

Ephesians 6:19-20

Introduction

Paul's letter to the Ephesians (like most letters in Paul's day) consists of an opening greeting (1:1-3), then the main body of the letter, and then some final personal comments and closing greetings. This morning, we've come to the end of the "main body" of Paul's letter. So in a sense, these last two verses are the conclusion to the entire book. And a more fitting conclusion I don't think we could find. But at the same time, it seems like Paul is already transitioning to the final greetings as he also turns now to a much more personal note. Sometimes it's that personal note that causes us to miss just how fitting – just how right and wonderful – this ending really is. Paul writes, starting in verse 14:

¹⁴**STAND**, therefore,
hav**ING** girded your waist with truth,
and hav**ING** put on the breastplate of righteousness,
¹⁵and hav**ING** shod your feet with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace,
¹⁶in all things, hav**ING** taken up the shield of faith
with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
¹⁷And **TAKE** the helmet of salvation
and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,
¹⁸through all prayer and petition, pray**ING** at all times in the Spirit,
and to this end be**ING** watchful with all devotion and petition for all the saints,
*¹⁹and for me, that speech may be given me in the opening of my mouth
to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am
an ambassador in chains, that in this I may speak boldly as I ought to
speak.*

I. "...and for me..."

It could almost feel like those last two verses are just dangling on the end by a thread. In other words, it could almost feel like verse 18 would have been a more fitting end. We see the connection. Paul has just exhorted the Ephesians to prayer – to "all prayer and petition, praying at all times in the Spirit, and to this end being watchful with all devotion and petition for all the saints." And now Paul exhorts the Ephesians specifically to pray for him. "And for me...", Paul adds. Make sure that in your constant prayers, of all kinds, for all the saints – you're including me – specifically:

II. "that speech may be given me in the opening of my mouth to *make known* with boldness the *mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an *ambassador in chains*, that in this I may speak boldly as I ought to speak."

Does any of that sound familiar? The whole theme of Ephesians has been the awesome "*mystery*" of the Gospel. In other places, Paul has already called it "the mystery of God's will" (1:9-10) and "the mystery of Christ." (3:3-5) And what is this mystery? It's God's purpose for "the administration of the fullness of the times to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and

things on earth, in Him.” (1:9-10) The *mystery* is God’s plan to take Jews and Gentiles and make them “fellow heirs, and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” (3:3-6) The whole purpose and burden of Ephesians has been the “**making known**” of *this mystery* in all of its beauty and practical implications for our lives today. And the whole assumption behind Paul’s **making known** this *mystery* to us is that God Himself has revealed this previously hidden mystery to Paul as His **Apostle and ambassador** of the Gospel. So all the way back in chapter one, verse one, Paul began his letter with these words: “Paul, an **apostle** of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” And then he went on to speak of how God has “**made known** to us *the mystery of His will*.” (1:9-10) He says later on: “**The mystery** was **made known to me** by revelation... whereby... you can perceive my insight into *the mystery of Christ*, which was **not made known** to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been **revealed** to his **holy apostles and prophets** by the Spirit.” (3:3-5) “To me... this grace was given, to **preach** to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to **bring to light** for everyone what is the administration of *the mystery hidden* for ages in God who created all things, so that **through the church** the manifold wisdom of God might now be **made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” (3:8-10) The mystery previously hidden in God was **made known** by divine revelation to the Apostles and prophets, and their task was then to **make that mystery known** to Jews and Gentiles alike, so that in the church it might even be **made known** to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

So now maybe we can see how this “ending” to the letter is as far as it could possibly be from being random or haphazard. It’s just the natural overflow of Paul’s heart in light of the divine revelation that he had received.

III. “and [pray] for me, that speech may be given me in the opening of my mouth to **make known** with boldness the *mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an **ambassador in chains**, that in this I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.”

