

Ephesians 4:1-7 “A Life Worthy of Our Calling” 9/19/21

The story is told of “A group of tourists who were visiting a rather picturesque town on the outskirts of a well know city - As they walked, they noticed an older man sitting beside a fence - One of the tourists asked him, “Were any great men born in this village?”

To which the man replied, “Nope, only babies.”¹

His answer holds a lot of truth - There are no instant heroes, there is no instant status or fame, whether in this world or in the Kingdom of God - Growth takes time

We live in the instant age - My parents used to drink instant coffee - My Keurig makes real coffee, but it is just as instant - We also have instant oatmeal, instant milk, instant soup, instant breakfast, and Ramen noodles are as close to instant as you can get

In the days before the camera became an app on our phones, we even had instant cameras - Microwave ovens are indispensable in our kitchens - And I'd rather not part with my box of instant grits

Humankind likes instant things - We crave short lines at our banks and at the supermarket - And I have to wonder if half-hour television shows have trained us to expect instant solutions to all of life's problems

Today, the passage of Scripture from Paul's letter to the Church in Ephesus reminds us that there is no such thing as an instant faith - The gift of salvation occurs in an instant - But after that, we are not instantly mature Christians - That takes lots of time and effort

Our walk of faith begins that instant we are born again - But that is just the first step in a lifelong journey

¹ Parables, Etc. (Saratoga Press, Platteville, CO, 80651), as quoted by Sermons.com

We have been focusing on Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus since the middle of August - And today we are at a major break in that book of Ephesians

In the first three chapters of the book, we heard about the Grace of God, Salvation, and other doctrine - Now, the Apostle Paul shares how to apply these things to our walk of faith so that we might become mature believers

John Stott pointed out, that these closing chapters teach that "we must cultivate unity in the church, purity in our personal lives, harmony in our homes, and stability in our combat with the powers of evil"²

Or to use Dr J Vernon McGee's always colorful language - In this last section of Ephesians "we descend to the plane of living where we confront a demon-possessed world and a skeptical mob. It is right down where the rubber meets the road."³

Ephesians 4:1 "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called"⁴

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul from prison in Rome sometime between 60 and 62 AD and is, therefore, often referred to as a prison epistle - Acts 28:16-31 describes this time - Paul also wrote the books of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon during that first imprisonment

It was a time when he was kept under guard - But was allowed to live in his own rented house and see many visitors - Paul's second imprisonment was the one when he was thrown in the cold, dark dungeon

Perhaps you recall him mentioning in the closing chapters of 2nd Timothy - How during that dungeon time, everyone had deserted him except Luke - And how he desired Timothy to come to him, and that he should bring Mark, a cloak, and some scrolls with him when he came

² John Stott as quoted by Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald,

© 1995, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN)

³ Thru the Bible Commentary, J. Vernon McGee, © 1981, (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN)

⁴ Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,

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It is significant that Paul describes himself as “a prisoner for the Lord” - He is not a prisoner of Rome, but a prisoner for the Lord - Totally sold out to his faith in, and service to, the Lord Jesus Christ

Years ago, there was a Christian comedian named Jerry Clower - He was a funny story-teller and a deeply religious man - He went home to be with the Lord in 1998

In his book, “Let the Hammer Down” he wrote about a time when he was invited to do a comedy act at the Country Music Awards show in Hollywood - Even better was that he was offered the chance to invite Sue, his 14-year-old daughter, and one of her friends to go with him

He figured the opportunity would really impress Sue because the Country Music Awards was an event that would allow her the chance of meeting many different celebrities in Hollywood

Sue’s response? - She said, “Daddy, I love you and I’m so glad that you would arrange it to where one of my friends and I could go on this trip, but Daddy, there’s something going on at Church that I don’t want to miss and I’ve made a commitment to be a part of it. So, I won’t be able to go with you this time.”

