



Sermon – July 19, 2020  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Ephesians 6:19*

*Ephesians 3:6*

Well as you're grabbing your seats, let's pick up our Bibles. We're going to be in Ephesians chapter 6 this morning. It's fitting that we're in a passage where Paul is asking others for prayers because I need to ask you for your prayers for me this morning. Got a difficult call in the middle of the night. One of my best friends lost his life. Pastor friend of mine, I can't imagine this world without him. And I feel confident that he would want nothing more than for me to stand before you and open God's word this morning. So to the best of my ability I'm going to do it.

In just a minute, we're going to read Ephesians 6:19. But I need you to ask to join me in a word of prayer, that God would strengthen my heart this morning before we do that. Let's pray.

Father, Your word says that apart from You we can do nothing. And that challenging moments like this we feel that burden. And I pray by Your Spirit today You would empower me to preach Your word with faithfulness and that You would inspire us to stand firm in the mission You've called us to, to be faithful ambassadors for Your kingdom. And I ask, Lord, that You would use our time together soaking in Your word to shape us to be more like Jesus. And we ask it in His name. Amen.

So let's follow along here. Paul is going to start in Ephesians 6:19, he's picking up, if you remember last week, he asked that they would pray for him. He spoke about the need for prayer. And now he goes from a general call to pray to a specific request to pray for him. And we're going to see that here in verse 19 when he says this:

<sup>19</sup>pray also for me that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

Now imagine with me for a moment a situation not too long in the near future where there is a cure for Coronavirus. And what if the situation was that the thing holding us back from bringing that cure to those that were in need was not the lack of a vaccine, but a lack of glass. Well, you

say, “That doesn’t make any sense. What do you mean?” Well that’s the perplexity troubling scientists and supply chain managers right now. Because while they’re working on a vaccine, in order to get that vaccine to those who need it, they are going to have to create billions of glass vials to transport that vaccine. It doesn’t matter if you create a life-saving cure that meets all the needs of those in the world if it doesn’t get there. If there’s nothing to carry it in order to provide that protection, that salvation, that deliverance. And when we speak here of this call to prayer for evangelism that Paul is speaking of in Ephesians chapter 6, he is giving us that same picture. That we have the gospel of Jesus Christ, the spiritual cure for the death that every person that has walked this earth has ever experienced. But unless and until the church is called and equipped to be the carrier of that message, that life-saving reservoir of God’s grace will not reach others. And that’s what Paul is speaking of here this morning when he moves from this general call to prayer to this specific need for prayer. He’s making connection between evangelism and prayer. That if we want to fight the good fight of the faith, part of that is by going on the offense, sharing the love of Christ to others. And what we’re going to notice this morning is that if we want to be faithful in our gospel calling through evangelism, there are three ways that we must pursue our mission.

You’re going to notice the first one right there back in the beginning of the verse. Paul calls us to pursue our mission with clarity. So see the way it begins. He says, pray also for me that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. So Paul first focuses here on what we say. He speaks of a need for clarity as we carry out our gospel mission. He talks there about praying also for me. That, he ends most of his letters to the churches with a call to prayer. But something feels different about this one. Because it’s tethered together with this spiritual warfare component. And it’s a specific call towards evangelism. And why does he offer that prayer request? I mean when we look at the New Testament, we think of Paul as a super Christian. He knows what to say. He knows how to declare the gospel. Why would anybody like him need prayer? But I’m telling you, if Paul is asking others for prayer, for clarity in his evangelism, how much more so is that true for each one of us? That we need to be faithful in that. And he prays specifically that words may be given to me. That he might have the words to speak. And that given that phrase there, that verb is in the passive voice. Because he knows that these are not things he can conjure up on his own. That God has to give His messenger the message to declare. God has to provide the story that we are to share. And he says he wants to do that anytime he opens his mouth boldly. That when his mouth opens, the words of gospel grace will emerge forth from it. And we’ll think more about what it looks like to declare the word of God boldly in just a minute when we get later on in the verse. But what he is saying here is that Paul wants to be known for having the gospel clearly come from his lips every time he opens his mouth. And it’s not just any gospel, it’s a gospel that he describes here as the mystery of the gospel. There is a proclaiming of that that he’s committed to. So if you drive around town, you go to your favorite restaurant or store, anytime you’re walking in those front doors now you’re going to be confronted with a sign that says, “Masks Required.” It was required by the instructions from the government that every retailer and restaurant had to proclaim that. Had to display that. Had to disclose that widely and freely to others so that they knew if they entered into that establishment, they must be properly equipped for it. When Paul speaks here of proclaiming boldly the mystery of the gospel, that’s the picture. That we are called to inform, to declare, to display, to proclaim that mystery of the gospel that he describes. If you’ll look back one chapter, or one page, in your Bible to Ephesians

