

Ephesians 6:21-22

Introduction

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are referred to many times as Paul’s “prison epistles.” All four of these letters were written by Paul almost certainly during his first imprisonment in Rome around the year 60 AD. If you’re reading these books, you’ll find that Paul mentions his imprisonment, or his chains, four times in Philippians (Phil. 1:7, 13-14, 17), two times in Colossians (4:10, 18; cf. 1:24), and five times in Philemon (Philem. 1, 9-10, 13, 23). Here in Ephesians, we saw just last week another mention of Paul’s chains:

- ✓ Ephesians 6:19-20 — 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.

Earlier in the letter, Paul has already referred to himself twice as “the **prisoner** of Christ Jesus” (3:1) and “the **prisoner** in the Lord.” (4:1)

It’s obvious that Paul was not ashamed of his chains. Paul did not see his imprisonment as any sign of defeat or cause for discouragement. But more than anything else, Paul was concerned for the churches – that *they* not be disheartened or discouraged by his chains. Paul was the one who had first brought them the Gospel. Paul was the one who had planted and established the church in Ephesus. As the “Apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul was truly the Ephesians’ spiritual “father” in the faith. And yet now this same Paul was imprisoned specifically because of his work and ministry on *their* behalf. It was *because* Paul had brought *them* the Gospel that he was now confined by Roman chains. In chapter three Paul said that he was “the prisoner of Christ Jesus *on behalf of you Gentiles*.” (3:1) *For Paul*, rather than being any cause for despair, this was a sign of God’s great love, and of his own love for the Ephesians. *But for the Christians in Ephesus*, we can easily imagine that Paul’s chains could be very disconcerting to them. Their fearless leader and spiritual father in the faith was **in prison**. What did this mean for them especially as Gentiles? What did this mean for the future of the Gospel that Paul had brought to them? Already, Paul’s entire letter has given a resounding answer to these questions. And so already, Paul could say in chapter three:

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

And yet in spite of all the truth about Christ’s triumph and victory and kingship, and our being seated with Christ in the heavenly places, Paul is still concerned here at the end of the letter that his chains should somehow end up being a discouragement to others. And so he writes here in verses 21-22 of chapter six:

I. Now in order that you also may know the things with regard to me—how I am doing—**Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord**, will make everything known to you, whom I have sent to you for this very thing, that you may know the things concerning us...

You can see the depth of Paul's love and concern for the church in Ephesus not only by the fact that he writes this letter, but that he sends it by the hand of Tychicus. Tychicus was *especially* dear to Paul. Paul calls him "the *beloved* brother." Tychicus was also a "faithful servant in the Lord." He was from the province of Asia Minor (which was home to the city of Ephesus). When we first meet him he's accompanying Paul on his last trip to Jerusalem – where Paul would then be arrested and ultimately make his appeal to Rome (Acts 20:1-4). So it's possible that Tychicus had ministered to Paul during the two years that he was imprisoned in Caesarea, accompanied Paul on the long voyage to Rome, and then continued to minister to him while he was imprisoned in Rome. That would explain not only why Paul calls Tychicus a "faithful servant," but also why he calls him a "beloved brother." We can hardly imagine the comfort and encouragement that this brother's companionship would have been to Paul, the prisoner in chains. And yet when Paul sends this letter far-away to Ephesians, he will send it (along with the letters to the Colossians and Philemon; Col. 4:7-9) by the hand of Tychicus.

So for Paul, sending a letter to the Christians in Ephesus didn't just mean stamping an envelope, it meant saying goodbye to a dearly beloved brother for no insignificant period of time (cf. Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:9-13). It meant losing one who was a personal comfort and encouragement to Paul in the midst of his imprisonment. So why does he do it? Why does Paul send these letters *by the hand of Tychicus*? Couldn't he have found someone else, *anyone else*, traveling in the direction of Ephesus? It's true that Paul wanted to be sure that letters as important as these arrived safely. But for Paul, there was another reason, at least equally as important.

II. Now **IN ORDER THAT** you also *may know the things with regard to me—how I am doing*—Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will *make everything known* to you, whom I have sent to you **FOR THIS VERY THING, THAT** you *may know the things concerning us...*

It's easy for us to skim over these verses, isn't it? But if Paul's wordiness and repetitiveness means anything, then that would definitely be a mistake. He says the same things two, three, and even *four* times! He emphasizes that it's *in order that* they might *know the things with regard to him—how he is doing*—that he sends Tychicus, *who will make everything known to them, whom he has sent to them for this very thing, that* they might *know the things concerning Paul* and his fellow workers in Rome (including his fellow prisoners; Col. 4:10).

For Paul, to send a letter to the Christians in Ephesus didn't just mean stamping an envelope, it meant saying goodbye to a dearly beloved brother. It meant losing one who was a personal comfort and encouragement in the midst of his imprisonment. So why does he do it? Why does Paul send these letters *by the hand of Tychicus*? Because *as* Paul's dearly beloved brother, and a faithful servant in the Lord, Tychicus was *just the man* to make *everything* known to the Ephesians – everything concerning both *what* Paul was doing and *how* Paul was doing.

But still we might ask – Why was this such a big deal for Paul? Why did this justify the loss, for Paul, of this dearly beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord? Paul writes:

III. Now **IN ORDER THAT** you also may know the things with regard to me—how I am doing—Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything

known to you, whom I have sent to you FOR THIS VERY THING, THAT you may know the things concerning us, **AND [THAT] HE MAY ENCOURAGE YOUR HEARTS**.

