

Title: What's My Destination?  
Date: January 8, 2023  
Subject: An overview of Ephesians as provided by Paul's visit with the Ephesian elders.  
Scripture: Ephesians 1:1, 2; Acts 20:17 - 38

Switzerland is known for watches, knives, yodeling, being neutral and more importantly -- chocolate and the breathtaking mountainous scenery. This morning we're going to begin a study of what's been called "the Switzerland of the New Testament" (Dr. Pierson). The writer wasn't thinking in terms of chocolate but in terms of the panoramic view of God's activity and his purposes for his church, though chocolate would be an apt description as it has lots of delectable morsels.

The book has also been called "the Queen of the Epistles, the divinest composition of man" (English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge), "the crown of St. Paul's writings" (Armitage Robinson). Another said, "There is no higher point of revelation than is reached in this epistle" (Wycliffe Commentary).

The book is Ephesians. READ 1:1, 2.

When Jean, I and the family go on vacations, we like to research the location. What does it have to offer? What are the sites? What experiences? What's the weather like?

This morning we're doing some research, preparation for when we visit the Ephesians. The city of Ephesus was located on the western edge of what is now Turkey. It was an influential business and trading center. The population was estimated to be 400,000 to 500,000 fifty years after Paul's visit making it the largest city in Roman ruled Asia.

Paul visited Ephesus twice. The first time came on the return leg of his second missionary trip (Acts 18:19-21). He went to the synagogue where he reasoned with the Jews. They wanted him to stay but he declined, telling them he'd "come back if it was God's will." He left coworkers Priscilla and Aquilla to proclaim Christ. While Paul was gone an influential teacher named Apollos joined in the work.

Paul's second visit was on his third missionary trip a year or two later (Acts 19:1-41). He preached in the synagogue for three months and then in the hall of Tyrannus for two years. Paul spent more time in Ephesus than any other missions' location. The city experienced a massive revival including people burning a fortune's worth of their magic scrolls and books of incantations.

Not everyone was enthralled with Paul and his teaching. Demetrius, a leading silver craftsman, instigated a riot. He viewed Paul's teaching as detrimental to the goddess Artemis that dominated the worship scene. Craftsmen made tons of money making images of Artemis. She was viewed as the mother goddess -- the goddess of fertility, virginity, childbirth, moon, nature, wildlife, hunters, and archery. Not sure how the last three fit as the protector of wildlife is for hunters using arrows? The "worship" involved prostitute priestesses.

The temple to Artemis was massive, about the size of our property measuring, 450 by 220 feet with more than 125 marble columns 62 feet tall. It was regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

For more of Paul's connection we go to Acts 20 and his farewell to the Ephesian elders. He was going back to Jerusalem and decided not to layover in Ephesus. He stopped in Miletus and sent word for the church leaders to come meet him there. It was an emotional occasion as he recalled his time in Ephesus and laid out what he believed was ahead for him. We're not going to look at all the insights from the passage but only a few.

#### 1. Motivation for living. V. 24

By this time the apostle had been actively engaged in proclaiming Jesus Christ as Savior for over 20 years. He assessed his experience and the way he wanted to spend whatever days he had left. The thing that mattered was that he'd be found faithful. His goal was to keep running the race until the end. He never considered the possibility of retiring from being an active follower of Christ.

Paul had already encountered numerous hardships. The work at times had been difficult. He'd gone without sleep, been hungry and thirsty, accused of false teaching, sent to prison, been severely beaten (Acts 16:22, 23), stoned and dragged out of the city as people thought they'd killed him (Acts 14:19), been exposed to death numerous times, and had been in danger at almost every turn (see also 2 Corinthians 11:23 - 27).

Though he didn't know exactly what would happen, he knew the future would hold more of the same, more bumps and potholes -- more like sinkholes and avalanches. But Paul felt it was all worth it. He'd seen people delivered from demons and healed physically. Most importantly, he'd seen people place their trust in Jesus Christ.

