

Early reading: Acts **14.** vs 26, 27, 28 + **15.** 1-12a, NLT.

Paul & Barnabas are returning home after their 1st Missionary journey.

Read: Ephesians 3. 1- 5

**Back to v1. I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus
because of my preaching to you Gentiles.**

As you know ...

Paul was not in prison, for any crime he'd committed:
But, because of the Jewish leaders: **prejudice & jealousy !**

Many years previously ...

Rome's armies had first, conquered **northern Europe.**

Then ~ they went West into **Spain** & over to **Britain,**

East ... all the way to **Persia** (Iran) and finally:

South, through **Syria & Israel**, to **Jordan & Egypt.**

That part, of modern Turkey ~ around Ephesus.

that Rome called: **'Proconsular Asia'**

had been conquered much earlier ... **back in ...133 BC.**

So, Paul is writing this letter to them ~ about 200 years
after Rome took control of their city.

Initially ~ each of the conquered nations,
was granted a level of Self Government ...
and the freedom to practice their own religion and culture.

BUT ~ Rome ... remained in ultimate control !

So Rome ~ was always wary of anyone recruiting 'followers'
to **rebel** against them, & turn the Romans out.

The Jewish leaders in Israel,
Who opposed, both Paul ~ & Christianity,
Had suggested: that Paul was travelling across the Empire.
To gain **followers** for a new King ~ namely **Jesus**.

They said ... this had all the marks of ~ “**an uprising**”
And **that** would be **treason** ! So, Rome had to be concerned.
But even Pilate was aware ...
Of the ‘**Jealousy, & Competitiveness**’ of the Jewish leaders.

Over time they’d developed: *very entrenched attitudes:*
of Jewish superiority ~ over every other race.
So, to have **one of their own** ~ teaching Gentiles ...
that the Jewish Messiah ... **had already come**, & that
Gentiles could be: On an equal footing **with them** before God

That was: **Unbelievable** ~ **Unacceptable** ~ **& such Heresy**
to the Jews ~ that it must be stopped ~ **by any means !**

The Ephesians knew all this. Paul says:
‘There’s another way of looking at my imprisonment’

I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus, because of my preaching to you Gentiles

In stating this ~ Paul couldn’t possibly know,
how large an audience, he would eventually have !

Not only the Gentiles across Greece, Italy, & Asia, in his day,
but down through all ~ the last 2000 years ~ to us as well.

If Paul had **not, been locked up in prison,
He would have revisited the Ephesian Church,
And preached to them ~ ‘face to face’.**

This ... and Paul’s other 12 letters ~ written from prison,
Would not have been written down !
Half of our NT ~ would not have been written at all !

You may remember, when Paul was confronted by the Lord
on the road into Damascus, he was temporarily blinded,
and had to be led by the hand ~ into the city.

Listen to the latter part of the story in: Acts 9. vs.10-17

Back to **Ephesians: 3.vs 2-6.**

Following the Damascus road, incident ...
Paul refers to his experience and He reminds them ...

**That God’s grace being available to the Gentiles,
was new information ~ that was completely unheard of,
before their generation.**

God’s plan ~ showed that God was not surprised
by mankind’s sinful behaviour ... But instead:

He’d always had a plan ~ of how to deal justly, with sin.
Many of the Gentile Christians:
Listening to Paul’s letter being read ~ were household slaves.
So they were very familiar, with the concept of ‘**house rules**’

Similarly today ... Whether you're ~ a share-milker,
a mechanic ~ a teacher ~ or an office worker,

When you go to a new job ...
someone will explain '**the house rules**' to you.

'This is how we do things round here' ~ & by implication:
This is how we expect you ~ to do them, too.

v2: **God has given me this special ministry,**
of announcing his favour to you Gentiles.

Paul wants them to know ... that what he's teaching,
Is **not** just his own ideas ~ but **God's 'house rules'**

The important thing ~ that had originally confused Paul,
(and was so strongly rejected by the Jewish leaders)

Was that ~ in God's eyes ~

The Gentiles, could be ~ on an equal footing with the **Jews.**
Remember ~ the word ~ '**Gentile**' ~ meant '**all**' non-Jews.

v6. **And this is the secret plan:**
The Gentiles have an equal share with the Jews
in all the riches inherited by God's children.
Both groups have believed the Good News, and
Both, are part of the same body and enjoy together
the promise of blessings through Christ Jesus.

