

Opening Words

Not everyone will be in full-time ministry, but all of us are called to something far greater than full-time ministry. We are called to the full-time ministry of reigning with Christ when he returns.

49 Ephesians Walk Worthy

I am so excited about these broadcasts where we consider God's Word together because his word will protect us. You know, you and I are living in a time of great deception. This morning I was reading a news article about a doctor who says he has proof that heaven exists. But even though that sounds great on the surface, I was a little suspicious. We do believe, of course, in heaven! But my guard was up, and sure enough, as I read this article and heard what this doctor had to say about his out of body experience I read words of deception. The sad thing is that most people, including many Christians will be deceived by his words.

That's why we need to study God's word diligently, put it into practice, and develop a biblical worldview. That's why WGS Ministries exists – to teach and preach God's word to protect God's people from spiritual dangers and to equip God's people to live his word and make a difference in the world.

We find ourselves in Ephesians 4. In our previous broadcast, I gave a picture of the last three chapters of Ephesians and shared how it emphasizes living our faith. We have had the doctrine, now it is time for the duty, time for the walk. John Stott, the great British teacher of the past century said these chapters

“moves us from the new society (that Paul described in chapters 1-3) to the new standards which are expected of it. Paul turns from exposition to exhortation, from what God has done ... to what we must be and do ... from doctrine to duty ... from mind stretching theology to its down-to-earth, concrete implications in everyday living.”

I really like that quote, and you can't get much more down to earth than the words of Ephesians 4:1-3. Listen to Paul's words to us:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There's our key word *walk* – Paul has told us how to think. Now he is going to tell us how to walk based upon right thinking which is why he begins the verse with the word “therefore.” Therefore, considering all that I have said, walk in a manner worthy of the calling. But notice that Paul also reinforces his exhortation by saying, “Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord.”

It is important to remember that Paul wrote this letter from prison. He was under house arrest and though his conditions were not destitute, he was in chains to a Roman guard and his life was in danger from the Roman authorities who would eventually execute him. But Paul relabeled those

Roman chains and rather than them being a mark of enslavement to the Roman authorities, he learned to see them as a mark of his enslavement to Jesus Christ. He called himself the prisoner of the Lord, not a prisoner of Rome. And there is an important lesson for us here because life sometimes deals us hardships as it dealt Paul hardships and we must think of the hardships correctly.

The other day, a good friend called and said, “Jonathan, how’s life treating you?” Well, I didn’t have a cheery answer for him. Life was treating me badly at that moment, and I was honest with him about what was going on. But, while I was honest, I didn’t let my circumstances define who I was or let my circumstances overwhelm my sense of Christian mission and duty to honor the Lord.

Paul does the same here. From the perspective of the times in which he lived, from the perspective of the civil authorities, he was the prisoner of Rome. But Paul did not think of himself that way. He was the prisoner of the Lord.

Let me ask you something – what has the world dealt to you? In what distressing circumstance or limitation has the world or life placed you? I want to encourage you with something – God wants you to re-label that. God wants you to have a different perspective. Whatever it is you are experiencing or going through, God wants you to see it from his perspective and to translate it from being a prisoner of the world or a prisoner of circumstances or a victim of what someone else has done to you into a new perspective where God takes ownership of it and where God works out a higher purpose in your life.

I would like to pray for you right now. “Heavenly Father, you know the hearts of many who are listening to this right now whose hearts are heavy. They are in chains in some way. They are in prison in some way. I pray that you would help them see their circumstances in a new way. Help them to view themselves as your prisoner and help them to see that you can and will overrule their circumstances and work something out for good. Help them to see that your power to work good is greater than the world’s power to work evil. And I pray this in Jesus’ name – Amen!” I hope God ministers to you through that prayer and these words.

Paul was a prisoner of the Lord in two ways: He was chained to God with cords of love. It was his love of Christ that forged those chains. If Paul did not love Christ, he would not have been in prison. If Paul had loved himself he would have been a free man. He would have been out of jail doing something unrelated to Christ. But because he loved Christ so much, because he was a prisoner of his love, he found himself in an earthly prison, but the earthly prison was just a shadow compared to the reality of his being bound to the love of Christ.

Second, Paul was a prisoner for Christ because he was bound to his purposes. You can’t separate the two. If you love Christ, you will love what he is doing. You will want to be with him and want to do what he is doing. Paul came to understand that Christ was extending his kingdom authority in the world through the proclamation of the gospel of the grace of God. And Paul’s heartbeat became to extend the kingdom of God, to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over the earth and to call men into this relationship of love and grace that he was experiencing. Paul lived, ate, breathed, and slept the kingdom of God, the grace of God extending to the world. Paul had no other purpose. This

consumed him. Paul set aside distractions and things unworthy of the Lord and unworthy of this high calling, and it landed him in prison.

And while we can be sure that he would rather have not been in prison, on one level it did not matter to him if his imprisonment was for the cause of Christ. If Paul had been freed he would have done the same thing he was doing while in prison – witnessing to anyone and everyone – writing letters of encouragement and he would have had the freedom to visit churches and new places to share Christ. I think this is why he told the Corinthians in 7:21-24, “Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but if you are able also to become free, rather do that. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord’s freedman; likewise, he who was called while free, is Christ’s slave. You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called.”

Whatever situation you are in, remain with God. Devote yourself fully to his cause. Bind yourself to his purposes and to the way he will express his purposes through you.

Paul tells us then to walk worthy of the calling with which we have been called. In Christian circles, when we use the word calling, we normally reserve that for people who are in full-time ministry. We hear stories of men and women who say, “I was called to preach. I was called to be a missionary. I was called to this church. I was called to this ministry.” That is fine and legitimate. I sensed that in my own life as a young man. I sensed that God was speaking to me and calling me to live my life as a Bible teacher.

But as fine as these uses of this word are, this is not what Paul has in mind here, and I don’t want us to miss the rich meaning that Paul has by our modern use of the word. When Paul talks about our calling he is talking about the calling of every Christian, and he is talking about God calling all of us to an eternal destiny of glory where we will be like Christ and reign with him.

We have already seen in 1:18 where Paul prayed, that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened, so that we will know what is the hope of His calling. Notice how the calling is associated with our great hope. In this context, here in Ephesians 4 he does the same. In 4:4 he says, “there is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling.”

And so, brothers and sisters, we are all called. Many will not be in full-time ministry, but we are all called to something far greater than full-time ministry. We are called to the full-time ministry of reigning with Christ when he returns. We are called to the noble destiny of being his mature sons and daughters who perfectly reflect his image on earth. This is our great hope and with such a hope before us, we should find great motivation to walk worthy of this calling.

So, let me ask, “how does a future king and queen act? How does a future son or daughter of the King of kings and Lord of lords behave? How does a person who is destined to be a joint heir with Christ conduct himself?”

That is what Paul addresses in these verses, and this is what we will examine even more closely when we gather again in our next broadcast.