

Ephesians 14-03-16b

We pick up our study in Ephesians chapter 4, verse 1. After Paul reviews again his prayer in chapter 1, he talked about the content of his prayers for these believers, which is an expression of goal and objective for all believers. He reiterates that in chapter 3, I bow my knees to the Father, that he will grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man. And this is the power working in us.

It is God the Father, it is God the Son, it is God the Holy Spirit. That is the presence and the power of God. How does the power of God come into the life of the believer? It is the Spirit of God and the Word of God.

This creates the presence of Christ. It creates the presence of God the Father. It is as though we are both receiving a visit from the Lord Jesus for a fellowship meal and entering into the throne room of God the Father, coming boldly before the throne of grace in the presence.

That presence of God is created by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. So these are the things we cultivate. The Spirit of God is not going to be active and effective.

If we are busy sinning, entertaining sin in our hearts, leaving it unconfessed, leaving it as an issue between ourselves and the Lord, we've got to think about 1 John 1, 7-9. And it is important to spend time cogitating, thinking about what does the Word of God mean. This is, I think, the hardest part.

Everybody can rip off a quick, Oh Lord, I sinned. I claim your gracious forgiveness through the blood of Jesus Christ for this fault and here's what it was. This is what I did not do or this is what I did.

That's usually a part of our routine if we're a growing believer. The hard part is to stop and reflect. Spend time thinking about why did God present to me this passage in Ephesians chapter 3 and this passage in Ephesians chapter 4 at this particular time in my life.

In the providences and in the incredible divine power that God has, He brought this passage to you and to me at this time in our lives and it is meaningful and pertinent right now for all of us. So what is the meaning and pertinence? Well, we've got to think about it. Why are we studying Elisha? Why are we looking at a hundred men being fed barley loaves? Why are we looking at widows receiving their sons restored to life? Why did the Lord Jesus specifically mention Elisha and Naaman the leper and the widow of Zarephath? Why did the Lord Jesus mention those things? Actually the widow he mentions is the one earlier on.

But the Sidonian widow and the Syrian general, Jesus is making a point. We need to think about these things. So we come to chapter 4 and once again, just as we saw in chapter 1, just as we saw in chapter 2, just as we saw in chapter 3, I therefore, understanding what God is doing in and

through the church, what it means to have the power of God at work, what our destiny, what our purpose, what our reason for being is, knowing that, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord.

This is the recollection we spent a lot of our chapter 3 looking at, I Paul the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. Now here in chapter 4, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord. Why does he say this? Why doesn't he say, I Paul a prisoner of Rome? I Paul a prisoner because of the mean legalistic Jews in my vicinity.

I Paul the persecuted former Pharisee. Have you thought about this phrase? The prisoner of Christ Jesus? The prisoner of the Lord? What does it mean to be a prisoner of the Lord? Does the Lord have prisoners? A little chain gang? It's the Christ Jesus chain gang? Used to be. You don't see this anymore.

When I was young, they still had chain gangs. You could see them by the side of the road. They'd have these guys out there in their orange jail suits picking up trash.

They don't do that anymore because they'd have to leave the air conditioning and the flat screen TV on the wall of their cell. But used to be, they actually got some work out of the prisoners. Jail used to be no fun.

And they'd put you in your little orange suit. I don't think the guys I saw actually had chains. But down in the South, in Mississippi and Alabama and some of those places, even in the 60s and 70s, they still had guys chained together out there doing work.

What does it mean to be a prisoner of the Lord? Is that what Paul means? Well, there I was. The Lord took me captive, hauled me off, and put me in shackles. Prisoner of the Lord.

Who is he actually a prisoner of at this point? We talked about it in chapter three. He is locked up by the authorities, right? This is the Roman government. And if you want somebody locked up, maybe you're a legalistic Jew and you don't like this guy, you think he's a heretic and a bad guy, you trump up some charges and you get the Romans to lock him up.

Israel's got no provision for jails. You see anything in the Mosaic law about jails keeping prisoners? They don't have any such thing. They take somebody prisoner, they either turn them into slaves or they put their foot on their neck and kill them, one or the other.

They didn't incarcerate in Israel. Rome has prisoners. Rome has jailers.

In Philippi, there is a Roman jailer. Paul is a prisoner in the system. Human beings have imprisoned him.

They are restricting his movements. He can't go preach. He can't go visit churches.

He can't go minister to the needs of these. That's why he's having to write letters. He can't be

there.

So why does Paul say a prisoner of the Lord, a prisoner of Christ Jesus? Well, what does that tell us? Paul is not blaming people. He's not assigning responsibility to anyone for his incarceration. He doesn't say, well, I'm a prisoner because of my own stupidity.