There are ... **3** points to notice:
Both ~ Jews & Gentiles, will be:
***Heirs together, &
Sharers together,
& are promised: the same Blessings.***

1^{stly} ‘Heirs together’ ~ of an eternal inheritance,
It **was**, and **is** ~ **guaranteed** ~ it’s secure.

When we write a will, we appoint one or more people to be
the ‘Executors’ ~ They are responsible to see that our wishes,
in regard to our estate ~ and our heirs.
Are faithfully, carried out !

Sometimes ~ heirs have been ‘short changed’ ...
or defrauded ~ of their inheritance !

Paul wants the Gentiles to be **confident**:
That their **‘Spiritual Inheritance’** is **safe**.
Because it’s **guaranteed** ... by God Himself.
So it cannot be disallowed by the **High Priest**, or anyone else.

2^{ndly} ‘Sharers together’

Our fellowship with each other, is special and unique.
Both Jews & Gentiles are **members** of the same body.
The Lord doesn’t differentiate between us,
So there’s ***no heavenly ‘class system.’***

The 'Earthly status' of the Christians, seated in the church,
'**slave or free**' ... would not be reflected in heaven,
So it shouldn't be reflected in the church ... either.

This fellowship of God's people ~ enables us to take a holiday
(In another city, for example) & go to church on a Sunday.

Where we can have fellowship ...

With people ~ we've never met before !

Because we both have a relationship with **the same Lord**,
We can have that special fellowship, with each other.

3^{rdly} 'enjoy together the promise of blessings'

Speaks of **our present** ... and **ongoing** relationship
with the Lord,

Back in:

John 14. v15. If you love Me, obey my commandments.

**v16. And I will ask the Father, and He will give
you another Counsellor who will never leave you
He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth.**

Jesus said this, to the disciples in the Upper Room.

But they soon discovered ~ it applied to all Believers.

In Acts **15.vs 8,9.** Peter said: **God, who knows people's hearts
confirmed that he accepts Gentiles, by giving them
the Holy Spirit, just as he gave him to us.**

**He made no distinction between us and them,
for he also cleansed their hearts through faith.**

The Lord promises us two things ~ *a future inheritance*:
‘I go to prepare a place for you’ (John 14.2)
And a present provision: The Holy Spirit (John 14.v16, above)

Both: the **fellowship** we can have with other Christians,
And ...the **power** to live in this present world,
With all its temptations ~ & opposition !
Have been explained by Paul ~ back in chapter, 2.

The provisions of God’s **grace** ~ come through **our faith**,
And that faith involves ~ both: our **belief**, and our **actions**.

Read: Eph.3 vs 7,8,9.

As men and women ~ come to understand the Gospel,
commit their lives ~ to following Jesus Christ,
and are joined into the visible **body** of ‘The Church’
We are **a testimony to God’s wisdom**.

1^{stly}, to the people around us, that we meet every day,
Who can **see** the changes in our lives ~ & the **new attitudes**
we’ve adopted ... But 2^{ndly} ... to the Angels above:

v10:

God’s purpose was **to show his wisdom** in all its rich variety,
to all the rulers and authorities ~ in the heavenly realms.
They will see this, when Jews and Gentiles
are joined together in his Church.

God's wisdom, is demonstrated by our obedience

As he said... in John 14: (v15)

If you love me, obey my commandments.

Coming back to Ephesians.3:

v11. This was his plan from all eternity, and it has now been carried out, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul wants to clarify ~

that God's plans are **not** just ... '*policy made on the hoof*'
In other words, not just **reacting** to things ~ as they happen.

He says:

God's ETERNAL purposes will be achieved in Christ Jesus

The 'Headship' of Christ ... is over the **whole Church,**

With people from different, cultures, languages & locations

So, our 'life experiences' ... are all part of our
preparation,

for His ultimate 'Headship' ... **over the whole Universe.**

v12. Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come fearlessly into God's presence, assured of his glad welcome.

In many **non-Christian** religions ~ both **then** ... and **now**,
There's a huge **fear** of the Deity: *What if He's in a bad mood.
He may punish me for something ... I didn't know was wrong !*

And even amongst some of the Jews, there was a belief that:
It was better to keep God, at 'arms length' & not get too close.

Opposing this thinking ... Paul insists:

We can '**approach God with freedom and confidence.**'

How ? Because we're 'born again' ~ adopted as his children.

And ... **He's** our loving heavenly Father.

v13. So please don't despair,
because of what they are doing to me here.
It is for you that I am suffering,
so you should feel honoured & encouraged.