Jerry writes that tears welled up in his eyes and he wanted to sing for joy to think that a Church activity was more important to his daughter than a trip to the Country Music Awards in Hollywood⁵

It is the type of commitment that we are all called to have - One where we keep our priorities straight - So much so that we too are a prisoner for the Lord because that’s who we belong to - One where we live a life worthy of the calling we have received

Jesse Lee was a circuit-riding preacher during the frontier days of our country - He once preached a sermon on Acts 17:6 which is a verse that records a time when Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica

⁵ Jerry Clower, Let the Hammer Down! (Waco: Word Books, 1978)

Some of the people came to the rulers of city and said, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also” - The point of his sermon was that sin has turned the world upside down, and the design of the gospel and the business of the Church are to set the world right side up again

The people of the town decided to have some fun with this passionate circuit rider and so the next day when he rode into town nearly everything looked ridiculous - Everything that could be turned upside down had been turned upside down: wagons, signs, gates, and so on⁶

The people of the town got a laugh at the preacher’s expense, but at least they got the point - The purpose of the Church is to turn the world upside down, or better yet, to take what sin had upset, and turn it right side up again - That is what we do when we live a life worthy of the calling we have been called

Paul goes on to write in Ephesians that to live a life worthy of that calling we should be people who “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”⁷

These verses begin to spell out what it takes to meet the expectations of the calling we have received - Such Godly conduct includes humility, patience toward others, and bending over backward to maintain unity and harmony, among God’s people

In the time flies department, I am in my twenty eighth year of serving God as a United Methodist pastor - Some of you may know that I spent most of a decade of that time as the pastor of the Pinelands Church

That Church is in the midst of the South Jersey Pinelands - It is a region that is perfect for blueberries - And therefore there are dozens of farms and thousands of acres of blueberry bushes

⁶ King Duncan, Sermons.com

⁷ Ephesians 4:2-3

It is an unusual crop, in that the blueberries come early in the season, mostly the end of June and beginning of July

After that, there is a whole summer of tending the bushes - Fertilizing and watering and pruning in preparation of the next summer's harvest - At harvest time, thousands of migrant workers would descend upon our community - And the farmers would provide camp like housing for them

The migrant workers were predominately Mexican - Except for one summer - The winter before that summer a major earthquake hit Haiti - The next summer, the migrant workers were predominately Haitian

The Haitian workers were only there for that one summer - I assume that they were gathering funds to help their families deal with the earthquake disaster - And the next summer the Mexican workers returned

I have gone down this side road in this message, because there was a world of difference between the Mexican and Haitian workers - In all the years we were there, we never had a problem with the Mexicans - But they certainly were joyful and loud

They could turn any space into a Mexican Cantina - And in a moment's notice there was loud music, dancing, and a party - One day we had the Pinelands' youth group out doing a road cleanup

While we were picking up litter, a busload of migrant workers came by - And I think they really appreciated the fact that at least half of us were teenage girls - Because you never heard such hooting and hollering

The summer of the Haitian workers was so different - They were truly a quiet and gentle people - And their humility stood out

One day, Joanne and I were going into Walmart and there was a group of Haitians ahead of us - They just about fell over each other to hold the doors and let Joanne and I go in first - As you can tell, that summer gave me a very good impression of the people of Haiti

I do not like to put people into groups - Because God despises racism and so we all should avoid referring to anyone by whatever culture or race that they may be associated with

God created us all people, and if that's good enough for the Lord - It surely should be good enough for us

But here's my point - I've spent a few moments describing the Mexican migrant workers and the Haitians because just for a moment I want you to think about putting people into groups

Plus, I hope you noticed that I didn't have a single bad thing to say about either group - They were simply our neighbors in our Pinelands Church days - But I want you to ponder this question: What do people say about that group of people like us? - People who go to Church?

Are they able to say that they don't have a single bad thing to say about those Church going folks? - Do they notice our humility? - Our gentleness? - The way we love one another? - And the way the Holy Spirit is the glue that holds us together?

Ephesians 4:2-3 exhorts us to be people who live our lives, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" - Is that how the world describes us?

It certainly should be - If we are living a life worthy of our calling it should be a life that is humble, gentle, patient, and full of love for others - Our unity in the Spirit and the bond of peace that we share should be totally obvious

So go forth from here today and live your lives by the way the Apostle Paul describes how a believer should live his or her life