

1. Psalm 8
2. Zechariah 8

I. Introduction and Background

1 A. This morning were going to start studying a new book together: Ephesians

1. This morning we'll do an overview of Ephesians, considering some of the background information, the organization, major themes, and my goals for our study together, and we'll finish by reading Ephesians together.

1 B. First, Author: Who wrote the book?

- 1 1. The answer to this question is easy because it's listed right at the start of the book, Ephesians 1:1 - *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God* - this book was authored by Paul
2. But, he doesn't simply introduce himself as Paul, but as Paul *the apostle*
3. Paul often adds a description of who he is at the beginning of his letters and apostle is his favorite description of himself - literally the word means messenger or delegate, it almost has the sense of ambassador
4. And this is exactly what apostle meant in the New Testament, men chosen by Jesus to be His special ambassadors to authoritatively teach His message to the world - and this calls us to listen carefully to Paul's words

1 C. Second, Recipient: Who was the book written to?

1. Now, at first glance, the answer to this question is easy as well, because it's right there in the first verse too
 - 1 1 a. Ephesians 1:1 - *To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus*
- 1 2. But, on further study, this is actually a really challenging question to answer for several reasons
 - 1 a. First, the earliest manuscripts we have of this book don't have the words 'in Ephesus' in the first verse
 - 1 b. Second, Paul spent years teaching in Ephesus but, unlike his other letters, there are no personal greetings or any indication he knows the recipients and perhaps the recipients don't know him all that well either
 - 1 c. Of the two churches, Timothy knew Ephesus much better than Colossae, but Colossians mentions Timothy prominently while Ephesians makes no mention of him at all.
 - 1 d. Fourth, Ephesians doesn't address any specific issue in the church, which is very abnormal for Paul
 - 1 e. Fifth, there is some minor witness from the second century that at some point this book may have been known as Paul's letter to the Laodiceans which would clear up the end of Colossians
- 1 3. So, who was this book written to? It's not entirely clear...
 - a. I'm not going to give any definitive answer to that question this morning, because it would take me years of study to feel confident I knew the answer AND I'm not sure that the answer matters much
 - b. Clearly this book wasn't written to address any particular situation, but is framed as a general epistle
 - c. In fact, what I think is probably the most likely is that Paul wrote this letter as a circular letter, to be delivered to multiple churches in the region, one of which being Laodicea and another being Ephesus
 - d. Due to the fact that Ephesus was the much larger city and much more well-known this letter became known to the church as the letter in Ephesus and some scribe added the words 'in Ephesus' later to reflect this
 - e. So, is this the letter to the Ephesians or the letter to the Laodiceans? I think the answer is probably 'yes', but again, figuring out who the book was written to probably isn't that important.
- 1 4. What is more important is how Paul describes the recipients: the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus
 - a. Paul describes the recipients with two words, saints and faithful
 - 1 b. Saints is a word Paul used often for believers and he borrowed it from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and it refers to God's called out ones, those who God has chosen to be His people
 - c. So saints is a word of being - you are the ones whom God has chosen, you are His called out ones
 - 1 d. Faithful, then, is a word of doing - you are something and therefore you do something
 - e. The saints who are God's chosen ones are known as those who are faithful, that is trusting, dedicated and obedient; they live in congruence with their calling
 - 1 f. And Paul says that all of this happens 'in Christ' - they are saints 'in Christ', they are faithful 'in Christ' - and this becomes a significant theme of Ephesians, a believer's union with Christ describes everything them, both their identity and their actions

1 D. Third, Date: When was the book written?

- 1 1. Paul calls himself a prisoner of the Lord several times, like he does in Colossians and Philippians, so it is likely that each of these books was written about the same time while Paul was in prison in Rome during the early 60's AD
2. Since Paul had some time on his hands - being a prisoner - he decided to write letters encouraging and exhorting believers in the areas of the world he had ministered to and he sent them via messengers, especially Tychicus