We remember, again, what Paul said in chapter three:

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

There, the reason for not losing heart, was all wrapped up in the Gospel. The reason for not losing heart was this awesome reality that to Paul, “the very least of all the saints, 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.” (3:8-9) Here at the end of the letter, Paul is once again concerned that rather than “losing heart,” the Ephesians’ hearts should instead be *encouraged*. The Greek word has the idea of being “comforted,” “reassured,” “strengthened.” (cf. Hoehner) But *now*, the *reason* for their encouragement is to be the news of *how* Paul is doing, and *what* Paul is doing, and basically “*everything*” concerning Paul’s circumstances. And why should this be such an encouragement? What is it about the news of Paul’s circumstances that should lift the Ephesians’ hearts? Well, let’s think about it:

The first reason Paul gave for not losing heart was that he had been appointed to preach to the Gentiles the Gospel – the unsearchable riches of Christ. But the question may still be asked: How is Paul to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ if he’s in prison? At the end of Paul’s letter, the Ephesians could still be wondering: What do Paul’s chains mean for his mission to the Gentiles? What do Paul’s chains mean for the future of the Gospel that he brought to us, and that he has been appointed by God to bring to light for everyone? What do Paul’s chains mean in light of Paul’s message that Christ has been enthroned at the right hand of God in the heavenly places? *Somehow*, it’s precisely the news of ***everything concerning Paul’s circumstances*** that will answer *these* questions, and comfort, and reassure, and strengthen their hearts.

Now in Ephesians, Paul doesn’t say anything about what these circumstances might be. He leaves Tychacus to pass on all the news in person. But in Philippians, which was written around the same time as Ephesians, Paul gives us a clue as to just the kinds of things Tychacus might have said.

- ✓ Philippians 1:12–14 — ***I want you to know***, brothers, that ***what has happened to me*** has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

For Paul, if God chose to use his imprisonment as a way of emboldening others to speak the word of God without fear, then that brought him joy. That was ***all*** that mattered. Fee says: “Here is one for whom the gospel is bigger than his personal role in making it known.” For Paul, if God chose to use his prolonged imprisonment so that his Gentile guards might hear the Gospel, and

also anyone else in Rome who heard of his chains, then that brought him joy. That was the *only* thing that mattered. As Fee puts it,

“Here is Paul’s obvious concern. He wants [the saints in Philippi] not to be anxious about him, *because* his circumstances, rather than being a ‘hindrance’ ... to the gospel, as they might well believe, have in fact led to its ‘advance’ ... ‘To advance the gospel’ has been his [foremost] passion; he has thus ordered his life so that nothing will hinder, and everything advance, the message about Christ.”

How are we ordering our lives? Luke writes at the end of the book of Acts:

- ✓ Acts 28:30–31 — [Paul] lived there [chained under Roman guard] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, *proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.*

At the end of Philippians, Paul can triumphantly write these words:

- ✓ Philippians 4:22 — All the saints greet you, *especially those of Caesar’s household.*

And even when Paul was imprisoned a second time, and awaiting his execution, he could write to Timothy like this:

- ✓ 2 Timothy 2:8–10 — Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But *the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*

This was the kind of news which Paul intended should comfort and encourage the Ephesians’ hearts as they thought about Paul’s chains, and what those chains could mean for them.*

Conclusion

So I have to ask myself, and then all of us here: Is this the kind of news that *most* comforts and encourages *our* hearts? Fee is certainly right when he says, “The furtherance of the gospel is *everything* for Paul.” Is it also “*everything*” for us? And if so, *how*? *How* in the context of our own heart’s desires, our calendars and our checkbooks, our families, marriages, friendships, and workplaces?

It was precisely this furtherance of the Gospel among the Ephesians that explains *why* Paul sent this letter by the hand of Tychacus – even though it would mean for him the painful loss of a beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord. For Paul, everything in all the world is secondary to the triumph, and spread, and promotion, and the general good and well-being of the

* “To know the several passages of God’s gracious providence towards his suffering servants, together with their undaunted courage under sufferings, and the use which God [makes] of their sufferings to advance his truth and cause, is and may be sufficient ground of comfort and encouragement unto the Lord’s people against the sorrow and sadness which their sharp sufferings, considered in themselves, [may produce].” (Fergusson)

Gospel. Is that true for us? Is it the promotion, and good, and well-being of the Gospel that orders all our priorities, all our emotions, all our decisions, and all our lives? Because if it is, then we'll never have any reason to lose heart – even when we're led to deny our own, *secondary* wishes, and desires, and longings. Is it the promotion, and good, and well-being of the Gospel that orders all our priorities, all our emotions, all our decisions, and all our lives? Because if it is, then we'll never lack a reason to have our hearts always comforted, always reassured, always strengthened, and always *encouraged*. May what Paul wrote of himself and the rest of the Apostles also be true of us:

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 2:14 — Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

What is “everything” to you? What, for you, is the *only thing* that matters? Listen now again as Paul, the prisoner in chains, writes these words:

“Now IN ORDER THAT you also may know the things with regard to me—how I am doing—Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you, whom I have sent to you FOR THIS VERY THING, THAT you may know the things concerning us, **AND [THAT] HE MAY ENCOURAGE YOUR HEARTS.**