I let myself get caught. I'm a prisoner because of my thorn in the flesh. I couldn't run fast enough and the guards caught me and locked me up.

I'm a prisoner because of those mean old Jews. I'm a prisoner because of the oppressive Romans. I rail against the machine, rage against the machine.

It's the man. He's keeping me down. How does Paul view his circumstance? This is of the Lord.

My prisoner status is of the Lord. This is by God's will that I am a prisoner. And this is amazing to me because Paul could not see what we see.

We've got hindsight. And guess what? This page in your Bible would not be here if Paul wasn't a prisoner. This stuff right here, you wouldn't have this.

It would not be here. Every century, every generation, every believer that has come to the book of Ephesians has come to it because Paul got locked up and couldn't go talk in person. They didn't have tape players, didn't have MP3 recorders, didn't have any kind of recording technology other than pen to paper.

So to record his thoughts, which under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit are valuable for every believer in the church age, Paul is a prisoner. It does two things. It puts him in a circumstance of needing to write a letter.

Now he could have been in a seaside villa writing a letter, right? He could have been John on the Isle of Patmos. He could have just been in exile but free to roam, sit down, get out a little scrap, hey, come here, amanuensis, my eyes are kind of bad, write down what I say. He could have been in great comfort.

Why a prisoner? It does two things. Not only does he have to write to people instead of visiting them, but it puts him in a frame of mind. He is in enforced quietude.

He's not dealing with Pharisees at first hand. He's not going down to the synagogue and debating. He's not traveling.

He's not staying in inns and lodges. He's not being asked questions by passers-by and by those to whom he comes and visits and stays and people in the house keeping him up late asking him questions. I mean, can you imagine? We talked about having the Lord Jesus as a visitor.

If you had the Apostle Paul as a visitor, would the guy ever get any sleep? Well, I just got one

more question, Paul. You remember over here when you were talking in Romans and you said, you know, the wrath of God and the, you know, Jacob if I loved, could you really explain that a little bit more? You know, this whole, you know, are the Calvinists right? How did, you know, Paul would never get, I would, I would, I will not let you go until you answer my, I'd be like Jacob wrestling all night with the, with the man, you know, Paul would have to give me a thorn in the flesh to leave him alone. But he's in a circumstance that brings out of him these thoughts, this set of spiritual observations and doctrinal truths.

We wouldn't have this letter if he hadn't been a prisoner. We wouldn't have it physically, he wouldn't have written it and the content wouldn't be the same. The thoughts that God brought to his mind, the conclusions that God put in his heart and helped him to draw in his circumstances forged this letter.

This letter was forged in the heat of captivity, hammered with the blacksmith's hammer of incarceration. And God used those harsh circumstances to bring out of Paul's soul this letter. And this letter is priceless, priceless.

This by the way is one of Paul's undisputed letters. Nobody says Paul didn't write Ephesians. They'll dispute some of the others, but not Ephesians.

It is a beautiful letter and so freighted with divine truth. Well, he says, I'm a prisoner of the Lord. I'm a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

Now how about you and me? Think about a circumstance you find restrictive, unhelpful. Well, in this area, you know, I've got this issue going on. You know, the older you get, the more often that falls into the health category or the capability category.

I used to, now I can't. But it can be a lot of things. I'm financially limited.

I am circumstantially limited. I am professionally limited. I can't get to where I want to be.

I've got a degree. Nobody's hiring. I've got capabilities.

Nobody wants them. I can't find somebody to appreciate my strengths and make use of them. I'm flipping burgers when I want to be flipping stocks and bonds.

You know, I want to be flipping houses. I want to be up in the world of big ideas and big money, big achievements. And instead, I'm in this menial thing.

I would love to be doing this, but I must necessarily do that. I am imprisoned. I am chained.

I am restricted. I'm not where I want to be. I'm not doing what I want to do.

You know what Paul says? Just tack on of the Lord. I am limited to domestic chores of the Lord. I

am in this particular job of the Lord.

I am in this particular relationship of the Lord. I've got this health problem of the Lord. Just when you start thinking about the negatives, just tack on.

This is what Paul does. I'm a prisoner. He doesn't go on and talk about the Romans and the beatings.

There's other places. You can go over to Corinthians, for example, 2 Corinthians 11.23, talking about these that are naysaying Paul. And he says, Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool.

I am more so. In labors, more abundant. In stripes, above measure.

Paul has lost track of how many times he's been chained to a post and whipped. He can't remember how many times. Above measure.

In prisons, more frequently. In deaths, often. At the very risk of his life.

