

"Closing Thoughts" Ephesians 6:21-24

Introduction

- In 490 BC the Persians went to war with Greece because a number of Greek cities revolted against Persian rule. At the plain of Marathon, 10,000 heavily armed Greek foot soldiers, called hoplites, soundly defeated a Persian force that was twice as large. Following the battle, a Greek soldier ran 25 miles, the first marathon, in order to bring the news of a Greek victory over the Persians.¹

Transition

Last week we talked about spiritual warfare and the armor of God. We talked like about the struggle we are engaged in and how to stand victorious. By the way, I hoped that as you were tempted this past week that you remembered this passage and stood your ground. Just like that Greek soldier, victory doesn't mean the work's finished. On the contrary, the Christian life is like a marathon. In addition to fighting a battle, we're also trying to go the distance. Serving God not only requires that we have a victorious Christian life in the midst of the battle but that we have endurance.

Proposition

- **Serving God requires marathon-like endurance**

Transition

Some people start so well in the Christian life. Like a sprinter getting off the blocks, they are out in front. In a sprint that's fine. But in a marathon, it's not the start that counts, it's finishing that matters. I am alarmed at the number of Christians who start out so well, they're on fire for the Lord, they're excited about studying the bible and ministry and they are a joy to be around. And then something changes. Soon they stop coming to church. They stop reading their bible. They stop serving in the ministries of the church because they're too busy or they don't like the hassles of working with people. And before you know it, they're ineffective Christians. When they do come they're warm bodies, but that's it. They get part way through the marathon that is the Christian life and can't make it to the end. Why do some Christians fail to go the distance?

Organizational Sentence

- **Ephesians 6:21-24 describes two (2) prerequisites of long-term faithful service to God**

Background/Setting

- The letter to the Ephesians is all about the church. "It's...about how God has powerfully equipped the church to experience blessing in Christ."² It's about mining the spiritual riches

¹"Marathon (sport)," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

² Constable, p. 78, quoting Bock, *A Theology*, p. 319.

of being in Christ together, arm in arm, in order to enrich the church. It's about strong families and living up our royal calling as Christians. It's about getting involved and serving the church. It's about using your spiritual gifts to edify the rest of the body. It's about watching each other's backs as we pray for one another to be victorious over our enemy. The church, what we do on Sunday mornings and what we should be doing together throughout the week, these relationships that are created because of our common relationship to Christ is the most important thing in the world to God. It's through the church, groups like this scattered all over the world, that God glorifies himself in this world, Ephesians 3:21. You see, Jesus didn't simply die for individuals. He died in order to save individuals into a new community, a new society that would love him, serve and him and witness to him. The church. We've been saved to serve; created in Christ Jesus to do good works. This morning, I want our service to God, our long-term faithful service to God to be at the forefront of your mind this morning. As we close out the book of Ephesians, this passage is about finishing well.

Transition

The **first** prerequisite of long-term faithful service to God is being **reliable**. That's the first point on your outline.

Main Points

I. Reliability (6:21-22)

A) Validation

- i) Are you reliable? Are you dependable? Can people count on you? Can God count on you? Or are you fickle when it comes to serving God and his church? Do you make yourself available? Do you actively look for ways in which to help out? When he created Christians, God's intention wasn't to make junk that didn't work. We're created to be reliable, steady, dependable, and trustworthy in our service to him. Not haphazard, intermittent or occasional in our service to him. If you want to make it to the end, one prerequisite of long-term faithful service to God is reliability.

B) Explanation

- i) As Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians, he introduces us to a character not previously mentioned in the book. Tychicus. Listen again to **verses 21-22**. *Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, will tell you everything, so that you also may know how I am and what I am doing. 22 I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage you.* Including this mention here, Tychicus is named 5 times in the New Testament. Acts 20:1-6, 2 Timothy 4:11-13, Colossians 4:7-9, and Titus 3:12. Who's Tychicus? After he finishes penning the letter, Paul puts a stamp on it and drops it in the mail. No. "The purpose of the public post, as organized and developed by Augustus, was swift official communication. Outside of influence or bribery, it was not possible to send civilian correspondence by this means."³ Paul would have had to resort to household slaves who served as letter carriers. And so it may well be that Tychicus was "[Paul's] special envoy to the churches of provincial Asia which had been established during Paul's Ephesians ministry." He was in fact, as Acts 20:4 alludes, a native of

³ O'Brien, p. 492.

the province of Asia. T. was like a cover letter sent with the letter itself as Paul's letter made its journey to Ephesus and the churches there.

- ii) What I want to briefly focus on is how Paul describes Tychicus. He's mentioned as a brother. In fact, Paul calls him a dear brother, a beloved brother. He's speaking collegially. Tychicus is a partner in ministry. He's Paul's co-worker. A helper to him in ministry. Additionally, Tychicus is described as a faithful servant. Tychicus had been entrusted with the gospel and he believed it and held onto it and proved faithful in working out the gospel in all areas of his life. "He had a proven track record of ministry in the cause of Christ."⁴ Paul could count on him. He was reliable. He was dependable. He was faithful. And so he sent Tychicus to the Ephesians to bring them up to speed with how Paul was doing and so that his report may encourage them. What a way to be remembered. We know very little about this man Tychicus. And yet what we are left with of his character is that he was a faithful servant, a beloved brother in ministry with Paul.
 - (a) What do you think God might say about you as he examines your life and your service? How would he characterize you?

