

Paul has just about reached the end of this letter. He has a few greetings left to give and he is done. But this man who was once a Pharisee of the Pharisees—immensely self confident, proud, arrogant, dismissive of others—now turns to his Gentile readers and asks them to pray for him.

When he was a practicing Pharisee he would not have sought prayers from anyone for his trust was in himself. But since having his whole life transformed by the power of Jesus he now yearns for the prayers of others even as he takes every opportunity to pray for them. And often we find him saying to Christians as he says to those at Ephesus, "Pray for me". And always he gives them basically the same prayer request as he gives here in Ephesians 6:19-20

¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Now I'm sure that this wasn't the only prayer point that Paul gave out to others. If he had a specific need he surely would have asked others to pray for that need. But we sense from this and other passages of Scripture that if Paul could only ask for prayer for one thing, it would always have been this one prayer point he would have given. "Pray that I proclaim the gospel accurately and fearlessly.

Makes one stop and think doesn't it! If as a believer, I could request others to pray just one thing for me, what would that be? I think Paul would say to us that whatever that request was it would predominantly have to do with you and the spreading of the gospel.

For Paul that seems to have over-ridden any other need that he could have focused on as he wrote to them from a prison situation. He was in Rome at this time, having been brought there after his arrest in Jerusalem, and he knew that at any time he could be taken before Caesar for a judgment that could mean death. Yet he didn't ask them to pray for his release.

Now it is a fact that this time for him in prison was not as severe as it became later. We know from Acts 28:16 that:-

Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

His coming and going was non-existent, but others could come to him and he could preach to them. He had freedom to speak out the gospel, but that was the only freedom left to him, as it seems that he was bound by a chain to the Roman soldier guarding him. A few verses later in Acts 28:20 he talks about being bound with this chain and several times in the letter to the Ephesians he refers to being a prisoner. Such must have been so unpleasant and even painful at times, yet he didn't seek prayer for his release. His prayer point was that he would use his one freedom—the freedom to speak—effectively and boldly for the sake of the kingdom of God.

With that in mind Paul enlarges on his prayer point by stressing two things he needs most. The right words and fearlessness in speaking them.

Now I'm sure we can all relate to that. Think back to any time that you had the opportunity to speak about the things of God to another person. What was it that you wanted most from God at that point? I know for me it was the right thing to say and the courage to say it. Paul asked for prayer beforehand because he knew he would constantly be in situations when he would need that help. He didn't ask his fellow Christians to pray that he might have the opportunity to speak the gospel. He accepted that the opportunities were always with him. Every soldier sent to guard him was an opportunity. They were chained to him—they were the ones who were a captive audience! But he didn't want to blow it by saying the wrong thing in the wrong way.

So Paul says: ***¹⁹Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me***

That phrase "open my mouth" is used often in both the Old and the New Testament in a technical sense. The prophets would 'open their mouths' and declare the Word of the Lord to the people. When Peter was at the house of Cornelius and discovered how it was God who had arranged for these Gentiles to hear the gospel we read in Acts 10:34 that he opened his mouth and told them the truth about Jesus. So Paul is particularly referring to those future occasions when he would be given the chance to present his faith, either as a defence in court, or as an explanation to someone who really wanted to know what Paul believed, and was obviously willing to be locked up for.

On such occasions he wants words—and the Greek term used is logos, so he wants the very precious words of Jesus who is the Logos of God—to be given to him to speak. He had no intention of resting on his own ability to speak, to argue, to convince. He needed God to give him the right words to say at such an important time.

And not only did he want the right words to say, but also he wanted to be fearless in speaking them. Paul knew the occasion was close when he would have to face the Emperor Nero and, as a Roman citizen, be allowed to give his defence. For that he wanted both words and boldness. So twice he asks for prayer for fearlessness in what he says.

The Greek word is parrasia. I remember from my college days that it was one of the favourite words of our Principal, Dr Noel Vose. I can still picture him standing at the front of the classroom and saying, "parrasia which means boldness with joy. That's what you need to strive for in your ministry—boldness with joy."

There's a wonderful account of a time in the early church when Peter and John were dragged before the Jewish Sanhedrin for preaching the Gospel. And of course, rather than defending themselves they preached again in the courtroom. And Acts 4:13 tells us that:-

¹³When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

The word courage is the Greek word parrasia—boldness with joy. And it was one of the things about them that made the authorities remember that they had been with Jesus.

