Christmas 2024

LSB Ephesians 6:18 - 24 A Constant Conversation with Our God

18 praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 as well as on my behalf, that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel— 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains—so that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 But that you also may know about all my affairs, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know our circumstances, and that he may encourage your hearts.

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

This morning we'll finish the excellent epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. And it's always exciting to come to the conclusion of a particular study and look with some anticipation on what is next.

Ephesians has been a particular joy for me to both study in depth, and to try to scratch the surface just a little in teaching. I love doctrine. I love it that in a world awash in it's self inflicted loss of any absolute truth to cling to what so ever, a world lost in a sea of relativity with no anchors, we who have bowed the knee to Jesus have a book of absolute doctrines, absolute truths.

Truths that never change. Eternity past to eternity future, what God declares as truth never changes. And Ephesians has them all. It's one of those books that if it were the only one we had, it would be enough.

But God has graciously not only given to us all of the bedrock solid doctrines contained in Ephesians, He has given us the whole New Testament, along with all of the histories and doctrines of His chosen people, the jews in the Old Testament to compare to Ephesians. And we find no conflict, no discrepancies.

In Acts chapter 20 we have the written record of Paul's visit with the elders of the church at Ephesus while he was on his way back to his final trip to Jerusalem. And the port where the ship was landed and probably doing maintenance and taking on supplies to further it's journey to Jerusalem was about 20 miles or so away from Ephesus.

Paul wanted to see the elders of this church but didn't have time to make the journey to them and back so he sends for the elders to come to him. And during that final visit, a very touching one with weeping because these men loved Paul so much and he told them they would not see him again before heaven, so there was sadness, but Paul makes an alarming claim to them.

Acts 20:25-29 *"And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. 26 Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. 28 Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. 29 I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;*

I did not fail to declare to you the full council of God. Paul was in Ephesus at the beginning, three years, and he tells them, you got it all. Nothing was left unsaid or untaught. The full council of God. So it's exciting to think about all of the doctrine we looked at just in this book of Ephesians. We have had the full council of God unfolding at out fingertips here.

So it's with anticipation that we close out this book and think about what is

next. My original plan was to teach right through Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. We have a week to think about jumping right into Philippians, or if the Spirit led us, to take a break in the middle of those 4 epistles for something else needful and then return there.

My hearts desire, with this door of opportunity God has graciously opened and allowed for me to have the privilege to be in this pulpit is to be able to at some level, say with Paul, I did not fail to disclose to you the full council of God. Obviously, I'm no Paul. But I've got his notes. His writings. So if I declare the full council of what he declared, perhaps we can say those words.

So on to Ephesians. It's rare for me to have sermon points with clever outlines. But I have one for you this morning. Here's our outline for the final words of Paul to the Ephesians. Easy to remember.

Exhortation in vs. 18. The example in vss. 19 - 22. And the exit in vss. 23,24
Exhortation, example, exit. How about that. I get my clever star for 2025.

We spent the last 7 studies in Ephesians, with some interruptions for Christmas and New Year, looking at the warfare of the christian.

We've all heard some form of the wheezing iron lung doctrine that's popular in the modern church, to "let go and let God." Step out of yourself and just let God take over. You're just a passenger along for the ride. Etc. etc. etc. Right?

Paul didn't get the memo. Nor did Jude, who wrote; *3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you exhorting that you* ***contend earnestly for the faith*** *which was once for all handed down to the saints*.

When Paul was writing his final swan song words to Timothy, he says;

5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. 6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. 7 I have ***fought the good fight****, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. 8 In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing*. 2 tim 4:5-8

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course,

The christian life isn't a nappie in the passenger seat while Jesus drives. It's a war. We are enemy combatants on the enemy's turf. And looking back over sermons and studies that had a part 1 part 2 and occasionally a part 3, those looks into the warfare of the christian in Ephesians, we had a part 7. We studied the christian warfare and armor together for 7 sessions.