3:6, and if you were to say, “What is the mystery of the gospel?” You’re going to see him describe it right here in Ephesians 3:6. He says,

<sup>6</sup>This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel.

So the mystery is that God has taken a gospel that was provided for His people Israel and now made it available to the entire world. That everyone of us is in need of Jesus, but the Gentiles are able to be recipients of that promise. That’s true for the Ephesians that Paul is writing to and it’s true for you and me and every one of us in this community. That this gospel is for all people. And so the question before us is if we want to be faithful in our gospel mission, how do we pursue sharing the gospel with others with clarity? It seems like Paul even struggled with it. I’m sure you and I both have a challenging time too. One of the tools that I’ve found that makes a big difference when I’m seeking to share the gospel with others is a tool called The Three Circles. And in just a minute up on the screens, you’re going to see me walk briefly through that because it’s something that’s simple for you to learn, it’s simple to explain to others, and it provides the type of clarity that Paul is speaking of here. And so just to walk you through it so you can be more familiar with it. This is something that our missions teams has already been sharing with our church. But I just want us to understand it together this morning. What we know as we walk through these three circles together, you’ll see it on the screen as I talk it through. We know that God made the world perfectly. That He made it according to His design. He is holy and righteous. What we find from the very beginning of humanity that humanity turns away from Him in their sin. They reject God. They reject that good design. And as a result of that, it leads to a brokenness in the world. Don’t you feel that brokenness all around you? Broken relationships. Brokenness in the workplace. Brokenness in the community. We sense that and what happens is that in the midst of that brokenness, every one of us is trying to find a way of escape. Some people look for it through success. Others look for it through fame. Maybe they look for it through money. Or maybe it’s through addiction or pleasure. They all seek to find their own escape. But what happens is just like rubber band as they seek to escape that brokenness, they are snapped back to that broken reality. But in the midst of that brokenness, God made a way for us in the gospel. The beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ is that God sent His own Son so that He might live a perfect life to die a death that we deserved, taking the punishment of the penalty of our sins upon Him, and three days later He was raised from the grave. He ascended to heaven victorious over satan, sin, and death so that now if anyone turns away from their sins and puts their faith in Jesus, believes in Him as their Savior, Lord, and Treasure, they may be saved. Whether that’s you in the room, that’s you watching online, anyone in this community, God is offering deliverance from that brokenness through the gospel. And when that happens, when we are rescued by the gospel, it enables us to recover and pursue the design that God had originally intended for each one of us. To live in a way that’s pleasing to Him. To walk with Him in a manner worthy of the gospel. And so as I sit and talk through this picture with friends, I’ll sit there and draw it out on a napkin. I just got to do that this week with a couple that I was meeting with and talked them through this. And one of the things that I’ll always do, if you’ll put the picture back up on the screen, the final thing is I will ask them at the end, “Are you in brokenness; are you in God’s design?” Because you can only be in one spot or the other. Where do you find yourself? And that confronts people with the reality of where they stand before God and enables you to have the type of clarity that Paul is calling us to. Because here’s the truth. The danger for each one of us is we know we should be

telling people about Jesus. But so often we hold back because we're scared, we're reluctant, we're hesitant. There might be fears that revolve around this lack of clarity. What would I say? What will they think? What if they ask me a question I don't know the answer to? What Paul is showing us here is that we should follow his pattern of crying out to God to provide clarity for the mission that he's called us to.