1 E. Fourth, Purpose: Why was the book written?

1. As I've already alluded to, there isn't any error or specific situation that Paul is addressing in Ephesians
2. Instead this letter seems to be a general letter, Paul wants to look at the exaltation of Christ and apply Christ's exaltation in the life of the church: what does it mean to be in Christ is exalted higher than all the heavens
13. Purpose is summarized by Ephesians 1:2 - *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
24. I'd like to read a short portion out of J.R.W. Scott's commentary, *The Message of Ephesians: Much of the message of Ephesians is [represented] in the apostle's opening salutation: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. True, this was the customary greeting with which he began all his letters, a Christianized form of the contemporary Hebrew and Greek greetings. Yet we may safely say that nothing from Paul's pen was ever purely conventional. On the contrary, both these nouns are particularly appropriate at the beginning of Ephesians—'grace' indicating God's free, saving initiative, and 'peace' what he has taken the initiative to do, namely to reconcile sinners to himself and to each other in his new community. 'Grace' and 'peace', then, are key words of Ephesians. In [chapter 6] the good news is termed 'the gospel of peace'. In [chapter 2] it is written that Jesus Christ himself 'is our peace', for first he 'made peace' by his cross and then he 'came and preached peace' to Jews and Gentiles alike. Hence his people are to be 'eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. 'Grace', on the other hand, indicates both why and how God has taken his reconciling initiative. For 'grace' is his free and undeserved mercy. It is 'by grace' that we are saved, indeed by 'the immeasurable riches of his grace', and it is by the same grace that we are gifted for service. So if we want a concise summary of the good news which the whole letter announces, we could not find a better one than the three monosyllables 'peace through grace'.*

1 II. The Organization of Ephesians

1 A. Global Organization: Ephesians is easily split into two halves: a theological half and then a practical half

1. This is a fairly normal organization for Paul - Paul's theology always roots the practical in the redemptive
12. So, chapters 1-3 is a grand theological treatise of the glory and wisdom of Christ's exaltation and the peace it has brought us; and chapters 4-6 are how to live in Christ's wisdom in order to pursue peace and unity with each other
13. And this is related to how Paul addressed the letter, he wrote it to those who are saints and faithful - there was a being aspect (they are saints, the called out ones) and a doing aspect (they are faithful, devoted to Christ)
4. So Paul starts by reminding them of what they are - this is what it means to be a saint, a called out one - and then he tells them what it means to be faithful - if this is what a saint is, how does a saint live?

1 B. Theological Organization: Ephesians 1-3 makes a chiasm

1. The first half of Ephesians, the theological treatise, is a beautifully and carefully designed piece of literature to emphasize Paul's theological point - and it moves from praise to peace to praise
2. So we start out with praise to God which is mirrored at the end of chapter 3 with the doxology
- ✕✕3. Next we have a prayer in chapter 1 mirrored by chapter 3, there are mirrored sections on the blessings of salvation enjoyed by both Jews and Gentiles, on strangers and aliens, and on far and near
- 1 4. Then, at the center is the declaration that Christ is our peace
- 1 5. The center of a chiasm is always its most important point - so Paul wants to highlight these verses
- 1 6. Ephesians 2:14-16 - *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*
- 1 7. The chiasm emphasizes that Christ is our peace through the cross: peace both with each other and with God

1 C. Literary Organization: Ephesians has some unique literary characteristics

1. Paul doesn't feel bound to any rigid rules of literature or grammar, he just says what he wants to say
12. So Ephesians is made up of extraordinary long sentences: for example, both chapter 1 and chapter 3 consist of only two sentences each - where we would have multiple paragraphs and dozens of sentences, Paul only has two
13. And Paul has parenthetical clauses that end up being almost a chapter long - most of chapter 3 is a parenthetical clause, an aside from the main flow of thought, that happens in the middle of a sentence - Paul takes a chapter long break in the middle of a sentence in Ephesians!
4. Figuring out where to take a breath while you're reading Ephesians can be hard, because it just never stops, the thought keeps going and going... But this isn't a drawback, really it's integral to the point of Ephesians
25. One of the main points of Ephesians is to cause us to wonder at the glory of salvation, and so Paul turns on a firehose of glory and aims it at us - and he's not going to let up, he wants us to hear it all, now, so that we are overwhelmed by the wisdom and the glory of what God has done

1 III. Major Themes of Ephesians

As we start to look at Ephesians together, I also want to look at some of the broad themes that mark Ephesians

- We've already seen two themes that permeate the book: grace and peace, first given to us and then lived in us
- And as you look at a book, 'themes' can be slightly subjective, different people may very well see different themes in a book, understand different emphases that really are there
- But, as I look at Ephesians, I see four more themes that permeate the entire book:

1 A. First, Ephesians declares the reconciling wisdom of God

1. The height of this theme is found in Ephesians 3:10-11 - *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
2. Paul says, in Ephesians, that God's ultimate purpose is the display of His wisdom worked in reconciliation through Christ; and not only displayed to us but to the entire cosmos, the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms
3. So we see this wisdom theme throughout Ephesians:
 - ✗ a. So, at the beginning of Ephesians, Paul tells us that God has lavished grace on us with all wisdom and understanding, and, in Ephesians, salvation is not only glorious, but it is according to God's purpose, His intent, His wise plan
 - b. And Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that God would give them *the Spirit of wisdom and revelation* so that they might know God better
 - 1 c. Another way we see this wisdom theme is through the word mystery - a word that appears throughout Ephesians and doesn't necessarily mean something un-understandable, but rather something that had been hidden and unexpected suddenly revealed by God to His glory
4. Throughout Ephesians, Paul wants us to see the depths of the wisdom of God worked in Christ that has brought us reconciliation with God and with each other

