

## 1. Today we embark on a thrilling journey

- A. We are going to begin an in-depth study through the book of Ephesians.
- B. To be honest I approach this book with some hesitation, because of the depth it contains.
  - 1). Listen to the words of the late great D. Martyn Lloyd Jones – my preaching hero
 

As we approach this Epistle I confess freely that I do so with considerable temerity. It is very difficult to speak of it in a controlled manner because of its greatness and because of its sublimity. Many have tried to describe it. One writer has described it as ‘the crown and climax of Pauline theology.’ Another has said that it is ‘the distilled essence of the Christian religion, the most authoritative and most consummate compendium of our holy Christian faith.’ What language! And it is by no means exaggerated.

    - a). If he felt this way, how much more should I

**Transition:** I feel a bit of trepidation – at the same time I’m very excited to tackle this great book

- A. Today is just an introduction – but I want you to get excited too

## I. THE DEEP IMPACT THIS LETTER HAS HAD THROUGHOUT HISTORY

### 1. This book has had an incredible impact on the great saints of the past

- A. John Calvin said it was his favorite letter
 

Armitage Robinson Dean of Westminster called it the “Crown of St. Paul’s writings.”  
William Barclay’s the commentators assessment was it is “The queen of the epistles.”
- B. Martin Luther: ‘the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest expression’
- C. John MacKay the former president of Princeton Theological Seminary.
 

‘To this book I owe my life’, he wrote. He went on to explain how in July 1903 as a lad of fourteen he experienced through reading Ephesians a ‘boyish rapture in the Highland hills’ and made ‘a passionate protestation to Jesus Christ among the rocks in the starlight’. Here is his own account of what happened to him: ‘I saw a new world ... Everything was new ... I had a new outlook, new experiences, new attitudes to other people. I loved God. Jesus Christ became the centre of everything ... I had been ‘quickenened’; I was really alive.’

**Thought:** This is my prayer as we study this. This book will impact us - we will really come alive.

- A. I ask you to pray for me, that I will present it in such a way that will happen.

**Transition:** So we are looking at one of the gems of Scripture

- A. You could spend your life in Chapter 1-2 and never fully mine the depths that are there
- B. What are we going to be looking at in the coming weeks?

## II. THE RICH TRUTHS OF THE LETTER OF EPHESIANS

### 1. We will see how spiritually rich we are in Christ

- A. Ephesians tells us what we possess “in him” and how to enjoy those possessions.

### 2. Paul describes these riches in three verses as:

- A. “The riches of God’s grace.” (Eph 1:7)
- B. “The endless treasures available to us in Christ.” (Eph 3:8)
- C. The “Riches of his glory.” (Eph 3:16)
  - 1). In Christ we have endless treasures that come to us from God’s grace! = unmerited favor

### 3. The repetition of words indicates how rich the teaching in this book is

- A. The key phrase is “In Christ.” It is used fifteen times.
  - 1). We are told that he is the source and guarantee of all spiritual blessings.
  - 2). In him we are made “fellow heirs” and have access to all he is and has.

- B. “Riches” is used five times
- C. “Grace” twelve times
- D. “Glory” eight times
- E. Fulness, filled up, or fills six times

**Transition:** In Christ. Riches. Grace. Glory. Fullness or filled up! That’s worth our time to study

- A. Because we are so rich – the book calls us to enjoy a spiritual fullness

#### 4. This book calls us to enjoy spiritual fullness.

- A. We are “To be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God.” (Eph 3:19)
- B. We are to “attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (4:13)
- C. We are to be “Filled with the Spirit.” (Eph 5:18)

**Thought:** If you feel spiritually empty – in a rut - this is the book to go too

- A. Let’s take a quick look at the grand themes of Ephesians.

### III. THE THEMES OF EPHESIANS

#### God Is the Theme of This Wonderful Book

**Eph 1:1 (ESV)** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God...*

#### 1. Paul’s writing always begin with God at the center then works out to man

Because God is like this and has done this – THEN – your response should be....

- A. Important to see - much of the trouble with the church today is caused by reversing this
  - 1). We start with man and work ourselves back towards God.
- B. In this “Selfie generation.” We have moved God out of the center and put us there instead
  - 1). Instead of Christ being our life – we fit him into our life – an addition rather than primary

**Thought:** The result of this self-centeredness - We are miserable, depressed and bored.

What else could we be if we lock our focus on us?

