ascends to the Father victorious, pouring out His grace upon us. So that if we believe in Him by faith, those of us who are corrupt, can once again experience the perfection of God. Can be set free from him, from sin, so that we may walk in Him. And that is the picture that Paul is pulling together right here for us in Ephesians 6.

You know, just last weekend, my friend John was finishing the trip of a lifetime. His church couldn't meet in person because they meet in school. So he had the entire month of July where he had pre-recorded sermons and he took his family on a camping trip to Yosemite, to Lake Tahoe, to the California Coast, to the Grand Canyon. He had come back, dropped them off, and then turned around and loaded up a truck and a trailer with a friend of his to set off to Missouri to pick up a vehicle they were going to bring back that he was going to seek to restore. And after dropping off his family, they rolled through Leona Steakhouse and with a belly full of ribeye, they headed north on I75 north of Dallas about 11:30 last Saturday night. They came upon a car in distress right there in the center of the two lanes. That car was on fire because it had just been in a traffic incident right before they arrived. John being John, he sees somebody in distress, someone in need, him and his buddy immediately pull off on the side of the road. And several other cars pull off at the same time. And as the police interviewed the eye witnesses after what took place, they all told the same story. They saw two men emerge from this truck. And the lead one, which was John, raced first to this vehicle that is in flames. And as he arrived, he ripped the door open and rescued several people from that burning vehicle. And after he did that, he looked up and he noticed in the distance that a semi was barreling towards the scene. He turned to the others who were out of their cars to that point and he yelled for them, "Get out of

the way!” And at the very last moment, he managed to push his friend out of the way of the semi-truck and saved him but lost his own life. And as we have gotten the chance to celebrate his life this week, it has been an incredible picture of the sacrificial love that God has poured out for us in Christ that Paul speaks of here in Ephesians 6. That God in His great mercy and grace sent His own Son to run to the flames of our failure and sin and to rescue us from the judgment to come at great cost to Himself. And the entire store of Ephesians for us, Central family, is God inviting us into that story to put our faith in Him and to walk in a manner worthy of that gospel. So let’s commit to do that together as we pause to pray.

Lord what a privilege it is to spend every Sunday coming together and walking through Your word verse by verse. We lay it open and we tell You to search our hearts as You pour out Your word to us by the power of Your Spirit. And I pray even now as we finish this final chapter of Ephesians, we bring this great book to a close, that You would seal these truths on our heart, God. That we would be a people who are committed to community. Who are intentional in pursuing each other. That are committed to these foundational truths that Paul is laying out here. That we be people of peace and love and faith and grace. And as we do these things, God. I pray that Your Spirit would continue to change us to make us more like Jesus and that You would unite our church together so that we can live in a way that pleases Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.