

Final greetings

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[0:00] Please turn to Ephesians chapter 6 and have your Bible open and you'll need to be prepared to scrabble forward and back a little bit I'm afraid because I will refer back to earlier places in the text well up on the screen there a couple of pictures.

There's a picture of a symphony orchestra it's actually a picture of Brighton Youth Orchestra taken about 25 years ago when my girls were involved in Brighton Youth Orchestra and there's a picture of a hi-fi speaker that picture was taken last week and I don't suppose you'll have much difficulty in I haven't labelled the pictures but I'm sure you can see which is which and yet there's an intimate connection between these two pictures or rather between the things that are pictured here because the purpose of the loudspeaker is to reproduce the sound of the music as closely as possible to reproduce as it's been said the authentic concert experience in your living room.

You can't actually get a symphony orchestra playing in your living room but the aim is to get as close to that as it possibly can.

And how is it done? Well hi-fi stands for high fidelity and fidelity is just another word for faithfulness isn't it? That's what fidelity means faithfulness. So a hi-fi system aims to be faithful to the original sound.

And this doesn't come cheap it requires good design good quality materials careful construction. Generally you get what you pay for. But the purpose of a hi-fi system or at least what it should be for is not to show off your wealth show how expensive kits you can afford it's not even to admire the quality of the engineering.

[2:08] There was a song written about hi-fi and said I never did care for music much it's the high fidelity. But it shouldn't be that of course. That loudspeaker exists really for one purpose only to bring the music closer to you and to bring you closer to the music.

Well maybe symphony orchestra isn't classical music is not your thing. Perhaps you prefer Elvis Presley or John Lennon or Michael Jackson or Amy Winehouse or Whitney Houston or Aletha Franklin.

Perhaps you'd like to go to a live gig given by one of your favourite performers. Only of course you can't because all those people, artists I just listed of course they're all dead.

But still you can hear what they sound like, what they sounded like, can't you? You can listen to the recording and get a pretty good idea of what it would have been like to hear them live.

Perhaps you could get together with some other fans and you could reproduce the atmosphere of a live performance. Well you won't quite achieve it of course. But the purpose of the recording engineer the purpose of the audio engineer is to get as close as is humanly possible to the original performance.

[3:36] That's what it's about. That's what you're paying for. So what's this got to do with our passage?

Well, Paul can't make it to Ephesus. In fact, when he last spoke to the Ephesians face to face we have a description of it in Acts 20 verse 25 he told them that he didn't expect ever to see them again.

And he can't make it because he's in prison. So what's he doing about that? Well, he's sending a letter but he's not just sending a letter.

He's sending Tychicus. Tychicus was probably from Ephesus or that area himself. In these closing verses Paul is at pains to ensure that the Ephesians have the authentic Christian experience if you like, the high fidelity message.

Note the phrases he uses that it might be declared fearlessly that Tychicus will tell them everything and that Tychicus is the faithful servant.

[4:47] So I'd like to look at the two points here really which I think are the two main points that Paul is making here. First of all the description of the faithful messenger and secondly that authentic experience of the Lord Jesus Christ itself.

So Paul's written a longish letter and it is what it is. It's a letter but in fact in this case of course it's more than just a letter because it's spirit-inspired scripture.

It is apostolic doctrine and yet in spite of that Paul emphasizes the need for a human messenger.

He sends the letter with Tychicus or perhaps you could say he sends Tychicus with the letter.

There needs to be a human messenger. He's urged the Ephesians to take up the sword of the spirit which is the word of God chapter 6 verse 17.

Scripture is not some drone system that automatically reacts to any attack. The sword is a weapon designed for personal combat and the best sword in the world is little use in the hands of an incompetent soldier.

[6:10] It's all about personal contact. We were thinking this morning weren't we about millennials having the best communication technology in history.

They have far greater bandwidth than anything Paul had access to. And yet the sociologists are having a field day telling us that the generation is lonely, stressed and having an epidemic of mental health problems.