- A. We become *spiritual hypochondriacs*, falling into depression as we notice every little thing that is wrong
- B. We become bored in life, because, to be honest, our main attraction – ME – isn’t that interesting.
  - 1). If I’m trying to be excited by looking at me! Good luck with that

#### 2. The Bible’s solution: Look away from self and look towards God

- A. The Bible calls us to humility – humility is a forgetting about ourselves
  - 1). Favorite definition of humility  
"Humility is not thinking meanly of oneself - it's not thinking of self at all"
  - 2). Humility frees us from having to have us at the center of everything  
**Thomas Watson** "The poor in Spirit are divorced from themselves"
- B. One reason humility is so important – it allows me to replace me with him at the center of everything.
  - 1). See his majesty and glory. He is grand enough to bring excitement into your life.
    - a). A vision of Him can lift you out of the rut of just paying bills and surviving.

**Thought:** This is one of the great characteristics of the Gospel

- A. The Gospel is not God making a big deal out of you
  - 1). The Gospel frees you from you, allows you to forget about you – humbles you
    - a). So that you can make a big deal out of God.
- B. It removes the boredom of a self-centered focus by shifting your focus to God
  - 1). You discover he is grand enough – majestic enough to thrill you – excite you – satisfy you
    - a). He is amazing enough to hold your attention now and for all of eternity

- C. Christianity hands you a book filled with letters like Ephesians and commands you to read it.
  - 1). When you do, you find the truth it contains is mesmerizing.
    - a). It speaks of a great God powerful enough to create the universe in 6 days
      - 1a). AND he loves you and has sent his Son to rescue you from yourself and sin
    - b). This God has come to earth to give us fullness of life NOW
      - 1a). And has conquered the grave to give us a sure hope of eternity with him later
  - 2). It tells you about who he is and what he's like – His majesty and His glory
    - a). It captures your affections and your imagination.

**Point:** This book is determined to rescue us from the shallows of a self-focus

- A. The way it accomplishes that is simply by painting a portrait of God and his Son.
- B. Ephesians is meant to thrill us with God! Who he is, what he's done and what he's going to do.
  - 1). The pages of this book drip with majesty
  - 2). Pray Pray Pray God will use this in our church
    - a). Do you know that you have a responsibility for the preaching in this church  
You want life changing – soul thrilling teaching – PRAY FOR ME – for this pulpit
    - b). I wonder how many people complain about their Pastors teaching but never pray

The theme is God Himself

## Jesus Christ Is the Theme of Ephesians

### 1. This is a Christ saturated letter

- A. The first verse is about Christ. That last verse is about Christ and everything in-between speaks of him.
- B. We understand there is no Christianity without Christ – what we do is a joke without him

### 2. We must see that Jesus Christ is at the center of all that God the Father is doing

- A. From the beginning to the end all the gracious purposes of God are carried out by his Son
  - 1). We are chosen “In Christ” from before the foundation of the world.
  - 2). We are reconciled to God by the blood of Christ
  - 3). All the blessings and all the promises come into our life through him
  - 4). He is at the right hand of the father with all power and authority in heaven and on earth.
  - 5). He is the Son of God, the savior of the world and the head of the church.
  - 6). He is sovereign Lord who is supreme over everyone  
Both saved and lost, both elect angels and fallen demons.

**Thought:** Christianity is about Christ - Yet, you can attend churches that rarely speak of him at all

- A. What many are calling today's Christless Christianity.
  - 1). The truth of Ephesians will rescue us from that – it will set our focus on Christ

**Summary:** In this epistle we will learn about Jesus Christ. We will gaze upon His glory

- A. 1 Cor 3:18 tells us as we gaze upon the glory of the Lord the Spirit will transform us
  - 1). We will become more and more like the one we are beholding

The theme is God. The theme is Jesus Christ

## The Theme of God's Sovereignty

### 1. To our own hurt, we hear so little about these great doctrines today.

- A. The glory, greatness, majesty and sovereignty of God.
  - 1). These were the truths our forefathers feasted upon.  
The truths that drove the reformation.

