

EPHESIANS 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION

I want to once again focus on the opening verses of this marvellous Epistle. In our last sermon we looked at who it was that received this letter and discovered that they are people living in Ephesus who are: 'called,' 'saints,' 'faithful' and 'in Christ Jesus.' But let us continue to look at this letter by asking:

1. WHO SENT THIS LETTER (v 1)

Well it is clear who wrote Ephesians for we are told that it was Paul. He describes himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ but this is a remarkable statement when you think about Paul's strict Jewish background. Paul who of course once was known as Saul was brought up by the strictest Jewish traditions and culture. He was educated as a Pharisee; he went to Jerusalem to pursue his higher studies under a man called Gamaliel who was probably the best-known Jewish teacher of his day.

Paul was destined to rise to the top in his Jewish studies and he was destined one day to have a huge influence upon the Jewish faith. As Saul grew and as his studies developed he became a fervent supporter of the Jewish faith and demonstrated this by his hostility to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul made full use of his influence to secure official authority to put down the Christian faith, which was spreading alarmingly for Paul. He was prepared to go to any lengths to put down Christians and to maintain the Jewish faith and it was while he was pursuing Christians in Damascus that a most remarkable event took place that changed Paul's name and life for good. While on the road to Damascus he was confronted by The Lord Jesus, a bright light appeared and he was blinded by it.

He was commissioned by Jesus to be his apostle to take his message to the Gentiles, the very people that every Jew would have nothing to do with. So now as he sends his letter to the church at Ephesus he reminds his readers that he is an apostle someone who has been commissioned by Jesus Christ personally. Someone who exercises authority granted to him by Jesus Christ.

As his readers read those words they would be reminded of Paul's remarkable conversion on that Damascus road and of course be reminded of the power of God to change someone like Saul into an Apostle like Paul. He was personally commissioned by Jesus to take the gospel to the Gentiles he was simply an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. He did not seek it, in fact left to himself Paul would have killed every Christian he could find, left to himself he would crush the church, but it was God's will to save him, and to commission him to be an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Paul was faithful to his commission and eventually his preaching and teaching and evangelising led him to Rome where he was imprisoned for his faith. While in prison at Rome (3:1) he wrote this letter to the churches in Asia Minor and in particular to the church at Ephesus. As we read this letter we too should be amazed that God in his goodness should save someone like Paul.

Someone who was so hostile to the gospel that given the chance he would kill and imprison Christians yet God comes to him and saves him. But not only does God save him he commissions him as an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul is a completely

changed man he had to be if he was going to take the gospel, which he originally hated, to the people that he also originally hated. All this God did because it pleased him it was according to his will.

We ought really to pause now and give thanks to God for his goodness and grace in saving people like Paul. But we also ought to ponder our own conversion experience. It probably was not as remarkable as far as the circumstances were concerned that is we were not saved like Paul was with a Damascus road experience, but we have to understand that our conversion was just as remarkable.

For we too were hostile to Jesus and to his gospel We may even have rejoiced in giving Christians a hard time, yet God in his goodness came to us and saved us. He changed us completely he turned us around and he has commissioned us not as Apostles for they do not exist today but as his servants to take the gospel of the Lord Jesus into all the world (Matthew 28:18-20).

This is our privilege and it has happened to us not because of our background, education or good living but it happened because it pleased God it was according to his will to save us.

We will look at this more next time when we think about God's election of us, but for now we simply ought to be humbled before our God our hearts ought to be filled with wonder and praise and in humility we should be seeking to fulfil our commission of proclaiming Christ in whatever situations he has called us too.

However there is another application here that ought to encourage us. If God can save someone like Paul and change him to such an extent then there is no one who is beyond hope. Perhaps you can think of someone who you simply think will never be saved. They are beyond hope they are simply too bad to be saved. O you would not say it publicly but privately in your worst moment that is what you think.

It might be a family member or a neighbour or work colleague, well we must not lose hope Paul is an example of what God does and so are all who are Christians for we are an example to God's goodness and grace. However perhaps there is Christian person that you think will never change either. Perhaps they are halfhearted and full of apathy in their walk with God. Perhaps you have prayed for him/her for years and nothing seems to change.

That person is very up and down and more often down than up. You despair that they will ever be stable as Christians.

We'll be encouraged look what God did for Paul look how he changed; so change is possible because God has the power to do so, so keep praying for that person and keep encouraging them in Christian things for the God who has saved them is able to change them and make them useful in his service.