But it doesn't stop with clarity. I want you to notice the second dimension of this gospel mission that we're called to. At the beginning of verse 20, Paul tells us second that we need to pursue our mission with conviction. So look back what it says there. He says,

<sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains,

So he says, he's not just focusing on what to say, but now he's turning his attention to why to say it; the convictions that drive our gospel mission. And he speaks of it in this way as an ambassador in chains. What a unique picture that Paul sees himself as an ambassador rather than as a prisoner or as a victim. In my old role at the ERLC just last year I had the opportunity to travel to Geneva, Switzerland to be onsite at the United Nations Human Rights Council. And I walked in a room that almost felt nearly this size. It's one of those where they've got the semi-circle desk all around it. And there's representatives from every country there who are functioning as ambassadors, representing, coming with the authority of their government to speak on their behalf to others about the issues that are facing the world around us. And when Paul speaks here of us being ambassadors of the kingdom of God, that's the image he's giving us. That the church is called to represent the authority of the King and to declare the words of the King to a dying world. And so when we think about what that means for the missions and evangelism strategy of a church like Central, what Paul was calling us to is to develop a ministry, a heart, a passion to be ambassadors to the gospel. And there are several ways that we do that. We want to see that happen through personal evangelism so that while you are going through your life in your relationships, you are being intentional about sharing the gospel. We want to do that through community outreach. We serve Mary Branch Elementary or we gather hundreds of kids like my boys in a few weeks on the fields here to play football or to play volleyball. We're not just teaching them to enjoy sports, we're planting seeds of the gospel in their heart. Or when we think about reaching international students on campus or reaching out to school administrators and teachers in this difficult time. We are showing them the love of Christ. And then it goes a step beyond that because we want to raise you up in order to send you out, to go on mission trips to Honduras, to be sent out for student ministry mission trips to Virginia, and to other settings like that for individual mission's mobilization. So that when we bring all those things together, Central will be known as a church of ambassadors for Christ who are committed to sending our best to the nations. It could even be the case right now that the job that you just lost during the pandemic is part of what God is doing to open your heart to a new season of ministry to be sent by this church somewhere else for the sake of the gospel. It could be that in these final years of your time at Texas A&M, the Lord is going to prick your heart to awaken you to the need not to pick your calling and vocation on the basis of what's going to get you ahead in climbing the corporate ladder, but on who has the greatest need to hear the gospel. That is the picture that Paul is giving us there when he speaks about our need to be ambassadors. But notice he doesn't just talk about being an ambassador, he speaks about being an ambassador in chains.

So if you remember, Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison. He has been arrested, he's been persecuted for his faith. And as he is chained there he is not a normal ambassador. He is suffering for the reality of his intentional evangelism. And yet notice what he does. He doesn't pray for freedom from his chains. He prayed for freedom in his chains. He prays that he will withstand in the midst of the persecution to keep faithful in the mission. And we know even today we see that persecution all around us. Whether that is Christians being imprisoned for their faith in North Korea. Whether that's Christians being beheaded for their faith in the Middle East. Whether that's Christians having their churches raided in China. There are people all around the world in churches just like this who are suffering for the sake of the gospel. And if we're being honest, we feel a different form of that right here in America where there's a sense of persecution or hostility to our faith as our culture increasingly shifts to the secular left. It doesn't seem like there's any room for receptivity to the gospel. Paul wants us to know that in the midst of our persecution, that God is with us. He is for us. He will help us to stand. And notice the mindset that Paul has. Paul doesn't see the fact that he is in chains as an obligation, but an opportunity. He doesn't see it as confinement, but a calling. He doesn't look at it as being in a prison, he sees it as being in a pulpit. He wants to be an ambassador for Christ regardless of the cost. And the only reason that's true is because that commitment to the gospel is grounded in convictions that would sustain him. It's the sense like he's saying, he's got a mentality of, I'm not chained to you, because so often these prisoners were chained to an actual Roman soldier to keep supervision over him. It's as if he's saying, "I'm not chained to you. You're chained to me. You're stuck with me. You've got to hear what I have to say when you're on shift with me." And I couldn't help but wonder as I was processing through this this week, how many of us feel in a very different way but in a similar sense just like Paul during this pandemic? We feel confined, restricted, chained in, surrounded by the same people, enduring the ups and downs of those challenges. But what if we too could take a shift in our mentality just like he did? And see this not as an obligation, but an opportunity. Not as confinement but a calling to be intentional to reach those who are in our orbits while we are more confined. That is what Paul is speaking of here. That we need to take the gospel forward with conviction.

But I want you to notice with me as the text comes to a close, at the end of verse 20 we see a third dimension of this need for evangelism. Paul tells us to pursue our mission with courage. Do you see how it ends there in verse 20? He says,

*That I might declare it boldly as I ought to speak.*

So it's not just a focus on what we say or why we say it; but now how we say it. That our gospel mission depends on courage. So last week we noticed how Paul was calling us to go with boldness and with courage before the throne of God in prayer. And now he's telling us to go with boldness and with courage to the people around us who are in need of prayer, who are in need of being reached by the gospel. He speaks there of declaring it boldly. And in the original language, it's talking about speaking freely, speaking out, speaking openly without fear. In that, we're familiar with the first amendment, freedom of speech in our context, well in that time period, that Greek word originated from the word used to describe the freedom of speech provided for Greek citizens. It was a way to highlight the fact that they were able to be outspoken, frank, even fearless in the way that they spoke about things. And Paul is calling us to this same courage. Now why would Paul need courage? This is a guy that survived shipwrecks, stonings, beatings, relentless persecution. If anybody should be tough enough not to need to ask

others for prayer for courage, it seems like it ought to be him. And yet that's exactly what we see him asking for prayer about. Because he knows that everyone of us is in need of gospel courage. That prayer can transform our cowardice into courage and so that we can be faithful in sharing the gospel in the opportunities that God has given us. And I just can't help but wonder this morning. Paul is sitting here as he closes his letter asking them to pray for evangelism. And I just want to ask you, when's the last time your prayers included prayers related to evangelism? Lord, will you please help me have the opportunity to have a gospel conversation today? Lord when I come across someone who's in need, will you give me the courage to not just comfort them, but to share gospel truth with them? When's the last time you've had the opportunity to share the message of Jesus with somebody that doesn't know Him? When Paul was speaking here of this need for courage, he's talking about doing it as the verse says at the very end of it. Because it is how I ought to speak, he tells us. It's an expectation of evangelism that marked not just Paul's life, but every Christian who is seeking to follow Jesus. That what we are called to do is to speak on behalf of our King in order to make Him known. And if that's true at the individual level that each one of us individually ought to speak through faithful evangelism and missions, how much more so is that true for us collectively as a church? That we as one voice must speak in the midst of our culture in order to be ready to share the gospel with them. And here's my challenge for you today. If you've got a pen or you've got a smart phone or something like that, I just want to challenge you during this moment or during the response time, to take it out and just write down the name of one person that you know needs Jesus. One person. That one person, if I said, "The Lord can grant you one wish and that wish will be granted that whoever you desire to come to know Christ." Who would that person be? I hope you'll write it down or you'll make a note of it and start praying continuously for this person. That is the pattern. That is the calling that Paul is putting us on. And he's saying, "If we're going to do that, if we're going to walk faithfully in the mission that God has called us to, then it's going to take courage in order to make it happen." Well the challenges before us when it comes to getting a Coronavirus vaccine to the world around us doesn't just revolve around getting enough glass made. Because in addition to those vials that are going to be needed in order to transport this cure to the sick all around us, people are having to manufacture billions of syringes as well. Because it's not enough to make a vaccine, it's not enough to load it up in a vial and ship it right to the point of need, there's someone right here that could be saved by it. But if all it does is arrive in the vial, it's not enough to save their life, is it? In order for them to experience protection, they must first experience piercing. That syringe must plunge deep inside of them in order to inject a life changing, lifesaving cure for their need. And what we know about evangelism is that God has called us to go. He has called us to proclaim. But unless and until the Spirit of God pierces the hearts of others and opens blind eyes to see His glorious truth and their need of the gospel, then we won't see life change. We must be faithful in carrying out the calling that God has called us to do in terms of evangelism and missions and trust that at the proper time the Spirit of God will pierce the hearts of others so that we might reap a harvest if we do not give up. The call of the gospel to each one of us this morning is to prayerfully pursue evangelism by carrying out that gospel mission with clarity, conviction, and courage.

Let's pray together.

Lord, we need that courage. We know that Your word tells us that You have not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power and love and self-control to stand in even the most difficult moments of life as ambassadors for Your kingdom. And I pray in this moment, Lord, if there are those that

have not yet come to know You that are here in person or watching online, Lord, would You open those eyes to see them. Would Your Spirit pierce their heart? Would they be reconciled to You? Would they experience salvation even today? And I pray for each one of us in the room that You would call us and equip us to be faithful and committed to sharing Jesus without fear to all of those around us. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.