But Paul hasn't quite finished. Beginning in vs 10 we've assembled an impenitrable war machine. We've built a tank to drive into enemy territory and wreak havoc with the enemy. But every tank needs fuel, right?

And so the tank we built in vss 10 - 17 is useless without the energy source we have in vs. 18.

18 praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

OK, class, we're going to parse this, but the first thing I want you to parse out is one little word used 4 times. all. all **all** **<u>all</u>** ***<u>ALL!</u>***

All times, all prayer and petition, all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

In Pilgrims Progress, Christian receives a piece of armor called "all prayer" which he uses to do combat with the fiends who come against him in the valley of shadow. When he gets out his weapon, all prayer, the fiends back

away and leave him alone. All prayer brings him victory over and over against different foils he finds in his journey.

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The first thing to consider is the continuous nature of what is called for in this exhortation. We are to pray at all times. Or as Paul said to the Thessalonians, *Pray without ceasing*. 1 Thess. 5:17

Does that mean when the noon siren goes off we take our prayer rug outside and face east and bob up and down saying some chant while our brain is somewhere totally different?

No. It means quite the opposite. Jesus taught in Luke 18 vs. 1;
Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart,

On August 26 1970, a few days after my 18th birthday, it pleased God to quicken me from the dead, spiritually, and make me alive together with Christ.

I began a conversation on that evening that has never ended. I began walking with my Lord, and as we walk, we talk. Even while I'm doing something wretched, the conversation doesn't end. Even in the midst of rebellion my heart continues to cry out, be merciful to me and please do not give me what I deserve. Ever.

And always I pray for restoration. He may seem to have quit the conversation in disgust but even in times of distance and sin, I hold onto His promise to never leave or forsake me.

The conversation is ongoing and has been for 54 years going on 55. The closest human comparison might be my wife. We've been having a conversation for almost that same length. There are moments of great

intensity, but mostly, we get along very well with little verbage necessary.

She thinks she can read my mind, but I know she can't. But she does in fact have eyes in the back of her head. My mother warned me of this. Women have eyes in the back of their head.

A friendship at any continuing ongoing level, is a conversation that never ends. And for us who are christians, we have just such a love relationship with the Lord Jesus. Sometimes our prayers are incredibly intense. There have been times when my children were in peril where I fasted all other activity except earnest conversation with God.

And there are other times, too often as I look at Paul's exhortation, where I am not nearly as engaged as I could be. This is an area where I am lacking.

18 praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

OK, praying at all times with all prayer ..... - that's the ongoing conversation. All christians who have Jesus living inside their hearts have that continuing conversation, or if not, why not?

praying at all times with all prayer and petition ***in the Spirit***

The christian walk is a spiritual walk. Jesus went back to His Father in heaven. But we are not orphans. He sent the Holy Spirit to dwell with us and in us. We walk with God and we have intimate fellowship with Him, as we converse with Him who dwells in us and with us.

When we sin, we break that fellowship, temporarily. When I break that sweet fellowship because of sin or because I am not submitting to His will, that walk is hindered. When I'm not walking in step with my Lord, there's only one prayer He'll hear. Repentence. Please cleanse and forgive and restore fellowship. Please fill me again with your Holy Spirit.

Praying in the Spirit is the prayer when I'm walking together in harmony with the Lord. When He is Master and I am slave. Then this kind of prayer that Paul commands is possible. *praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit*

But, Paul doesn't stop there. He gets specific on how we should pray as we walk with Jesus spiritually.
18 praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Paul exhorts us to make it our business to know the spiritual welfare of all the saints, and with that knowledge, with that alertness to petition God in their behalf, and even further to petition God for all the saints, relentlessly.

Alert to what the enemy is doing to individual saints. Then with that alert ever changing knowledge, I am to pray and petition God intelligently for their well being.