Now it’s not wrong for us to think of ourselves as ambassadors of the Gospel. And yet when Paul uses this word, he has in mind something more than what any of us can ever claim. Paul is thinking here of his own very unique role as “an **apostle** of Christ Jesus, by the will of God.” One person writes: “The [function of the apostle] is derived from the Jewish legal system in which a person may be given the legal power to represent another. The one who has such power of attorney is called [an apostle]. The uniqueness of this relationship is pregnantly expressed by the notion that the... apostle of a man, is as the man himself.” (Ridderbos; quoted by Waldron in his “Word” syllabus) So when Paul speaks, it is the exalted Christ Jesus Himself who speaks through him. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:

✓ 1 Thessalonians 2:13 — And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Who but false pretenders and dangerous wolves in sheep’s clothing would dare to say such things today? But this was truly Paul’s role as one of the foundational, “big A” Apostles who saw with His own eyes the resurrected Christ, and received directly from Him the revelation of the mystery of the Gospel. And so it’s in order to emphasize *this* divinely granted authority that

Paul refers to himself now also as an “ambassador.” One commentator says that this word “was used of the emperor’s legates, who were empowered to be official representatives of his government.” (Lincoln) In 2 Corinthians, it’s in the context of *defending* his apostolic *authority* that Paul speaks of all the apostles as “*ambassadors*.” (cf. Barnett)

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 5:12–13, 20 — We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you... Therefore, we are ***ambassadors*** for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

In other words, this is what Paul is saying to the Church: “We come to you as ambassadors, invested with the full authority of Christ Himself.” If “ambassador” is how we should translate the Greek word in Philemon, then this is the only other place in the New Testament where the word appears. And once again, when Paul uses the word “ambassador” he has in mind his own unique apostolic authority.

- ✓ Philemon 8-10 (O’Brien; cf. Bruce) — Therefore, although I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you. Although I am none other than Paul, an ***ambassador*** of Christ Jesus and now also his prisoner, I appeal to you for my child Onesimus.

As an ambassador, Paul doesn’t simply represent the King, he comes with His authority, and word, and message. As an ambassador, Paul doesn’t simply represent one king to another king, he comes with the authority, and word, and message of the King who is over all kings and the Lord who is over all lords – the one in whom all things, things in heaven, and things on earth are to be united. That’s been the whole theme of Ephesians. Remember what Paul said in chapter one:

- ✓ Ephesians 1:20-23 — [God] raised [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come; and He subjected all things under his feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

As an ambassador of the Gospel, Paul comes with the authority and word and message of *this* King who is over all kings, and *this* Lord who is over all lords, the one under whose rule all the tribes, and tongues, and peoples, and nations of the earth are to be united – Jews and Gentiles alike – as fellow heirs of the kingdom (cf. 3:3-6). That’s heady stuff, isn’t it?

And yet for all this, Paul is an “ambassador *in chains*.” That doesn’t make any sense! One commentator says: “To talk of an ambassador in chains is to employ an oxymoron. Normally an ambassador had diplomatic immunity and could not be imprisoned by those to whom he was sent.” (Lincoln) Someone else writes, “The notion of a prisoner functioning in [the role of an ambassador] is... ‘without precedent and contradicts the status, honour and prestige characteristic of ambassadors... The imprisonment of an ambassador would have been regarded

as a serious insult both to the Sender and to the ambassador’.” (O’Brien, quoting Smillie) But do you think Paul is feeling insulted? Does Paul sound like he’s been dishonored and personally offended? To the contrary! He actually seems to be *claiming* his chains as a badge of honor. Paul says in Galatians, and then Corinthians:

- ✓ Galatians 6:17 — From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.
- ✓ 2 Corinthians 11:23, 30 (cf. 4:11) — Are [the false Apostles] servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death... If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

And so here in Ephesians, Paul definitely seems to be “boasting.” “I am an ambassador in chains,” he says. Paul actually saw his sufferings and chains as among his most powerful credentials as an ambassador of the King who also suffered, and bled, and died so that He might bring many sons and daughters to glory. (Col. 1:24; Heb. 2:10). This is ridiculous foolishness to the world, and yet for all those who believe, the saving wisdom of God! This is why Paul could speak of himself in Ephesians 3 as a “prisoner *of Christ Jesus*” (3:1), and then go on to say:

- ✓ Ephesians 3:13 — So therefore I ask you *not to lose heart* over my sufferings on your behalf, *which are your glory*.

As an ambassador of the Gospel, Paul comes with the authority and word and message of the King over all kings, and Lord over all lords, the one under whose rule all the tribes, and tongues, and peoples, and nations of the earth are to be united – even Jews and Gentiles together as fellow heirs of the kingdom (cf. 3:3-6). And Paul’s *chains* are nothing other than his royal insignia and credentials verifying that he is indeed one of the genuine Apostles and ambassadors of Jesus Christ.

