

Putting it All Back Together

*[21] So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you **everything**. [22] I have sent him to you for this very purpose, **that you may know how we are**, and that **he may encourage your hearts**. [23] Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. [24] Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*

We have officially made it to our last and final week of Ephesians. We've got four verses this morning, and then we're done. And as Paul generally does in his letters, he closes out with some personal notes and practical instructions.

And it's precisely the practical nature of them that might make you wonder, *what exactly does this have to do with us? What we do with a passage like this one? I don't know anybody named Tychicus—which by the way, poor kid...sure hope he went by Ty or something—and I wasn't really wondering what Paul was doing and this specific point in his life, and even if I was, how exactly would knowing that “encourage my heart” today?* Those are great questions to ask.

I think passages like this one are where we have to remember what we've hinted at several times in this series already: **that Ephesians is actually a letter, not a book**. I realize we call it “the book of Ephesians,” and that's not wrong necessarily. But at its core this wasn't designed to be a theological textbook. It was meant to be a *letter*. A piece of *personal* correspondence, written by one *real person* to another group of *real people*. A group of people who were likely anxious to know how Paul was doing and would've asked our boy Ty to tell them all about it. Paul says “I've sent Tychicus to you—with letter in hand—to tell you all about how I'm doing and what's going on with me.”

So think about it this way: for the past seventeen weeks, we've been breaking and chopping up and this letter into a bunch of different passages and topics. And that's a necessary thing to do in our day and age. We have to take it in sections because it takes us a little longer to wrap our minds around each thing Paul is saying. But by doing that, it's sometimes easy to forget that Ephesians is one continuous piece of writing that all belongs together. When the Ephesians actually read it, it wasn't one sermon about grace, and another week about racial reconciliation, and another week about praying for each other, and another week about sex, and another week about marriage. **For them, it was one cohesive train of thought that worked itself out right before their eyes and ears.**

As the letter talked about racial reconciliation, they would've had fresh on their minds everything Paul had *just said* about how God rescued us out of death, gave us life, and put us in relationship with one another. As Paul talked about speaking the truth with one another, they would have had *just been thinking* about what he said about continually putting off our former selves, and putting on our new selves. **They would've seen clearly how all the theological truth in the first half of the letter leads to the practice and actions in the second half.** And at the end of it they would've felt led in one direction, all at once, to become this new type of humanity and live into God's plan to *put things back together* on planet earth.

So here's the way it would've worked specifically. Tychicus would've rolled into Ephesus one day with this letter in tow. When the followers of Jesus in Ephesus heard that Paul sent them a letter, they would've all piled into a public gathering space called the School of Tyrannus to hear it. And once they were there, Ty (or maybe one of the leaders or members of the Ephesian church) would've stood up and read this letter, all at once, out loud, to the church gathered together in one place, much like we are here today. **And as it was read over them, they all would've sat and thought through how it related to them and their life together there in Ephesus.** That's how this all worked.

So in light of that, here's what I want to do today. As best we can in our day and age, I want us to try and recreate that experience. I want us to spend the the remainder of the time we'd normally devote to teaching the bible, and instead simply listen to the *reading* of the bible over us. We're going to listen to the letter to the Ephesians read all at once, out loud. **For the past 17 weeks we've chopped it all up into sections, but today I want us to put it all back together.** I want us to see how all these different passages we've been processing and learning from over the summer all fit together as one cohesive whole.

Now, some of you might be thinking "Kent, shoot straight man. Did you just forget to write a sermon this week?" "Like, really? I came here today just so we could read straight through a book of the bible?"

Well, a couple things on that. First, I want to remind you that **the power of what we do here on Sundays is actually found in this thing [bible] anyway.** Not in anything I get up here and say. All I do on Sundays, when it's all said and done, is try to unpack and extrapolate and clarify the things that are in this book. But **the power of what we do isn't ultimately in any of that, it's in the Spirit of God breathing these words to life.** So it'd be good for us not to *underestimate* what just reading this aloud can do.

Second, **this is an opportunity to be reminded of everything we've already talked about in this series.** One of the things I've noticed about myself the longer I follow Jesus is that my main problems are actually *remembering problems*. When I fail to love my wife well, when I grow impatient at other people, when I struggle to believe how God feels about me as his son—usually, it's not that I need to hear something *new* about Jesus. **It's not that I need to discover some new idea, some new teaching or concept about God. It's not that I need to learn something I don't know. Usually, what I need is to be reminded of all the things I already know.** That I've been forgiven of far more than I'll ever have to forgive. That God has shown tremendous patience to me and given me his Spirit to fill me with patience towards others, that God chose before time began to make me holy and blameless before him. Usually, I simply need to recall things I've already heard dozens of times. So **as we read through this letter of things you "already know," don't make the mistake of believing that means you don't need to hear it again.** Because most of us—myself included—need *exactly* that.

Because of that, some of you **may want to get out your journal or your bulletin.** Jotting things down might help you stay focused as we read. As we read through the letter, you may want to just jot down phrases or verses that stick out to you. Maybe they're things that you remember God really working on you about when we taught through it earlier in the series. Maybe it's something that you totally missed or skimmed over while we were going through it but today the Holy Spirit just puts a spotlight on it and you want to remember to dig deeper into it later this week. Whatever it is, it just may be helpful to get out a **pen and paper so that you can jot those things down.**

Now, let me just lay out a handful of practical instructions before we read, since this will feel a little different to us:

- First, **this is gonna be long**. Like, *real* long. Like imagine how long you think it's gonna be, and then add ten minutes to that. And that's probably how long it's gonna be. I just wanted you to be prepared for that reality.
- Because of that, **Eric's gonna come up** and play some good ol' mood music behind the reading, but less to set a mood and more just to cut out potential distractions in the room since it's gonna take a while to read through it all.
- We'll have **multiple people reading** (you guys can come on up), so that it's not the same voice throughout (and so no poor soul has to read six full chapters in front of a bunch of people).
- Some of you might want to keep your eyes *closed* while we read, to cut out distractions. Some of you might want to keep your eyes *open*, because if you close them, you will immediately fall asleep.
- And lastly, if at any point you need to get up to go get additional coffee for the journey, or need to just to stand up so you don't fall asleep—you're totally welcome to do that. Nobody's gonna be offended by that at all. There's plenty of space in this room to spread out and still hear what's being said.

Okay, with all that being said, open your bibles to the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 1. As you're doing that I will pray, and then these fine folks will read.

Father, I thank you for letters like this one. I thank you for the incredible and life-altering truth they contain—both for the Ephesians way back when, but also for us today. So I pray that as we listen to these words read over us for the next little while, that you would (as you often do) use them to speak to our hearts and souls and minds. That you would use them to speak to our hurts and our joys and our fears. That you would use them to teach, to instruct, to correct, and to encourage. And I pray that through this letter, you would knit us into the type of community you would have us to be in our city. We ask this in the name of Jesus—amen.

Okay, let's read from the letter to the Ephesians:
