

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, March 9, 2021

Be Prepared

Overview: As you watch the "Bible Project" video that outlines this letter of Paul, note the two parts (chapters 1-3 and 4-6) that are clearly identified. They could be labeled "Review" *therefore* "Renew". In the first three chapters, Paul expresses thankfulness for their ministry. He knows them well, having spent nearly three years with them earlier (Acts 19). Now he writes from prison, so he starts by reminding them of God's grace that has declared that all of them, Jews and Gentiles alike, are now one in Christ. Then, knowing the challenges they face in this Greek/Roman culture, urges them to renew their commitment to stay true to the Gospel of Jesus, in spite of being a small but influential minority of the city's population historians' figure was about 225,000. Today we study and learn from what the Bible tells us about the Ephesian Christians at three different times over a quarter century.

Video: Bible Project | Ephesians

Segment Questions: (References are on back)

Read Ephesians 2:7-10

- Listen to Paul's words as using The Message paraphrase. As you listen, note a word or short phrase that strikes you as one worth remembering.

Read Ephesians 6:13-18

- The two word summary statement comes first: "Be prepared!" Why?
- What are the five characteristics of being prepared that Paul suggest? What else?
- Re-read his last sentence: "Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out." How do you do this today...in addition to participating in Men's Life?

Read Acts 19:23-28

- Flash back to Ephesus several years earlier when Paul was their pastor. This section describes the silversmith incident of Demetrius and his silver idols of Artemis.
- What are some similar challenges we face as Christians in this Bloomington community?

Read Revelation 2:1-7

- This letter was dictated by Jesus to the aging "disciple that Jesus loved", John, on Patmos. Again, this has two parts: Review...*but*...Renew.
- What compliments or encouragement is being sent to these Ephesians via this letter?
- "Do you have any idea how far you have fallen?" Fallen from what?

Closing Personal Prayer:

Lord, I come to You and bless You for bringing me into Your family and setting my feet on the solid ground of Christ Jesus my Lord. I know that we are to count it all joy when we are placed in difficult situations and when we face trials of various kinds. I pray that in Your strength I will be able to stand firm against the Evil One so as to remain a true and faithful witness to the truth of the Gospel. Lord, use me to share Your truth with my family, friends, colleagues and neighbors that I would not say or do anything that would discredit Your holy name. Send Your Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of those who do not know You. Convict them of their need of a Savior and bring them at last to saving faith in You. I live in eternal thankfulness that you died for me and rose again. I cast all my care upon You. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

The City of Ephesus was a major metropolitan area and an international hub for both sea and land merchants. It was also the center for the temples for the Roman and Greek gods...14 temples in all, the largest was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the temple for the Goddess of Fertility, Artemis. Yet the “god of gods” at this time was the Roman Caesar. One historian writes that shoppers who wanted to spend time in the agora (main marketplace) had to pick up a bit of incense and add it to the incense fire at the entrance to the Agora as a tribute to their “god”, Caesar. Paul wrote this letter to the Christians of this city with the overall theme to “Be prepared”.

Ephesus was much larger than Bloomington, but the culture of that city in 60 AD when Paul wrote to them is very similar to the culture of our community in 2021. The “temples” are not as obvious, but they surround us... and tempt us... just the same. We’ll look at one scene that Paul experiences with this congregation that challenged their beliefs.

Finally, Jesus directed John to write letters to seven churches. The first of these, to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7, was likely written about 25 years later than Paul’s epistle. We’ll look at this letter as the last scene in our study of the Christian congregation of Ephesus.

Ephesians 2:7-10 | Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! We don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Ephesians 6:13-18 | Be prepared. You’re up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it’s all over but the shouting you’ll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are more than words. Learn how to apply them. You’ll need them throughout your life. God’s Word is an *indispensable* weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other’s spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

Acts 19:23-28 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Revelation 2:1-7 Write this to Ephesus... “I see what you’ve done, your hard, hard work, your refusal to quit. I know you can’t stomach evil, that you weed out apostolic pretenders. I know your persistence, your courage in my cause, that you never wear out. But you walked away from your first love—why? What’s going on with you, anyway? Do you have any idea how far you’ve fallen? A Lucifer fall! Turn back! Recover your dear early love. No time to waste, for I’m well on my way to removing your light from the golden circle. You do have this to your credit: You hate the Nicolaitan business. I hate it, too. Are your ears awake? Listen. Listen to the Wind Words, the Spirit blowing through the churches. I’m about to call each conqueror to dinner. I’m spreading a banquet of Tree-of-Life fruit, a supper plucked from God’s orchard.”