There is no substitute for face-to-face contact. It's one of the paradoxes of our age. We can get news from Australia in moments. And yet this often works against real human interaction.

The information technology that spans the globe banishes the user to perhaps to a lonely bedroom in front of their laptop. even if they're sitting on the bus surrounded by people.

They're all like this aren't they? We all do it frankly. Sit on the bus and don't make any contact at all with the people around us but rather with whoever happens to be on the other end of our screen at the time.

[7:29] Technology banishes the user to a sort of increasingly artificial and abstracted interaction. You can think of it if you like as your avatar your Facebook identity is talking to the Facebook identity of somebody else which is not the real person that it's talking to.

There is no substitute for human interaction and there's no substitute for a human messenger which is why Paul is sending Tychicus.

So what are the messenger's qualifications for the job? Well Paul lists two of them doesn't he? He says firstly he is a dear brother someone who is intimate with Paul himself.

It's no good sending somebody who doesn't know Paul that would be no use at all would it? We wouldn't be able to tell him anything about what Paul was doing or how he was getting on.

It has to be somebody who is intimate with Paul himself. But secondly he is described as the faithful servant. Which is if you like high fidelity communication.

[8:42] It's the message from a faithful servant. Paul says doesn't he will tell you everything. Anything you might have possibly wanted to know about how Paul is going going on?

Paul Tychicus is prepared to tell you. Paul can't make it to Ephesus but close your eyes and you might almost think you are talking to Paul himself.

Seems to be what he is saying. You will know who he is and what he is doing. If you can't have Paul Tychicus is the next best thing. Paul can't make it to Ephesus so he is sending Tychicus.

Well brothers and sisters I said that Jesus meets with us but actually Jesus can't make it tonight at least not in person. Of course as Phil was reminding us recently he is seated at the right hand of God.

He is busy elsewhere pleading for us. and yet he did say he is always with us. Of course in fact actually it's not the authentic Paul experience that's on offer here.

[10:01] Tychicus is described as a faithful servant in the Lord and Paul himself has described himself as a servant or diaconess of the gospel in chapter 3 verse 7 and in 6 chapter 6 verse 20 the passage we looked at

last passage sorry the passage we just read he describes himself as an ambassador.

Well what is an ambassador? An ambassador is the personal representative of a ruler. talking to the ambassador is the next best thing to talking to the ruler themselves.

It's as near as you can get. And it has to be a suitable person. In Roman times as today an ambassador would have some sort of chain or badge of office.

Well some people see a joke here Paul has a chain of office indeed his chain of office are the shackles that imprison him that mark him out as a servant and representative of the suffering king. His chain of office are the shackles of his imprisonment. So okay that's Paul but why do I stand up here and talk to you? I could give you a handout and say here's a handout and some questions come back next week and give me the answers.

[11:39] Or I could play you a recording of some more gifted biblical expositor than I am. Play you a recording of Martin Lloyd-Jones or John Stott or somebody like that.

Well I could point you to an interactive Bible study tool on the internet there's quite a few of those around nowadays and these could all be good things to do they would all be useful things to do but when we gather here on a Sunday we don't do any of those things.

Why? Because when the church assembles there's no substitute for a human teacher. What did Paul write to the Romans?

How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? How can they hear without someone preaching to them?

I mean they could get the good news they could read the Times of Rome or the Jerusalem Telegraph but it is just not the same Paul insists that there must be a preacher.

[12:56] The spoken word has power. God didn't just think let there be light God said let there be light. When Jesus was caught in the storm on the lake he didn't just sort of wave his arm vaguely to calm the storm and go back to sleep.

he stood up and rebuked the storm out loud. There is power in the spoken word. And so what

Tychicus was really carrying was not just a letter, not even just some greetings from Paul.

What every gospel messenger or missionary or preacher is aiming for is an authentic contact with Jesus, an authentic encounter with Jesus. Jesus can't make it here in person this evening.

He's busy elsewhere. But if I was really doing my job properly you ought to be able to close your eyes and feel that it is Jesus speaking to you.