And as an older guy, with no antiseptics to speak of and no real medical care, getting your ribs cracked and getting your flesh flayed, the risk of infection, that's death. Infection is death in the ancient world. They didn't have the knowledge that we have today.

In Philippians 1, verse 7, It is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel you all are partakers with me of grace. And he talks later on in Philippians 1, verse 13 and following, It's become evident to the whole palace guard, to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ. My chains aren't Roman chains.

My chains aren't Pharisaical Israelite leadership chains. Jewish chains. My chains are in Christ.

And most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. We think, this is bad for me. This circumstance limits me.

And yet God is using those things to bring out of us, bring out of our hearts, and express truth that reflects His glory. Glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, to all generations forever and ever. You think, now wait a minute.

The fact that I'm not doing well in this particular area, I remember thinking this. I had been listening to a pastor who was talking about all the blessings that God was going to give you if you're doing the right thing, and paid attention to the teaching of the word of God. And he called it super grace.

You get super grace. You get super grace blessings, above and beyond blessings, in five different categories. And one of them is professional.

I thought, well here I am, I'm a midshipman, so I'm going to be getting these super grace blessings because I am faithful to listen to the word of God. I'm thinking about it. I'm keeping short accounts, confessing my sins.

I'm constantly in prayer. And I did terrible. I had bad grades.

I was getting called on the carpet for various malfunctions. And I thought, hey, wait a minute. Where's my super grace blessings? I'm hitting it hard here.

I'm staying up in the shower at night, listening to Bible class on tapes. I've got my little tape player. I'm huddled around it trying to muffle the sound in the shower, trying to take notes in my sleep time after I've already spent an 18-hour day running around, burning 6,000 calories.

Now I'm here in the shower trying to get my Bible class in, trying to keep my spiritual priorities, and I'm doing awful. Where's my super grace blessings? To him, glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. It's not short term.

It's not immediately, and it's not all about me. Glory to Sam. Look how good Sam's doing.

Boy, he's top of his platoon, honor man. He's getting stripes. He's getting stars.

He's getting promotions. Look at that guy. He's going to be brigade commander.

He's just a plea. They're just going to promote him right over the next three classes. Look at him.

The guy is just made out of military. I mean, look at the cover of Shipmate magazine. Let's just put the flags behind him.

Oh, my gosh. We can't stop this guy. He glows in the dark.

Bullets coming out of his fingers. He's just insanely the epitome of everything. It's not glory to Sam, and I figured this out slowly, that that isn't really the promise in the word of God.

I either misunderstood the pastor or the pastor messed it up, but I came to realize that this is the forge. This is the heat. This is the fire, and this is the hammer, and this is what makes me what I need to be, and this is the way that God's glory is going to be reflected.

God's glory is not always reflected in our successes. It is often reflected in our endurance, in our faith, in our patience, in our confidence, when it doesn't look like there's any reason to be confident, and we trust him anyway. That is the reflection of the glory by Christ Jesus in the church, not just now, not just in the immediate, not on the cover of the magazine, but to all generations forever and ever.

These are invisible things that will be visible later on. So Paul says, I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord. This is how we've got to look at our challenges, our restrictions, the things that we

initially think are negative.

It's of the Lord. This limitation is of the Lord. This lack of opportunity is of the Lord.

This slowdown, this shortfall, this brick wall that's making my head bloodier and bloodier with every bash, it's of the Lord. This is the brick wall of the Lord. Prisoner of the Lord.

That's why it's repeated here. You've got it in chapter 3. You've got it in chapter 4. You've got it throughout the letters of Paul. My chains are being used by God over in Philippians.

My chains are in Christ. My chains are making others confident and bold because people aren't looking at Paul in chains. They're looking at God in heaven and saying, look at what God is doing through Paul.

And Paul's locked up. Think what would happen if they let Paul loose. Well, the whole Roman world would get turned upside down and they're not ready for that.

God's got to lock Paul up to keep the whole place from flaming up in revolution. Incarcerated, the world gets turned upside down. Think what would happen if Paul had never been locked up.

A, he would have been much more free to speak in person and verbally, and B, we'd have a lot less of the record down through the ages. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, plead with you, beseech you, appeal to you. Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

Let me ask you a question. Have you been called with a calling? Are you a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you alive? Yes, you have been called with a calling. Do you know what your calling is? A little piece of notepaper there.

Draw a little box. My calling, colon. What is it? It's an open book test.

You've got it right in front of you. My calling, colon. Ephesians chapter 3, verse 21.

To God be the glory, in the church, by Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever. Context, context, context. What is the calling with which you were called? You are called to be a reflection of God's glory, by Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever.