1 B. Second, Ephesians not only wants us to see but to wonder at God's Wisdom

1. Paul doesn't describe God's wisdom just for our knowledge, but throughout Ephesians, He calls us to stand in awe, to worship, to praise - God's reconciling wisdom is glorious and calls us to respond with shouts of praise
- 3 2. So the repeated refrain of chapter 1 is "*to the praise of His glory!*", and the introduction of Ephesians 1 is "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" and the conclusion of Ephesians 3 is "*to Him be glory, in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever, amen!*"
- 1 ✗ 3. Paul wants us to praise and he wants us to praise because we stand in awe, so he calls us to see how great salvation is - he tells us about God's incomparable power, His immeasurable and unsearchable riches, His surpassing love, His manifold wisdom and how God can do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine
4. We ought to stand in awe of who God is and what He has done, and our response must be praise

1 C. Third, Ephesians not only wants us to see and to wonder, but also to walk in God's Wisdom

1. One of the most repeated words in Ephesians is the word 'walk' - it is found throughout the book and, importantly, marks the transition between the glorious theology and the practical application of Ephesians
- 1 2. So, in Ephesians 2 Paul tells us how we used to walk and then tells us how in salvation God has created us to walk differently; in Ephesians 4, Paul calls us to walk in conformity with our salvation and not to walk as the Gentiles do; in Ephesians 5, he calls us to walk in love and to walk in light and concludes that we must be careful how we walk
3. So Ephesians wants us to see the glory of the reconciling wisdom of God and to respond with worship, but then Paul wants us not to turn away from such glories, but to walk in them, to conform our life to these glorious truths

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1 D. Fourth, Ephesians says that all these things happen in the Church

- 1 1. Ephesians emphasizes the importance of the church probably more than any other book in the New Testament, and we can see this again in Ephesians 3:10 - *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms*
2. The Church is where God's reconciling wisdom is displayed, the church is where Christ is made the head, where Jew and Greek are brought together, where God is glorified, where we live out the peace that God has given us, and where the mysteries of Christ find their expression
3. God's salvation, His reconciling wisdom, is glorious, but it is not individual or private, God's reconciling wisdom has been shown to a people, His salvation is corporate and must be received and lived out corporately
4. So the church is where we see God's wisdom, where we wonder at God's wisdom and where we walk in God's wisdom - Ephesians stands against any concept of a private, personal salvation and calls us to throw ourselves, heart and soul, into the church both theologically and practically, because that is where God's glory shines forth

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① IV. My Goal for Ephesians

① A. To renew our wonder and awe in salvation

1. In Ephesians, Paul wants us to see how good salvation is - in fact, he takes three entire chapters, half of his letter, to show us the immeasurable glory of God's salvation because he wants us to feel how great God is
2. Paul's exhortations in the second half of the book will fall flat if we aren't first awed by what God has done for us
3. Since that is apparently Paul's first goal, that's also my first goal as I preach through this book - I want to call us to see and to remember how great God's salvation is, to renew our wonder and awe in salvation

① B. To reinvigorate our participation in the church

1. Paul weaves Ephesians to show how the church, both universal and represented in local bodies, is at the center of God's redemptive plan and calls us to participate and to value the church as the very body of Christ
2. Apart from the church, Paul's exhortations are going to be extremely minimalistic - reconciling wisdom cannot be applied and displayed unless there is a diverse and naturally separated body to apply it in
3. So, again following Paul, that is my goal as well - to call us to value the church deeper and to renew our passion for and our participation in the church: the church is where we see the glory of God's salvation, where we praise Him for that glory, and where we live in the peace that He has given us

① C. To refresh our dedication to living holy lives in Christ

1. Paul wants us to see glory, but he doesn't want us to stop there, so he dedicates the second half of his book to walking in the light of God's glory, walking in conformity with our calling
2. Paul's glorious theology cannot be taken apart from his sober exhortations
3. So, once again following Paul, that is my third goal - to call us not only to know but to live in God's salvation, to pursue holiness that is rooted in and displays the glory of God's salvation

① V. Summary Statement

As we start Ephesians, as I've done with some books, I want to give a short summary statement of the book that we can remember each week as we come back to Ephesians, a reminder of the grand picture of Ephesians as we dive into each individual passage

- ✘✘A. So, the summary statement I've come up with is this: **The reconciling wisdom of God has been gloriously displayed in Christ, calling us to walk by grace in the peace He has given us.**

① VI. Read Ephesians

Note on NIV not ESV and why...