It didn't matter what happened. "I consider my life worth nothing to me." Paul's words remind me of Revolutionary War hero Nathan Hale. He was 21 when he was captured by the British. Before he was hanged for being a spy, he uttered the famous words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Paul regretted he only had one life to give for Christ. This didn't mean he was a pain seeker. He looked beyond those things because he had a different view, a different priority. The key word is the small, but mighty "if." It marks a possibility of something happening or not. In Paul's case he knew there was a possibility he might not finish the race. However, his mind was set on finishing it and to do what it took to be faithful and loyal to Jesus Christ. "If only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me."

Paul uses more imagery from the athletic world in another spot: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; But we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

Years later, when Paul felt his death was imminent, he said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). One more reference that some say was written by Paul though others have different authors for the book of Hebrews: "Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Paul's task is revealed in v. 24. It was testifying to the gospel of God's grace. He saw himself as a living, breathing testimony. His story of transforming from a hater of Jesus Christ to a follower and proclaimer is given several times in the book of Acts and other places. He recalls how he did everything he could to fight against Jesus including persecuting his followers, having them jailed and voting for them to die. Then he encountered Jesus and became a testifier of what the Lord had done for him.

We have the same task, the same commission, that of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. It can be done through telling our story of how God met us.

I grew up in a family that went to a Bible preaching church. From the time I was little I heard about Jesus but it wasn't until when I was 11 or so that things clicked. I was at Vacation Bible School when the leaders dismissed the group for games. I went out but noticed my younger brother had stayed to talk to the leaders. Later I found out he did so to ask Jesus to be his Savior. I began thinking that I hadn't ever put my trust in Jesus and if my younger brother could understand and make that decision, I could do the same.

Completing the task can be done by telling what the Bible says. People have the problem of sin which leads to death and destruction. Jesus enters the picture by proclaiming people can get to God through him. He died on the cross by taking our punishment, paying the penalty for our sin. A person needs to understand Jesus is the one and only way to get to God the Father. They have to place their personal trust in him, turning from whatever they'd been trusting in, whether in themselves or their goodness or some other belief system. They accept the gift of eternal life Jesus extends to people. The benefits include becoming a child of God, having sins forgiven and having the hope of living forever in heaven with him.

We can have Paul's assurance, that when we fight the good fight, finish the race and keep the faith, the results is "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 longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7, 8).

In the words of v. 27, Paul said he didn't hesitate to proclaim the whole of God's will. Another place in Scripture says: "And this is the will of God that Jesus shall lose none of those that have been given to him but will raise them up at the last day "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I'll raise him up at the last day"" (John 6:39, 40).

2. There will be tests of our faith and endurance. Vv. 28 -31

Paul's lengthy stay in Ephesus didn't mean it was an easy road as evident by what I shared earlier. This passage again refers to the difficulties Paul faced. Go back to v. 14 and you'll notice Paul spoke of being severely tested by the plots of the Jews. The people of Ephesus were extremely aware of the opposition as they'd been caught up in it.

Paul informed the leaders to expect more of the same. However, there was an added wrinkle. Some of the opposition would arise from within, from those who claim to know Christ as Savior. REREAD vv. 29, 30.

William Carey was a shoemaker who became the father of modern missions which began in the 1790s. At one time he said his main accomplishment was "I can plod. I can persevere to any definite pursuit."

He felt called by God to go to India but faced great resistance before leaving England. The East India company monopolized half the world's commerce. Its directors opposed Carey's work (according to Oswald J. Smith, *In the Challenge of Life*) and presented a resolution to parliament: "The sending out of missionaries into one eastern possession is the maddest, most extravagant, most costly, most indefensible project which has ever been suggested by a moonstruck fanatic." A speaker said he'd rather see a band of devils let loose in India than a band of missionaries.