2. WHAT DID PAUL WANT FOR HIS READERS (v 2)

We greet each other with 'hello how are' in our country. But when Paul wanted to greet people he used two words that are full of meaning. When two Jews met each other they wished each other 'shalom' which means peace. So Paul takes the

Jewish word and uses it as a greeting for this Gentile church and he uses a term that was not used except by Christians to greet these believers in Ephesus. The other term he used is 'grace' and in these opening verses he wishes that his readers might know God's peace and grace within their lives.

But let us examine what is grace and what is peace. Grace means unmerited favour, favour which we do not deserve favour which we receive from God but favour we have no right to claim for we are totally unworthy and undeserving. When it comes to the term peace we think of this term from our English usage, which is the ending of war. But when Paul uses the term he means once more than he hopes that the Christians at Ephesus enjoy a period without conflict.

The actual meaning of the word peace is 'union after separation.' It's a bringing together, reconciliation after a conquest. Well for the Christians at Ephesus they have come into a relationship with God, which means that they are at peace with him, reconciliation has taken place, and Paul, wants the Christians to know the reality of this peace within their lives. This reality means that they will be at peace with their fellow Christians and they will experience the peace of God even in the midst of conflict.

The reality of grace is that every day these Christians might know his undeserved kindness to them enabling them and empowering them to live in fellowship with God and with others. Everyday we need to know this reality in our lives, we could not pray for anything better and we could not wish for anything greater, than for our brothers and sisters to experience the reality of God's peace and grace within our lives.

It is lovely when we can say that we are at peace with other Christians even those who don't hold to the same doctrines we hold too. It is great when we can testify that even though everything in my life has thrown me in turmoil yet I have a real sense of God's peace within my heart. Even though the future is so uncertain, yet I know that peace that comes from God that peace that gives me security.

It wonderful to know that I am not left to my own devices to live for God but everyday God supplies me with grace, that he gives me what I do not deserve so that I can stay true to my God and Saviour. Now this grace and peace comes to all Christians from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because this grace and peace comes from God that we are brought into a relationship with him and are therefore able to call him our Father. But this grace and peace comes through the Lord Jesus Christ.

If Jesus had not of come and died on the cross thus paying the cost of our sin then we could never have received grace from God or been able to be at peace with God. In turn God would never have been our father in any meaningful way but instead he would have been our judge and his wrath would be upon us. So we cannot separate God the Father from God the Son, grace and peace comes to us through them.

There is no blessing that comes to us from God without the Lord Jesus Christ therefore we need once again to pause and praise his wonderful name, to exalt our God as our father and to praise His Son our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ for without him and his work on the cross then we simply would not know God's grace

and peace within our lives. Let us also pray for God's grace and peace to be evident within the lives of those who are members within our Church.

We rightly pray for one another's physical well-being, we pray for material things for our fellow believers but how often if ever do we pray for grace and peace.

How often in our desires for others do we long that they might experience God's grace and peace and know the blessings that flow as a result of knowing God's grace and peace in one's life. In verse 3-14, which is one long sentence in Greek Paul, begins to outline some of the blessings that we receive in Christ. These blessings become our experience because of God's grace and peace that comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. (v 3).

There is the blessing of election (v 4) which unless we have come to know God's grace and peace within our lives then this doctrine would be repulsive to us. We would argue against it claiming that God is unfair to choose some for salvation. In truth we would probably not even know this doctrine existed yet because we have experienced God's grace and peace we rejoice in this marvellous truth and rejoice in the security it gives to us and the encouragement it gives us in our evangelism.

There is the blessing of adoption (v 5) which one would be unknown to us except for God's peace and grace, which has come into our lives as a result of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amazing isn't it that we are children of God that we belong to his family. As a result we can call God our Father and can present to him our requests. Then there are the blessings of redemption (v 7), forgiveness of sins (v 7) and of course there is the blessing of our inheritance (v 14).

Now all of these are truths that we will explore over in future sermons but the point is they are known to us and are experienced by us because of God's grace to us in bringing us into a peaceful relationship with himself through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we desire and pray that God's people may experience the reality of God's grace and peace in their lives we are asking that they might come to fully grasp and benefit from their election, adoption, redemption, forgiveness and inheritance.

You see its only once we are Christians that we understand and can appreciate the implications of all these doctrines in our lives and as I have said I hope to show us some of these implications in future messages.

So let us ask God to give us hearts that will desire grace and peace for all God's people and that the blessings that flow from knowing his grace and peace will increasingly be realised and enjoyed by all of God's people.

Amen