

A Message from Above Ephesians 1:1-2

Introduction

The famous American explorers Lewis and Clark – became well known for their bravery in scouting out land newly acquired by the U.S. in the Louisiana Purchase. They were commissioned by President Thomas Jefferson for the task – which was not an easy one – met with all kinds of dangers and hazards along the way

In fact - the expedition almost met a fateful end near the winter of 1805. They were in the area of Idaho's Bitterroot Mountains – and stumbled across an Indian tribe known as the Nez Perce. The Lewis and Clark team was hoping to find food and shelter - - - but instead - - - some of the Nez Perce wanted to kill the white man explorers and take all their goods. However - an aged and dying woman in the camp intervened.

As a young girl – this woman had been captured by another Native American tribe – then sold to another tribe back east. She eventually escaped and ended up in the care of some Canadian settlers who took care of her until she was old enough to make her way back to her own people.

Over the years – she told her people about the light skinned people who lived toward the rising sun and took care of her. So – when she saw the light skinned members of the Lewis and Clark team arrive – she intervened on their behalf - and the expedition was spared.

Lewis and Clark were able to continue on with their mission - - - and returned with valuable information about the Western frontier of America

Some 1800 years earlier – The NT – tells us about another individual who embarked upon a dangerous commission

This person had been commissioned by God Himself – and tasked [not with exploration] but with the proclamation of God's gospel to the first century world

And this mission also - almost met with a fateful end before it ever got going

In Acts 9 – we find the apostle began speaking of Jesus to the Jews in Damascus - - - and a plot developed in which he was to be put to death

Acts 9:25 - 'But his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.'

Such was the first of many perilous escapes and dangers survived by the apostle

On one occasion he listed a number of dangers he had faced while on his commission

- 5 times - received 39 lashes from the Jews
- Three times he was beaten with rods

- Once he was stoned and left for dead
- He had been shipwrecked
- Faced dangers from robbers / dangers in the wilderness / dangers on the sea [II Cor. 11:23-27]

But the faithful apostle carried on – surviving each of the dangers – sometimes thru miraculous intervention

Towards the end of his life – he was able to write these words

II Tim. 4:7 - 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.'

The apostle we are talking about is of course, the apostle Paul - - - he refers to his commission with the simple words expressed here at the beginning of the letter to the Ephesians

Eph. 1:1 - 'Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus.'

Who made Paul an apostle / sent him? [God did]

This same Paul would be tasked with writing more letters than any other of the apostles – that would end up in the NT of our Bible – [13 letters in all by Paul] - - - to be used for the church's edification / instruction – we know these letters as the book of Romans, I Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians

This morning – we will begin a study of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church

We are reminded of what this letter is – it is a message from above - - - that comes to us thru the words of an Apostle commissioned by God Himself to utter faithful words of truth

How we respond to Ephesians is how we respond to God Himself

I. Paul, an Apostle - v. 1

Paul refers to himself as an apostle

The term apostle [αποστολος] refers to someone who is sent by another

The verb form of αποστελλω = to send – [you might send a letter / a person / a text / an army]

In the very term – it raises the question - - - [sent - - - by who?]

Answer: Jesus Christ

Paul points to the fact that it was the will of God that he become an apostle - - - he did not get up one day and say, 'I think - I will become an apostle!'

Saul [as he was known before his conversion] was not one of the original twelve - - - He did not travel with Jesus - like Peter, James, and John

He was not at the Transfiguration
He was not in the boat when Jesus walked on water

If he ever heard Jesus speak or saw him in person - he resisted the truth at the time
He was a Pharisee - zealous for the law
Even was zealous in persecuting the church / trying to destroy it

What happened to bring him into the ranks of apostleship?

We first encounter Saul in Acts 7

Acts 7:58-59 / 8:1

Before Acts 9 - Saul not only rejects Jesus - but he thinks the whole Christian church movement needs to die - literally

What happened to change all this? - - - How does such a one become an apostle?

Paul traces the source of His apostleship back to the will of God

There are times when you cannot explain things apart from the will of God

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a successful doctor in Wales / Great Britain - - - had studied medicine at one of their top schools - was established in his medical practice - held in high regard as a physician - - - when at the age of 26 - gave it all up to become a preacher

When he decided to make the switch - some people questioned him about the wisdom of such a choice.

MLJ: 'people said to me: 'Why give up good work - a good profession - after all the medical profession - why give that up? If you had been a bookie for instance and wanted to give that up to preach the gospel, we should understand and agree with you and say that you were doing a great thing. But medicine - a good profession, healing the sick and relieving pain!'

His decision puzzled many

Lloyd Jones' response: "if you knew more about the work of a doctor you would understand. We but spend most of our time rendering people fit to go back to

their sin! . . . I want to heal souls. If a man has a diseased body and his soul is all right, he is all right to the end; but a man with a healthy body and a diseased soul is all right for sixty years or so and then he has to face an eternity of hell. Ah yes - we have sometimes to give up those things which are good for that which is the best of all.'

i.e. – People were looking for an explanation of how someone does something like that

With Paul – people asked the question – ‘How does a guy go from persecuting the church to becoming its biggest defender and proponent?’