And that's a really scary thought isn't it for any preacher. When I was teaching mathematics, of course I was teaching some wisdom from years gone by but I didn't expect the students to think they were actually in the presence of Newton or Gauss.

[14:17] But the qualification for a sermon is much higher than we actually aim to bring people into the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Of course we never even come close but still that is the aim and it's here perhaps the high fidelity analogy breaks down because my hi-fi speakers are built with the best engineering and the best quality that I could afford.

But Paul says we have this treasure in earthenware vessels. What are earthenware vessels? Just cheap utility stuff. And yet nonetheless this is what Jesus has chosen to use.

The spirit helps us in our weakness and incompetence and that is why the sword of the spirit is the sword of the spirit. It is a very scary thought for any preacher to think what you're actually trying to do is to bring the authentic encounter with Jesus to your hearers.

Well okay most of you are not preachers but I'm afraid that doesn't let you off the hook. Why do I say that? Because we know that the church is Christ's body on earth and Paul has already written for we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.

[15:56] Ephesians 2 chapter 10 this requires work as this verse makes clear and much of the later part of the letter expands on this exactly what that means in practice.

You're a work in progress but at the same time you're a working model. The intention I think is clear. You're created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

which God has prepared in advance for us to do. You're created in Christ Jesus. An encounter with a Christian is supposed to be an encounter with Christ.

If anyone meets you on the street or in the home or in the workplace or of course in the church the aim is that that encounter should be the next best thing to a meeting with Jesus himself.

no one ever went away from a meeting with Jesus unaffected did they? You just remember all the meetings that we have recorded in the gospels.

[17:10] One thing you can say on every time nobody ever went away unaffected. Some of them were encouraged. Some of them were saddened. Some of them were enlightened.

Some of them were chastened. some of them were hardened in their unbelief. Some of them were straight horrified. But never were they unaffected.

And so Paul warns us twice in fact to be careful what we say in this letter. In chapter 4 verse 29 he said do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen.

Spoken word has power. How did Adolf Hitler hold all those crowds in his thaw by his spoken words? You can see the film of it.

It's almost unbelievable. Whatever else he was he was certainly a man who knew how to hold a crowd with his words. This warning is repeated in chapter 5 verse 4 again where he warns us that what we speak should be profitable for others and then he goes on to say our whole attitude in fact should be Christ-like be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you these interactions are marked by compassion and forgiveness why?

[18:55] because they are supposed to be encounters with Jesus and that is the way we encounter Jesus as he comes to us with compassion and forgiveness so that's the faithful messenger how does Paul characterize this authentic encounter with Jesus well we get the final greeting here peace to the brothers love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love most letters in the ancient world started and finished with a greeting but it could be a fairly formal meaningless thing yours truly as we used to write we don't write that anymore do we but we used to and even if we say more than that it can be a pretty weak thing can't we see you at

Christmas give my love to the kids ta-ta for now but that's not what Paul is bringing Paul actually leaves the letter where he came in verses 23 and 24 echo the greeting of chapter 1 verse 2 but here they're expanded and Paul has already expanded on these themes in the letter so what are the themes that he wants the things that he wants the Ephesians to encounter well he lists them for us here doesn't he encouragement more literally in fact comfort actually peace brotherhood love faith grace that's more or less the order in which he lists them Paul was a

Hebrew Tychicus was a native of Asia Minor quite likely in Ephesians himself not a natural person to be Paul's representative perhaps Ephesus was an important cosmopolitan city and doubtless in the Ephesian church there were Romans Greeks people from all over the empire and possibly even from beyond it even the Roman empire didn't cover the whole world there was the Persian empire to the east and India and yet all these people from Rome from Corinth from Jerusalem wherever they'd come from where Paul tells us brothers and sisters those united in a bond of peace what had been preached to them the message that had been preached to them in chapter 2 verse 17 was peace and what are they aimed to strive for to maintain that unity chapter 4 verse 3 maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace what was it that kept them standing firm chapter 6 verse 15 tells us it's the gospel of peace and what was their protection against attack well we're told in chapter 6 verse 16 it's the shield of faith faith was what would fend off the fiery darts of the evil one faith is what would proof them against attack as it were what's going on as it were under the scenes here behind the scenes well