And yet for all this, Paul’s chains do still remind us of something else. Paul asks for prayer that speech may be given him in the opening of his mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel – to *whom*? Ultimately, to the emperor of Rome himself, before whom Paul is now waiting in prison to make his appeal (Acts 25:6-12; 27:23-24). Now the Emperor of Rome considered himself—and was acknowledged by almost the whole known world—to be the one king over all other kings, and the one lord over all lords. The Emperor of Rome expected that all tribes, and tongues, and peoples, and nations should submit to his rule as the highest and most ultimate authority in all the world. And yet when the day comes that Paul stands before the Emperor in chains, he will actually stand there as an *ambassador* of the mystery of the Gospel – the mystery “that God is uniting all people groups by means of *his* enthroned, anointed king and has placed *all* other powers and authorities under Jesus’ feet.” (Thielman) When Paul stands before the Emperor in chains he will bear a royal message to which even the Emperor of Rome is called to bow and submit in repentance and in joy. And so Paul ends the main body of his letter to the Ephesians like this:

IV. “and [pray] for me, that speech may be given me in the opening of my mouth to *make known with boldness* the *mystery of the gospel*, for which I am an *ambassador in chains*, that in this I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.”

As an ambassador of Jesus Christ, appointed *in person* by Christ Himself, Paul speaks not the word of any man, but the word of God, which he has received directly from the King by divine revelation. And so this calls for boldness as he stands even before the Emperor of the entire, then known world. There is no room here for being timid, for being politically correct, or for in any way hiding any part of the glorious, royal message that he has been given. And so Paul ends his letter to the Ephesians by asking for prayer that he might make known the mystery of the Gospel freely, and clearly, and unreservedly – for this is how he “ought” to speak.

Years later, as Paul sat in yet another prison awaiting his final testimony before the Emperor, and ultimately his execution, he would write these words:

- ✓ 2 Timothy 4:16–18 — At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Conclusion

In these two verses in Ephesians, we’re reminded first of all of God’s wonderful gift to us of the Apostles and prophets as ambassadors of the Gospel. We remember that the mystery of the Gospel which they made known has been fully written down in the Scriptures, and is fully sufficient for the living of our lives in all godliness and obedience to the truth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). Jude speaks of “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 3) And Peter says:

- ✓ 2 Peter 3:1–2 (NASB) — This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.

We must always beware that we are not devoted to the teachings of any other man, but only to the teachings of the Apostles who spoke to us the very words and commands of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:42). We receive the word which the Apostles spoke not as the word of men, but as the word of God, which is at work in us who believe. (cf. 1 Thess. 2:13)

But now think about what this means. We may not be Apostles or ambassadors of the mystery of the Gospel in the way that Paul was. There’s no longer any need for that! We don’t speak words that we’ve received by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. But in so far as we speak the words and message of the Apostles recorded in the Scriptures, we do speak in a “secondary” and “derivative” way as nothing less than royal ambassadors of the King of kings and Lord of lords – the one under whose rule all the tribes, and tongues, and peoples, and nations of the earth are to

be united – even Jews and Gentiles together as fellow heirs of the kingdom. (cf. Barnett on 2 Cor. 6; cf. Phil. 1:12-14) And so whether we stand before kings or paupers, the intellectual or the simple, we must never be ashamed of the Gospel – of the truth that God’s purpose for the administration of the fullness of the times is to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, in Him. (cf. Rom. 1:16) There can’t be any room for being timid, for being politically correct, or for in any way hiding any part of the glorious, royal message that has been handed down to us.

And yet if Paul felt it necessary to *ask for prayer* that speech would be given to him in the opening of his mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel – that he might speak boldly as he ought to speak – then how much more must we? We should pray faithfully for those who have been especially called and gifted in the ministry of the Gospel – especially pastors and teachers, and evangelists, and missionaries – that words might be given to them in the opening of their mouths, that they might proclaim freely, and clearly, and unreservedly the mystery of the Gospel. But then we should also pray for each other, that all of us will be enabled to boldly make the most of every opportunity. Our confidence is not in ourselves, or in our own wisdom, or in anything that we have ever experienced no matter how real or true. Our confidence is in the message itself, which bears within itself the full authority of the one whom we represent – the King of kings and Lord of lords. And should we ever be called to suffer for this Gospel, then may we see in these sufferings the royal insignia and credentials showing that we are heirs of the King, the one who also suffered, and bled, and died so that He might bring many sons and daughters to glory. (Col. 1:24; Heb. 2:10).