Can you explain this Paul?

Paul’s answer: ‘God’

The crucial point of change in Paul’s life is related for us in Acts 9

Acts 9:1-19

Saul – the Pharisee / church persecutor just received Christian baptism

This was an open break with Judaism – a public act of identification with Christ

Saul will not try to hide his faith from his Pharisee buddies
Paul will later say, ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel . . .’

Saul is ‘all in’

This was huge

He has just made a decisive break with Judaism – and thrown in his lot with the Christians.

Paul later came to see that God’s purposes involving himself personally and the church – predate Acts 9

Gal. 1:13-16

Bryan Chapell: 'the greatest witness to Paul of the great power of the gospel is its claim on his own heart. When he was Christ's enemy, God called him. When there was no desire to seek Jesus, the Savior made this Pharisee of the Jews an apostle of Jesus. Paul has been transferred from one universe to another, and it is plain to him that this was not and could not be his own doing but, rather the sovereign work of God.'

Paul sees that he had been set apart from his mother's womb

He sees that God is a very purposeful God

God is purposeful in our lives as well

- He has placed you where He wants you / has work for you to do
- He has planned your existence [and salvation if you are a believer] from before the foundation of the world [Eph. 1:4]
- He has ordained the number of your days in this world – [Ps. 139:16]
- The blessings you have – gifts from God
- The trials you encounter – sovereignly designed for your benefit / His glory
- The people who have assisted you in your journey – sent by God

One of the blessings you and I have today – are the writings of the apostles / the NT letters

Paul's ministry touches us today – thru the Scriptures

John Calvin: 'when we read the epistles which St. Paul wrote to a variety of places, we must always consider that God meant they should serve not only for one time alone, or for certain people only, but forever, and in general for the whole church.'

We hold in our hands – one of the blessings God intends for us to have as His church – the letter to the Ephesians

II Peter 3:15-16

Peter puts the writings of Paul on par with Scripture

That is why we study the letter to the Ephesians today

This letter is a message from above / Scripture

A practice in the 1st century - - - [before there was a completed canon] Apostolic letters would be distributed amongst other churches

Col. 4:16

Paul tells the Colossian believers to have his letter read in the church there

Many believe that Ephesians was intended as a circular letter [send this around] – especially since Paul includes no personal greetings in the letter

Apostleship was a gift limited to the first century of the church

Wayne Grudem: 'The New Testament apostles had a unique kind of authority in the early church: authority to speak and write words which were "words of God" in an absolute sense. To disbelieve or disobey them was to disbelieve or disobey God. The apostles, therefore, had the authority to write words which became words of Scripture. This fact in itself should suggest to us that there was something unique about the office of apostle, and that we would not expect it to continue today, for no one today can add words to the Bible and have them be counted as God's very words or as part of Scripture. [Systematic Theology, 905-906]

Do we have apostles today?

The Roman Catholic Church makes the claim – [apostolic succession] - the pope is the successor to Peter as chief apostle
Protestants have rightly rejected the claim

For Protestants – our apostolic authority is found in the Word of Scripture
We care what Paul / Peter / John said - - - not Pope Francis / etc.

A few Protestants claim to be apostles today – usually from within charismatic circles – but – that too is dismissed by all but a few

Wayne Grudem: 'It is noteworthy that no major leader in the history of the church - not Athanasius or Augustine, not Luther or Calvin, not Wesley or Whitefield - has taken to himself the title of 'apostle' or let himself be called an apostle. If any in modern times want to take the title 'apostle' to themselves, they immediately raise the suspicion that they may be motivated by inappropriate pride and desires for self-exaltation . . .' [Strange Fire, p. 99]

Apostleship was a gift which ceased after the first century of the church

It was foundational – Eph. 2:20

Paul an apostle – is writing to the saints [at Ephesus] – v. 1

The saints – the church!
Set apart / the holy ones

One of the purposes of our salvation is holiness – Eph. 1:4

Holiness is our position in Christ / our eternal destiny / our calling and current responsibility

Peter will write: 'be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.' - I Peter 1:15

The idea is that God has set you apart for holiness – now begin to live that out by the power of the Spirit

In Christ – common expression in Paul’s letters – used to refer to the believer’s union with Christ thru faith

It is in Christ that we tap in to the blessings of God – which Paul will begin to unfold for us in the following verses – vv. 3ff

II. *Grace and Peace* - v. 2

Paul greets his readers with a prayer or blessing of grace and peace

He is teaching us – these are the things we need: grace and peace

We will see the doctrine of grace developed as we work our way thru this letter

Grace is God taking hell-deserving and calling them unto Himself – thru faith He pardons us of our sins / washes us thru the blood of Christ / adopts us as His children / gives us an eternal inheritance

And the whole process began in the counsels of eternity – amazing

In this letter to the Ephesians

Calvin: '[God] has not passed over or forgotten anything that might further our salvation.'

Conclusion

So – we have begun this great letter to the Ephesians

Paul is already pointing us to the riches of grace in Christ Jesus

Robert Traill: 'There is no other music, but the praises of free grace in heaven; and none shall sing its praises there but the happy receivers of it here.'

Have you received grace?