If God were to call me into His office and grill me on what I know about all of the saints who are the closest to me in the battle; How is their spiritual health? What are their weaknesses and problems? What are their faith challenges? What are their needs in order to be effective warriors together with you in the battle with the enemy. How, spiritually, are they doing?

My answer would be very much like the news clip we kept seeing last week of the mayor of Los Angeles, who had gone to Ghana for a political event, on taxpayer money I'm quite sure, who faced a lot of angry accusatory questions from reporters, and just stared at the ground. She had nothing to say.

If what Paul just stated immediately following his teaching on warfare, about praying, is normative, for all christians, we are completely dysfunctional.

I don't know where most of you are at spiritually, but I do know, we're not

engaged in any real warfare. Nothing Paul just said about how we are to pray for each other makes any rational sense at the level of christianity we're engaged in. It is what it is. Perhaps you'll tell me I've overstated that.

Moving on from exhortation to example. Paul's going to show us what this idea should look like. Here's where you can start. Here is a specific need you can begin with. Vs. 18 is the general command, vs. 19 is the example of how that command should look, for all prayer, all the time, for all the saints.

19 as well as on my behalf, that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel— 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains—so that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

21 But that you also may know about all my affairs, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know our circumstances, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Paul says pray for all the saints, but in particular, as an example of how we should pray for each other, Paul says, you can start with me;

praying / petitioning God; *on my behalf, that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel— 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains—so that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

Paul gets right to the specific need. Boldness. Pray for boldness for me so that the words will make it out of my mouth boldly with boldness. What words exactly Paul? The gospel.

What happens every time Paul boldly preaches the gospel? He gets beat up and drug to the edge of town and left for dead. That's real. You can read

through the lists of beatings and tortures and left for deads and nights and days in the deep in the book of Corinthians.

He'd preach the gospel and the jews would begin the blowback. But nobody liked them much either so the jews would go get the city officials and shopkeepers and everyone else frothed up to a riot. Another beating. Another 39 lashes. Another dragging out of town and left for dead.

If anything, Paul's example of how to pray is probably very understated. Do you get the ambassador in chains thing? Paul was still a free man when he went to Ephesus the first time and after the initial rejection, he stayed with the new church there for 3 years.

But after the trip to Jerusalem, when he stopped and visited the elders one last time, the riot in Jerusalem that ensued would have snuffed out his life, except he played the Roman citizen card, and they couldn't kill him, so they bound him with chains and sent him to Rome for trial.

He was literally in chains when he wrote to the Ephesians. No longer a free man. But still an ambassador. I like the enemy combatant thing better than ambassador. I watch too much TV. But we are ambassadors from another kingdom doing our Kings business in a land ruled by en enemy.

It was the gospel that caused the chains. But no matter, because Paul was a doulos, a slave of Jesus, long before Rome's chains throttled him. God used Rome's chains in order for Paul to have time to write these letters we still study today. Take that Satan. 2000 years worth of doctrine caused by Satan's persecution of Paul with Sovereign God in ultimate control.

Paul continues his example. Pray for his boldness to open his mouth boldly with the gospel is the general over arching request in his example. But he doesn't stop there.

21 But that you also may know about all my affairs, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will make

everything known to you. 22 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know our circumstances, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Tychicus will fill you in on details for very specific petitions for Paul and the saints with him. Do you remember where Acts 20 says Tychicus is from? Asia. Ephesus is probably his home church. He was Paul's postman. We can thank Tychicus when we get to heaven for us having Ephesians and Colossians. He very likely delivered both of those letters to the recipients, and they became part of the new testament canon.

Paul's example to us is to let us know that he didn't stop at the big general prayer request for boldness, he does what people who love each other do and sends all the personal details and needs for them to pray and petition God for, with Tychicus.

Pray. Pray for the saints. Pray for the big things. Pray for the little things.