Paul ...could have been **overcome** with Self Pity & Anger.
'After all I've done for you Lord, **Why** am I stuck in prison ?
Why can't I be out ... preaching the gospel ?
Why doesn't God get me out of this place, Why,Why, Why ?

But ~ as you already know:

His writing ~ was **more important** than his freedom !

Paul is not into self pity ~ But He's concerned,
the Ephesian Christians shouldn't be distracted,
or self-pitying ... either !

The last 7 verses (14-21) form a new section.
With the heading: **Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Empowering**

We'll read vs 14, 15 &18.

Back in v 12 ~ Paul has said:

We can now come fearlessly into God's presence ...

v14b says: I fall to my knees and pray to the Father.

He's not saying ~ he can only pray, when He's on his knees,
But he wants to emphasise that our **freedom & confidence**,
Must always include ... '**reverence.**'

Someone wrote:

“ Our God ... is God, **Almighty** ... not God, **All-matey.**”

The whole 'Christian' family ~ was not just those they could
see around them ~ but many other Christians in other places
including those who would believe ... (in the future)

**v16. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources,
he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit.**

A story ~ to illustrate this:

You notice, an elderly man walking down the street:
Long, dirty hair, a straggly beard and unwashed clothes,
And as he comes closer ... he smells too !

He's prowling the streets ~ poking around in rubbish bins
You're appalled ... But you also feel ... **confused** !

Should you feel sorry for him ? Or just ... **disgusted** ?
As you're watching him,
A Salvation Army officer comes towards you.

So you ask if 'The Sallies' know him ? '**Old Charlie** ?
Oh yes, his appearance and scavenging are both self imposed.
He's got more than half a million dollars in the bank !
He says ... he's saving it ~ for 'a rainy day'!
And before you ask ... 'No,' he's not mentally handicapped !

He's just **totally prejudiced** ~ he accepted **bad advice once**,
& now he **won't accept any advice** ~ from anyone.

Occasionally ... you meet some Christians,
a bit like '**Old Charlie**' !

They have all God's grace & resources available to them !
But they leave it untouched ~ while they live a life that is:

Ineffective ~ **Unattractive**, and a **poor Testimony**,
to the Lord ~ they say they love !

One of the most unique things about the Christian faith:
Is God gives us the resources, to meet our particular needs.

Perhaps **you've experienced** ... a sudden **disaster**.
It hit you very hard. But, as you thought about it later.
You were amazed ... at how well you coped !

God's grace & strength were provided, at just the right time
They helped you, live **through** the situation,
And come out the other side.

That same God given strength, is available to all of us, today

In the 2nd part of his prayer ~ **Paul prays that they,**
May appreciate how great, God's love for them, really is.

v.17: **And I pray that Christ will be,**
more & more at home in your hearts as you trust in him.
May your roots go down deep into the soil
of God's marvellous love.

v.19: **May you experience the love of Christ,**
though it is so great, you will never fully understand it.
Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power
that comes from God.

When we put money in the bank.
We want to know the 'balance' ~ how much, is there,
Then we'll know how much we can spend,
It's a precise amount ... **But God's love, has no such limits !**

Isaiah, Trying to teach this, to the rebellious Jews of his day,
put it like this: **Is 49. vs13-16a**

Sing for joy, O Heavens !
Rejoice O Earth !
Burst into song, O mountains !
For the Lord has comforted his people
And will have compassion on them in their sorrow.

Yet Jerusalem says,
“The Lord has deserted us, the Lord has forgotten us,”
Never ! Can a mother forget her nursing child ?
Can she feel no love for a child she has born ?

But even if that were possible, I would not forget you !
See, I have written your name, on my hand.

The 3rd part of Paul’s prayer ~ vs 20 & 21 are a **benediction**.
emphasising that God’s power within us,
will both **enable us** ~ and ~ bring **glory** to Him !

This is not ... like the passing **glory** of a **sunset**,
or like a beautiful **flower** blooming for a short time !

Christ’s glory is for ever !
And there’s a day coming... **when everyone will see it !**
And then they’ll realise who he really is !

When we’ve sung our last hymn,

We’ll use this Benediction ... To close our Service.

V 20. Now glory be to God !
By his mighty power at work within us,
He is able to accomplish, infinitely more
than we would ever dare to ask or hope.
May he be given glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus,
Forever and ever through endless ages.

Amen