Paul reminds us it's grace God's favour grace was the means of their salvation chapter 2 verse 5 chapter even says it twice again says the same thing in chapter 2 verse 8 and then he expands it in chapter 4 verse 7 because he tells us there that through the grace which each of us has received in Christ this life is possible and at the center of the list and at the center of what binds everything together and really what makes sense of it all Paul tells us is love but it's a special kind of love it's not the ambiguous mutable fragile love that's found in the world love may flare up to a fire and die

away just as quickly leaving nothing but burnt out debris or sometimes it just grows cold slowly leaving nothing behind but an icy numbness

I think Joni Mitchell in her song both sides now caught the sort of love that is found in the world let me read you a few verses from it I'm not going to attempt to sing it because you really don't want to hear me sing but it should be sung really moons and dunes and ferris wheels the dizzy dancing way you feel when every fairy tale comes real I've looked at love that way but now it's just another show you leave them laughing when you go and if you care don't let them know don't give yourself away and then we get our conclusion I've looked at love from both sides now from give and take and still somehow it's love's illusions I recall I really don't know love at all of course you might argue that this is a different kind of love but what was the illustration that Paul used for love used to illustrate the love of Christ for his church in chapter 5 verse 31 it was the love for a husband for his wife the love of a man for a woman of course we're not saying that there is no love in the world we're not saying there is not real love in the world but that society becomes more and more self-centred as individual freedom becomes the only good we can see it around us can't we that even the natural bonds of family love are weakened and fade husband and wife parent and child brother and sister those bonds of love which binds a family together we can just see it are fading families are becoming more diffuse less supporting of each other because only your own satisfaction matters and once you do that love becomes an illusion now it's just another show you leave them laughing when you go it's love's illusions I recall

[26:44] I really don't know love at all that's not the sort of love that Paul is talking about here the authentic experience of Jesus love was different he says this is my command that you love one another as I have loved you and so our love for him is modeled on his love for us as I have loved you he said love one another as I have loved you and just in case we've missed the point Paul describes it those who love the Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love actually there is some dispute about the best translation of that word a more literal translation is an incorruptible love a love that won't go bad on you Jesus doesn't stop loving human love can be selfish and manipulative can't it but Christian love is modeled on that of Christ and that's giving and selfless and that won't go bad on you it won't become corrupted by the world and to use the other translation it's an undying love it won't fade in this world or even in the next and it's worth reminding ourselves again

Chris reminded us of that parable this morning that most of us could probably recite by heart and yet having it spoken again is worth doing let's read what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about love once again 1 Corinthians 13 verses 4 to 8 love is patient love is kind it does not envy love is patient love is kind it does not envy love is patient love is kind it does not envy it does not boast it is not proud it is not rude it is not self-seeking it is not proud sorry it is not self-seeking it is not easily angered it keeps no record of wrongs actually if anything is what undermines the love of this world isn't it when you start keeping a record of wrongs when you remember all the times you've been hurt by the loved one and you start keeping a tally a spreadsheet love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth and then we get what

Paul means by undying and incorruptible love he says it always protects it always trusts it always hopes it always perseveres just in case we still haven't got it he finishes by saying love never fails so I stand up here separated by time and space and circumstance and language from the time and message and experience of Jesus but nevertheless I invite you this evening to an encounter with Jesus through his words through the words spoken I invite you if you will to close your eyes and be transported to the concert hall of heaven where we tell well what are they doing what are they singing there we told in revelation aren't we they sang a new song to the Lord Jesus you are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nations revelation five verse nine so I invite you to close your eyes and hear the music of heaven to meet this evening with the living God with the living Christ through the power of the spirit so we're going to close our formal time together after that we'll have a time of prayer but we're going to sing this song that Anya assures me that enough people will know