It's not a light thing. That is your calling. Ephesians chapter 3, verse 10.

To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known, by the church, by me, by you, to the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies, according to the eternal purpose, which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. We in Him, He in us. It's the eternal purpose.

And it eternally reflects God's glory. That is the calling. Now, can you fill in your calling box? My calling, colon, is what? To be a reflection of the glory of God, by Christ Jesus.

The eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Verse 11. Now, what does Paul say? Be sure you remember your calling.

Be sure you can write down your calling next time you get the pop quiz. What does he say in chapter 4, verse 1? I plead with you, I beseech you, since I've already told you what your calling is, to do what? What is the imperative here? What is the command? What is the desire? What is the request on Paul's part here? And God through him. Walk worthy.

What does walk mean? You know, halak in Hebrew, peripateo in Greek. It literally is talking about one foot in front of the other. What does it mean here? What is your walk? What is your peripateo? It's your life.

It's your lifestyle. You hear people use the phrase, your Christian walk. Well, you're talking about your... But it becomes a trite thing.

I try very hard to avoid having repetitive mannerisms in speaking, but everybody has them, and everybody that has them isn't aware that they have them, and so they do them, and you can't help it until you find out. Listening to yourself on tape is a very humbling experience. But I used to hear a pastor, and unconsciously one of his verbal tics was to say, in life, as you do this in life, as this happens in life.

Well, it's sort of unnecessary because everything happens in life. It's not in death. It's not in space.

It's not in a cave. But it was kind of a gap filler. As you pray in life, as you study the Word of God in life, as you encounter difficulties in life.

And once I noticed it, then I couldn't get my mind off it. It was just like my mental highlighter would go off every time. I'm sure I have those.

You can tell me later, and I'll try to clean them up. But here, the prisoner of the Lord, I beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. Because you are church, you've already gotten this calling.

It was issued in the past. And we are to live, we are to function in life in the light of this calling. Everything we do is a part of our walk.

So, you say, all right, I've got the whole picture. I understand the calling. I filled in my box.

My calling is, I want to reflect the glory of God. I want the presence of Christ. I know how to do that.

It's the Word and the Spirit. Have my words and keep them. Stand at the door and knock.

Come in. Have the meal. Got it.

Got it down. Fine. I'm with you.

He says, walk worthy of that calling. So, we're going to leave here. Fold up the tents and steal silently into the desert and go off and live our little Bedouin lifestyle.

I'm ready. Got it all nailed down. How do you walk worthy? What does it mean to walk worthy? Be holy.

Do good things. I need something a little more tangible, a little more concrete. Thankfully, Paul gives us the means in the next verse.

Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called in, by, with. This is a wonderful thing about the dative, locative, instrumental case in Greek. When you want to say something generally and you want to leave it a bit nebulous, you can use the dative, locative, or instrumental.

You just put your words in that and it can be in, by, or with. If you want to be more specific, you throw in a preposition. Here we have the preposition, meta, with.

Meta is a complex word. Since we're trying to figure out the means here, we're trying to figure out the mechanism. With all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another.

You've got three withs in the same sentence. But it's meta. Meta is a flexible preposition.

We generally translate it as with, but it has a lot more meaning than that. It carries with it a lot of the force of the dative, locative, and instrumental, just depending on context. Here it has an instrumental force, with in the sense of by means of.

If I say, dig a hole with this shovel, that's using this shovel. By means of this shovel. I don't say, dig a hole in the shovel.

I would have to get a torch. I could say, dig a hole by the shovel. This is a shovel-dug hole.

I could say, oven-roasted this, that, and the other. Roast this by oven, by a flame. But with, in by, or with, by means of, is the idea here.

So, here's the answer to the question, how do you walk worthy? By means of all lowliness. This is an even longer word in Greek than it is in English. It is typano-phrosyne.

Typano-phrosyne. This is quite a common word in Greek, but it means not toe-kicking in the dirt. Aw, shucks, I'm no good, I'm nothing.

I have a low opinion of myself. My self-esteem is at its lowest ebb. It's not that kind of lowliness.

It is recognition of your place of service. All of us, even people in very high offices and very high positions, have some areas where they serve. And lowliness has the sense of service.

Recognizing that it is to serve. What did Jesus do in the upper room? The disciples are arguing about who's going to be the greatest. What did he do? Wrapped a towel around his waist, and did the service job of cleaning their feet.

This is more practical than you might think. It's not just symbolic. You remember the way they arranged themselves around the table? There's head to foot, head to foot, head to foot.