C) Illustration

- i) My second car, now keep in mind I'm exaggerating a bit, was the most unreliable piece of junk ever invented. How many of you have ever heard of a Lancia Zagato. Yes that's a car. I had an 82, steel blue, good looking car but absolutely worthless as far as getting you from point A to point B. As I graduated from college, along with packing all my stuff up in my parent's borrowed van we towed my car all the way home to Cincy. It was unfixable.

D) Application

- i) Can those in authority rely on you to do the work of the ministry? Can you be categorized as a faithful servant in the Lord or are you a haphazard, undependable, untrustworthy to your leaders and to God?
- ii) Do you even make yourself available for service? Church life is not about what you can get, it's about what you can give (serve) in order to build the body of Christ.
- iii) Where are you serving? In what way are you ministering to the body of Christ? Are you just a warm body?
- iv) Faithful servants are encouraging. Paul I believe was encouraged knowing he could trust Tychicus to deliver his letter to the Ephesians and the Ephesians were to be encouraged his message of Paul's ministry.

Transition

The **second** prerequisite of long-term faithful service to God is being **a passionate love for all things Christ**.

II. Passionate love for all things Christ (6:23-24)

A) Validation

- i) It's not enough to be dependable. Reliability is great, but it's only half the formula of long-term faithful service to God. Reliability without passion is like going to every football game but never cheering, never involving yourself in what's taking place. If

⁴ O'Brien, p. 492.

you want to make it to the end, one prerequisite of long-term faithful service to God is a passionate love for all things relating to Christ.

B) Explanation

- i) This is what Paul calls the Ephesians to as he writes his last words to them. Listen to [verses 23-24](#). *Peace to the brothers, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.* Certainly it's right of Paul to remind them of peace and how through Christ's death we have peace with God and peace with each other. Certainly it's appropriate for Paul to speak of grace and how by God's grace he saves us from death, bestowing riches upon us through Christ that we do not deserve. But what I want to focus on in these last two verses of the book is the love he calls us to. As [Andrew Lincoln](#) points out so lucidly, "Elsewhere the letter has referred to God's love for believers (2:24) and Christ's love for them (3:19, 5:2, 25), to believers love for one another (1:15; 4:2), to believing husbands' love for their wives (5:25, 28, 33), and to believers' love in general (1:4, 3:17; 4:15, 16, 5:2; 6:23), but this is the only place where their love for Christ is made explicit."⁵ Paul calls them to love Christ with an undying, never ending, passionate love.
- ii) What's so prophetic about these words, is what happens years later, after Paul is no longer around. He's been martyred for his faith in the gospel and of the apostles, only John, one of the Sons of Thunder is left. As he sits exiled on the island of Patmos, he receives a vision from God for seven Asian churches, most of which Paul planted in during his ministry. One of which is Ephesus. What's so interesting is to see what has become of the Ephesians undying love just a few years later. Flip to the last book of the bible. The book of Revelation. In Revelation 2:1 and following we read God's message to the church in Ephesus. Listen. *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.* Did you catch that? They endured. They were reliable. They demonstrated long-term faithful service to God. They were trustworthy and dependable. They were Tychicus kind of Christians. They worked hard, they persevered. They didn't tolerate evil. They threw out the bad apples in the church. They hadn't grown weary. They ran the marathon well. And yet, look at what God says about them in verse 4. *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.* The very last thing that characterized the Ephesian church at the time of Paul's writing, their undying love, was the one thing they now lacked. God called a spade a spade and proclaimed to the church in Ephesus that they no longer loved Christ. He's the first love God is talking about. They had forgotten Christ. Their passion for all things relating to Christ had burned cold.

C) Illustration

- i) One of my favorite memories as a child and as a teenager was helping my dad build fires in the fireplace. Funny thing happens with fires. No matter how much you

⁵ Lincoln, p. 466.

stoke them at night, in the morning, there's no fire left. There's usually a little heat, some coals left. But morning fires never burn as hot as when they were first stoked.

D) Application

- i) If you don't regularly stoke your love for Christ, if you don't keep that relationship hot, your long-term faithful service to God will suffer. As we close the book of Ephesians? How's your undying love for Christ? Honestly. Are you more in love with Christ now that you were five years ago, six months ago, two weeks ago? The words of Revelation 2:5 are appropriate. *Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.* Repent, turn to God and turn from your sin and confess that your love has grown cold. Plead to God, pray that he would refuel your love for Christ. And do the things you did at first. By the way, what are those things? My guess is that they are the things that Paul first encouraged the Ephesians to do in this letter. Do these things; put the words of Ephesians into practice and your love for God will not grow cold.
- ii) Again, I have labored to feed you God's word from this book. Now it's up to you. What are you putting into practice? What are you doing with what you've been fed? Are you taking in the nourishment of God's word or have you spit it out of your mouth like a newborn regurgitating its strained carrots?

Conclusion

- At the summer Olympics in Los Angeles, 1984, American runner Mary Decker-Slaney, the world record-holder in the 3000-meter, was on pace to win the 3000 and take the gold. Everything was going great until the last lap. As Decker-Slaney rounded the final turn, a diminutive native South African running for Great Britain, a barefoot runner, a woman with one of the coolest names I've ever heard, a woman by the name of Zola Budd came up behind Decker-Slaney. Slaney tripped on Budd's foot, they both fell and finished out of the medals.⁶ As 1 Corinthians 4:1 says, *Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.* You've been given a trust. A deposit has been made in your life in the form of Jesus Christ. Don't let yourself be tripped up by all the things that can keep you from long-term faithful service to Christ. Yes. Prove reliable but also love Christ passionately. Finish well so that one day we don't have to stand before God and here he say, well done good and faithful servant, yet I have this against you. Pray with me.

⁶"Budd, Zola," *Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia*. © 1993-1997 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.