The truths that captured the imagination of the great Puritans. - Redwoods

## 2. Paul starts out with the sovereignty of God.

**Eph 1:1 (ESV)** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God...*

- A. He says - This whole apostle thing was not my choice, nor was it the choice of a church. God sovereignly chose me for this. He saved me and he called me. *It was all his will*
- B. We will wrestle through the issues of Paul's teaching on the sovereignty of God in man's salvation

**Thought:** Any time we can study the sovereignty of God I get excited for both you and me

- A. There is nothing more comforting then the truth that God is in control of all things
  - 1). I wouldn't have the courage to do what we do on Thurs and Friday night without resting in this
    - a). My whole life has been lived by this – God is in control NOT man  
That frees me to answer his call even when it is dangerous
    - 1a). I'm as safe on those streets late Friday night in the trafficking ministry  
As I am sitting in my living room behind a locked door
  - 2). Because that sovereignty over circumstances also means sovereignty over my life and death
    - a). He will determine when and how I will die and LITTLE man cannot change that
    - b). I love being able to walk through this world with total peace
- B. This is the truth that comforts me when adversity crashes into my life
  - 1). This trial comes through the hands of God's love – father filtered – for my good
    - a). He said it would be for my good – all things are  
Since He is sovereign He will make sure it is
  - 2). That good may be life-changing growth that pain brings into my life  
It may be the lesson I learn in the trial that I carry with me the rest of my life
    - a). I have had so many trials that I couldn't see how they could work for my good  
Trials so painful I thought I felt I was being crushed
      - 1a). Now with 20/20 hindsight – I wouldn't trade them for anything  
They changed me – mellowed me – I rest so much more now  
They made me a better Pastor – more compassion - patience

**Thought:** God's sovereignty tells me that I'm not just a victim of uncontrolled circumstances

- A. Not just unlucky – in the wrong place at the wrong time – God is moving! It will be good!
- B. Listen to the **“Bethlehem Baptist church elder affirmation of faith”**

We believe that God upholds and governs all things—from galaxies to subatomic particles, from the forces of nature to the movements of nations, and from the public plans of politicians to the secret acts of solitary persons—all in accord with His eternal, all-wise purposes to glorify Himself, yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly; but that His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with the moral accountability of all persons created in His image.

- 1). That is truth to build your life upon – that is God exalting – rest producing truth
- 2). That is truth to grab ahold of when everything seems to be spinning out of control
  - a). It's not spinning out of control – God knows what he's doing – I can rest

**Transition:** We will see the peace producing sovereignty of God as we study this letter

- A. Because of time – let me just quickly fly over a couple more themes

## Other Themes of Ephesians

### 1. The theme of grace

- A. Ephesians gives us the clearest explanation of God's grace in the salvation of man

### 2. The theme of mystery

- A. Mystery in NT simply means a truth that was hidden before but has now been made known.
  - 1). Truths that had only been hinted at before are opened up clearly in this letter.

### 3. The theme of the church

- A. We will see God's purpose for the church and it's members
- Transition:** So those are the major themes we will see. God. Christ. Sovereignty. Grace. Mystery. Church.
- A. Let's turn to the details of this letter, such as, who wrote it, and who was it written too.
    - 1). We will also see some details about the city of Ephesus and the beginning of the church there.

## IV. THE AUTHOR. DATE. CITY AND CHURCH

### The Author to the letter of Ephesians

#### 1. We find out who wrote this letter in the very first verse.

**Eph 1:1 (ESV)** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God...

#### 2. Some facts about Paul

- A. He was from the tribe of Benjamin
  - A well-educated Pharisee that studied under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel.
    - 1). Paul was a genius – “Biggest problem with Paul is getting enough books for him to read”
- B. It was believed Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin
  - 1). That powerful religious ruling council based in Jerusalem
- C. As a Pharisee, Paul hated Christianity. It was a threat to his beloved Judaism
  - 1). He determined to wipe everything connected to Jesus Christ off the face of the earth.
  - 2). He hunted Christians down to have them imprisoned and even put to death.
  - 3). He was converted on his way to Damascus, in possession of a letter from the high priest granting permission to apprehend believers and bring them back to Jerusalem to be punished.
- D. After his salvation he spent three years in the Arabian desert being mentored by Christ.
  - 1). There he received the gospel message he would take to the pagan world.
- E. Eventually he would end up co-pastoring a church in Antioch with Barnabas.
  - 1). From there that the Holy Spirit called him to the mission field to reach the Gentiles
  - 2). Paul would eventually go on three extended mission trips.
    - a). His involvement with the church of Ephesus occurred on his third missionary journey.

### Background on The City of Ephesus

#### 1. It was located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey today)

- A. At the time of this writing Ephesus was Asia's greatest city.
  - 1). One Roman writer called it “Lumin Asia” (a-z-uh) which meant “The light of Asia.”