We live in a culture where privacy is over played. We are taught by the world to guard our space. This is my space and you have no business knowing what or how I'm doing. My weaknesses and challenges are my business and we are told by this world to keep a wall of protection up. No one needs to know what or how I'm doing. You mind your biz and I'll mind mine. I'm not accountable to anyone.

But that doesn't work very well with how Paul commands us to pray for each other. We need to be in each others lives enough to know how to pray effectively for each others needs.

There's no record of Paul having anyone pray for his own personal wellness or comfort. Paul prayed for his personal thorn in the flesh three times, and God told him; The answer to your question is no. My grace is sufficient for thee.

It's OK to pray for all the ingrown toenails that are making us

uncomfortable. But perhaps in Paul's example, we should be praying for specific petitions that advance God's agenda in this world, before ours. Paul didn't ask them to pray for his safety. He told them to pray for the very thing that caused him danger. Kingdom first, Paul second, or not at all. That's our example.

I fear if God answered all of our prayers in the order we prayed them a whole bunch of people would get physically well and then die without God.

Prayer is designed by God to be sort of like a corporate check book. It's a checkbook with unlimited kingdom money to be spent on kingdom advancement. And we should think of it as if we would stand before the accountant and explain what every check of kingdom money that we wrote was for and what it accomplished for the kingdom.

Pauls prayer request is our example. He doesn't ask for anything that would make his life better. He doesn't ask them to pray for his release or his health or his comfort or his wellbeing or anything else that could be spent on himself. He says pray for this mouth of mine. Pray that it will speak with boldness the good news.

He asks for kingdom advancement over anything else. In fact what he asks them to pray for is the very same thing that has gotten him beaten and stoned and whipped and is also the same thing that has caused his chains. The gospel ushered many many thousands into the kingdom, but for Paul it was the source of all of his personal problems.

Even so, pray that my mouth will be opened boldly. Apparently that prayer request was answered and Paul was dead within about 5 years.

If prayer is a corporate checkbook and we all must stand before the accountant and give an accounting of what we did with the kingdom's money; How are we doing? No misappropriation of funds based on the fact that we did nothing the whole time is not a good answer.

That kind of sounds like the lukewarm church in Revelation 3. Or it sounds like the talents guy that got the one talent and said, I'm too busy investing my own capital in me to bother investing your kingdom money, but at least I'm not a hypocrite, here's your talent you gave me. I didn't spend it.

Beloved, I hope that's not us, because both of those scenarios wind up in hell.

Well, we need to keep moving along. Why would a church turn deaf ears to christian warfare? Why would a church and / or individuals in the church, not be spending the King's capital to advance the King's holdings in this world? Handily, the answer is in Paul's final words to the Ephesians.

Verses 23 and 24 are Paul's benediction. They are the final doxology given to the Ephesians.

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

Within that beautiful benediction is the motive for people who charge into the King's battle. We are to be waging war against the usurper who stole the glory of this world for himself, and we are about the King's business of rescuing and retaking captured souls for the glory of the King.

We do battle against the King's enemy. We spend the King's capital fighting the King's war. We invest our lives fighting for our King. Everything else is secondary. Kingdom advancement and glory returned to our King who is rightful owner is primary. Before everything else.

Who does that, and what motivates people who live like that?

Answer; Peace. Inner peace. Wellness far beyond this world that is perishing. A peace from God combined with love and faith. Peace and

love and faith from another world.

Listen, the world is condemned. This world is in full rebellion against the God who owns it. They are not at peace. They are at war with God.

But those of us who have been called out of this world, given forgiveness for our sins, and who are now at peace with God are sent back into this world with the good news that peace with God is available and it's free.

Love for the one who died in our place to purchase the peace we enjoy is what motivates christians to take that message to everyone we can in this condemned world. Forgiveness is available. Peace with God is available. Love, real uncorruptible eternal love is available.

Grace and peace and love and faith are what make us different in this world.
They are what motivates us to live for our King, in this world.

23 Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love.

Amen.