Everybody's kind of reclining, and their head is toward the table. Well, if you think about it, somebody's feet are going to be near your head. And it'd be nice if they were clean.

Especially in those days. It's not like there are hot showers and daily baths, and these guys are wearing sandals and traipsing through camel paths and tracks. It would be nice if there wasn't something odiferous between the toes of the person you're reclining next to.

And so it was a very wonderful service that someone would perform to cleanse the feet before people had a feast. Particularly that upper room meal, the last that the Lord would share with the disciples. And Jesus cleansed their feet.

And he said, As I have done for you, you should do for others. Now, we talk about Jesus meek and mild. Do you think of Jesus as having low self-esteem? Do you think of him feeling bad about himself? This is strength under control.

To be great enough to serve. And it doesn't diminish what you know yourself to be. It doesn't change who you know yourself to be in Christ.

Jesus wasn't diminished when he came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. He emptied himself. Didn't think equality with God a thing to be grasped.

Took on the form of a servant. Came in the likeness of men. Humbled himself.

Became obedient. And it didn't diminish the Lord Jesus. Wives, it doesn't diminish you to submit to your husbands.

Enlisted men, it doesn't diminish you to submit yourselves to officers. Children, it doesn't diminish you to submit yourselves to your parents. Submission is typano fursune.

It is recognition of a place of service. It's an opportunity to follow the Lord Jesus in not being so proud that you can't fulfill a function. A needed function.

To be that particular gear in the machine that makes everything else work. You take one gear out of a wind-up clock, nothing works. The tiniest, most insignificant gear with the fewest teeth, you

pull it out, the clock is done.

The watch no longer functions. Every gear is equally important. Some are big with many teeth.

Others are small with a few teeth. But every single one of them has to be in its place doing what it's supposed to do or the whole machine fails. Well, why can't I be a big gear? Why can't I have more teeth? Well, it's ridiculous.

I don't need a big gear with many teeth. I need a little gear with small teeth or I didn't get to keep time. This is your assigned place.

Can you do it? Walk worthy of your calling. Do you want God's glory to be reflected to all generations forever and ever in the church by Christ Jesus? Then understand what lowliness and gentleness and longsuffering are. This is where we're going to pick our study up next time, is taking a look at these qualities because this is the how.

How do I walk worthy of the calling? Got the calling. Understand it. You've been over it.

You've reviewed it. Reviewed it again. Got it.

I can fill in the calling box. What I want to know now is how. Give me the step-by-step.

This is what we do now. I'm working on a project right now and I need somebody to give me a step-by-step. How do you get this particular thing done? If your dashboard lights go out in your Ford Expedition, somebody has posted a step-by-step.

Here's how you take your dash apart. Here's where the screws are. They've got little labeled pictures.

You go in. Here's the circuit board you pull out. Here's the connections that you re-solder because they've gotten cold and cracked.

And you put it back together and now your odometer works again. Step-by-step. That's what I need.

I don't want the theory. I don't want the history of the Ford Expedition. I need somebody to give me step-by-step to make this work.

Coming up here in these next few verses, this is the step-by-step for the worthy walk. So we don't want to miss it. It begins, as with everything in our life, with recognizing where the power comes from.

It can be described. It can be shown. But, hey, if you don't own a soldering iron, what's the point of the step-by-step? You don't have the ability because you don't have the tools.

Our tools are the Word of God and the Spirit of God. This is our enablement. This is what makes it possible for us to follow the steps.

And that's what we work on day by day, is cultivating the ever more present and powerful ministry of God's Holy Spirit. How do we do that? Prayer. Ensuring that we don't have obstructions of sin and patterns of evil.

We know what those are. It can be gossip. It can be bad attitudes.

It can be apathy and indifference. It can be distraction. It can be allowing other things to elbow God out.

It can be additions that shouldn't be there. Chopping gourds into the pot. It can be any one of a number of things.

We have our hands full trying to ensure that the house is ready so that when the Lord Jesus is standing at the door and knocking, and we open the door, He's willing to come in and sit down and share that fellowship meal. We're going to see the details of this in these next several verses in our upcoming studies. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for the incredible order and beauty and symmetry of Your plan. That You were willing to include us in our imperfection and our fallenness and our corruption is a measure of the greatness of Your power and Your grace to take us and turn us into something not only useful, but something that is eternally valuable in reflecting Your glory and expressing Your manifold wisdom. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ in whom all of these things are possible.

We pray that Your Holy Spirit will keep us aware and mindful of our calling and the enablement You have given to us to fulfill it, to walk worthy of it. We know that this vindicates and justifies and glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf and our privilege as His church, His body, and one day His bride. We thank You for these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.