#### 2. Ephesus was a center of trade - THE market place of Asia

- A. It had the greatest harbor in Asia and four of the great roads in Asia intersected in this city
  - 1). Therefore the goods of the world flowed in and out of Ephesus
  - 2). This made Ephesus a very prominent, powerful and wealthy city

#### 3. Ephesus was also known for its great events.

- A. The Ephesian games, which rivaled the Olympic games were held there.
  - 1). These games annually brought people from all over Asia into the city
    - Again – adding to its prominence and wealth – the tourist dollar
- B. This made Ephesus a strategic target for Paul.

- 1). If the gospel could take root in Ephesus  
It could be taken out to the whole world through the visitors that came and were saved
  - a). They would become missionaries in the cities they came from
  - b). Perhaps this is what Paul was speaking of in 1 Corinthians.

**1 Co 16:8–9 (ESV)** But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, <sup>(9)</sup> for a wide door for effective work has opened to me...

#### 4. It was a city of great pageantry.

- A. One writer wrote: “The whole pageant of Greco-Roman life could be seen in its most brilliant colors in the city of Ephesus”
- B. It had great architecture
  - 1). The famous Celsus Library – a beautiful structure housing more than 12,000 scrolls
  - 2). Also a massive theatre that could seat 25,000 people – Ephesus was famous for its dramas

#### 5. It was also a city given over to idolatry

- A. It was the center of the worship of the goddess Diana.
  - 1). She was an ugly, big, black, multi-breasted cow like thing  
Her image supposedly fell from the sky a gift from Zeus
- B. The Ephesians had constructed a fabulous temple for her worship
  - 1). It was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.  
And was the largest building in the Greek world – 4 times the size of the Athenian Parthenon
    - a). It was made of glittering Persian marble
    - b). It had 137 columns standing 60’ high, 37 of them were embellished with Gold and jewels.
    - c). The altar carved by famous Greek architect and was said to be beautiful beyond description.
- C. In this magnificent temple Diana was worshipped in ways that were unimaginable in their debauchery
  - 1). Orgies and mutilations were common faire. Temple prostitutes were common
  - 2). Hericlitus, the Greek philosopher said these temple worshippers were “fit only to be drown.”

**Point:** Ephesus in all its beauty and pageantry was a city given over to sin.

- A. In the center of the city, was this magnificent temple leading the way into darkness
  - 1). Day and night its evil practices were being performed in the name of worship  
And the citizens of Ephesus were expected to be involved – expected to worship
  - 2). This is why you see things like “orgies” prohibited so often in the NT  
**Rom 13:13 (NIV)** Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.  
**1 Pet 4:3 (NIV)** For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do-- living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.
    - a). This kind of sexual immorality was common and expected in those days  
“Didn’t see you at the orgy. Are you alright? You’re not backsliding from Diana are you?”

**Transition:** In this evil, sensual, idolatrous environment a powerful church was born.

- A. Let’s look at some background to this church Paul is writing too.

### Background on The Church of Ephesus

#### 1. This church Paul is writing to was an amazing church

- A. It was the most prominent church in Asia.
  - 1). The greats pastored there. Paul, Timothy and the apostle John.
  - 2). Its ministry of the Word went out from that church and affected the whole of Asia

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**Ac 19:10 (ESV)** This (Paul's teaching) continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

- B. This church was an effective missions church. A church planting church.
  - 1). All the other churches in Asia sprang out of the church at Ephesus.
- C. It was a work that God backed up with great displays of power.
  - 1). Acts 19 testifies of the many miracles, healings and individuals delivered from demon possession.
  - 2). It was a time of great revival, people were openly confessing their sins and turning from their sorcery and idols
- D. The church was so effective, so many were getting saved and turning from their idols
  - 1). The idol makers caused a riot in an attempt to rid the city of the Christians.
  - 2). God was moving so powerfully through that church that the sales of idols had plummeted.

**Point:** Paul is writing to a fantastic church that had begun in an amazing way.

- A. Unfortunately we know the church didn't continue like this.
  - 1). When we get to Revelation – some 30 years after this letter
    - a). Jesus writes another letter in Revelation  
Confronting the church of Ephesus for losing their first love.
      - 1a). They were still very active, but the fire had gone out.
  - 2). What a warning to every believer to guard your heart.
    - a). To continue to do those things that keep the fire burning brightly.
    - b). To be vigilant in staying away from those things that can douse that flame.

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## CONCLUSION

### 1. So we step onto a path today that will take months

- A. In it we will ascend the heights of the loftiest theology in the NT
  - 1). We will gaze upon God, His Son and His grace
  - 2). We will look at his purposes for the church and its members
    - a). We will be changed