That's the same boldness with joy that Paul asked for and we need to display, and in some way it will convince others that we are the real thing. That whatever they may think of what we proclaim, they will know that we truly belong to Jesus.

So that is the substance of Paul's Prayer Point, but there is one further explanation relating to his current position that he wants to leave with these Christians. You see the Ephesians were very concerned about Paul's situation. They had become discouraged because he was in prison for preaching the gospel. In Eph 3:13 Paul wrote:

I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Perhaps they were discouraged because they felt that if such a great Christian as Paul was allowed to suffer in such a way, what hope did they have. Or maybe they thought that God had let them and Paul down by not rescuing him from prison. Rather like a story I heard this week of a person who used to go regularly to church, till her Pastor, a man younger than me, had died of a brain tumour. That person hasn't been to a church since. Now we can understand where she is coming from I'm sure, for there is this thought deep inside many of us that God should be protecting His people, especially the really good ones like Paul, from suffering.

That's why what Paul says in this verse, as an explanation of his position, is so important for us to hear. Look again at v 20

²⁰for which I am an ambassador in chains.

The Greek actually says, an ambassador in a chain, which is a reference to the fact that Paul was bound by one chain to the soldier who guarded him.

So what Paul is saying is that his position as a prisoner in Rome was not a mistake on God's part. Neither was it a case of God neglecting him, or not caring enough about him, or the evil one having a victory. He was God's ambassador still, and the place where God wanted him to serve in that role was at the end of a chain, in a prison.

Now of course the Ephesians knew about ambassadors. They were important people sent to Rome to represent their country. And on festive occasions they would wear a decorative chain around their necks as a mark of the prestige of their countries. I am here says Paul, representing my Lord and my King, and the Kingdom of God. And the chain that I wear shows the power of the cross on which my Saviour died to give eternal freedom to all who would receive Him.

So don't be discouraged about me, says Paul, and don't be discouraged about your situation either. For whether your life is hard or easy. Whether you are familiar with suffering or with comfort. That's where God wants you as his ambassador. So look for ways you can serve Him right there.

That's exactly what Paul did, and in Philippians 1:13 we read:-

As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.

This final word of Paul about being an ambassador in a chain contains a huge challenge for us, for at times we all find ourselves in a place where we would rather not be. It could be the place of sickness or of the dependency on others that old age brings. It could be a really horrible work situation, or a relationship breakdown, or economic stress, or family difficulties, or trying desperately to overcome an addiction. It may be the place of rejection and abuse simply because you have chosen to follow Jesus. The point that Paul makes is that there we are Ambassadors, and when we give that place over to God—when we surrender that place to Him—then that's where He uses us with the greatest effectiveness.

This morning I know that some of you are ambassadors in bad places and others of you in good places, and none of us knows what tomorrow may bring. The message of this Scripture is that our principal prayer point should not be that God should rescue us, but that God should use us and give us the words and the boldness we need as He does so.

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But this man who was once...Pharisees—immensely self confident, proud,
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now turns to his Gentile....**asks them to pray for him.**

When he was a practicing....would not have sought prayers....**for** his trust
was in himself. ...**But since** having his whole life transformed...now yearns
for the prayers of.... **And often**.....saying to Christians as he says to...Pray...

And always he gives....same prayer request.... As...he gives here.. Eph6:19

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His coming and going was non-existent, but others...could come to him... **He** had freedom to speak... but that was the only freedom....as it seems...he was bound... **A few verses later** in Acts 28:20...talks about being bound...and several times...prisoner.

Such must...so unpleasant and even painful...**yet** he didn't seek prayer for his release..... **His prayer point** was that he would use his one freedom—the freedom to speak—**effectively** and boldly...sake of the kingdom of God.

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He accepted...opportunities always with him.... Every soldier...was an...
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That phrase “open”... used often in both... **technical** sense...The prophets..
When Peter was at...& discovered how it was God.... we read in Acts 10:34
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He had no intention...resting... own ability to speak, to argue, to convince.
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And not...right words to say....also he wanted...fearless in speaking them.

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I am here says Paul...representing my Lord and my King...and the Kingdom **And the** chain that I...shows the power of the cross on which...Saviour died **to give** eternal freedom... to all.... who would receive Him.

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