There was also obstruction from Christians. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland resolved: "to spread the knowledge of the gospel amongst Barbarians and heathens seems to be highly preposterous." Carey had previously been told by a minister, "Young man, sit down; You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without consulting you or me" (attributed to John Ryland).

David Livingstone explored Africa in the middle 1800s. He was driven by an intense desire to rid the world of the immense evil of slavery. He hoped to discover the source of the Nile, feeling it would give him a platform for speaking against slavery and also about Jesus Christ. He was the first westerner to get to the source of the Nile and see Victoria Falls. His main purpose was to serve Christ as a medical missionary. Part of his determination to go where others hadn't gone is found in this statement: "Cannot the love of Christ carry the missionary where the slave trade carries the trader? I shall open up a path to the interior or perish."

His exploits intrigued the people of England. The more stories they heard the more interest there was in this vast unreached area. One young man wrote that if Livingston could provide the location of roads, he and others would be there soon. The missionary responded, "If you have men who will only come if they know there is a good road, I don't want them. I want men who will come if there is no road at all."

The challenge to us is phrased in livestock terms. People who belong to God are compared to sheep and the leaders to shepherds. Those who attack are savage wolves. The duty of the shepherds is to protect, watch out for the welfare of the flock, prevent false teaching from wreaking havoc.

This is the duty of the spiritual leadership **and** all members of body of Christ. We are to care for one another and protect each other from those who seek to harm through false teaching which would lead away from faith in Christ. We keep watch over ourselves and others. We're to be on our guard. Not only do we need an awareness of what needs to be done, we also need the tools and weapons for fulfilling the assignment.

3. The Lord God has what we need so we can accomplish what we need to accomplish.

Read V. 32

Commit to God. Is there any better person to whom we could be committed? Nobody else loves us like God does. No one else sent his Son to die on the cross for us. No other kings stepped down from their thrones. No other lords abandoned their homes. No other greats have become the least. No other gods have poured out their hearts to romance a world that is torn all apart. No other fathers gave up their sons. Only one did that for me and you. (adapted from *How Many Kings? Downhere*).

“Commit to the word of his grace.” God's word informs us God is full of grace and love and mercy and kindness. His grace is revealed through the giving of his Son. It's the pouring out of all God is, of God himself, and all he has. He did this for us. In another place we're told: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Hudson Taylor went to China as a missionary at the ripe old age of 21. He threw himself into the work. Within a few years he began a missions organization (China Inland Mission later known as OMF). As director he often interviewed applicants. He met with one group to determine their motivations for service: “Why do you wish to go as a foreign missionary?” The first, “I want to go because Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Another said, “I want to go because millions are perishing without Christ.” Others gave different answers. Taylor said, “All of these motives, however good, will fail you in times of testings, trials, tribulations and possible death. There is but one motive that will sustain you in trial and testing; namely, the love of Christ.”

The purpose of God's word and his presence is to build us up and give us an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. The word sanctified is a theological term meaning we've been set apart -- separated from the evil world system and separated to God for his purposes. We've been placed in that position.

There's also experiential or progressive sanctification. The person who knows Christ as Savior grows and matures. This leads to the ultimate expression of sanctification when we'll be made completely holy and perfect in heaven.

Building up refers to the present earthly life. It's a preparation time for the future expression of eternal life in its fullness. It includes the ability to see truth and apply it in our lives and help others do the same. The “you” is in the plural. We have an individual responsibility and a corporate one. It's like building brick upon brick, putting up truth upon truth. You and I are bricklayers in each other's lives.

As for inheritance, we experience some of it now, but it won't be fully revealed until after our death. Normally, inheritances are given upon the death of the one who made the will. The spiritual inheritance isn't fully realized until the person to whom the inheritance is given dies.

The majestic panorama of Ephesians reveals the inheritance God gives; his intentions for the building up of the body, the church, the building God has created; and how we are to live in the light of his tremendous love.

We're headed for those Switzerland heights the next few months as we visit the book of Ephesians. Hope you're ready for some mountain climbing.