

Sermon for July 11, 2010

**Ephesians 1:1 -22**  
**Rev. Barrie Flitcroft**

If when I am old, which Tillie affirms happened five years ago, I should write a book it will probably be on the letter to the Ephesians. Perhaps the title will be, "An Idiots Guide to the Letter to the Ephesians." An idiots guide because I make no pretence of being a scholar and a guide for idiots because that is what we frequently are when we try to complicate the gospel message by inserting ourselves into the work of redemption, a work that only God can do and which He has most wonderfully done by the sacrifice of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

I so love the letter to the Ephesians because of all the wonderful truths in this wonderful book which we rightly call, "The Word of God." Paul's little letter captures the essential truth in a nutshell. Though written beautifully flowing Greek it remains simple clear truth in what was then the common language for common men.

It deals with mysteries like election and predestination, glorious truths like redemption and forgiveness, citizenship in the kingdom of God, the necessity of good works, the unity of the body of Christ, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and practical issues like the importance and order of the family, social justice and finally a guide to effective spiritual warfare. I have spent over forty years enjoying, exploring and expounding this book, not to the neglect of others but certainly devoting to it the time and attention due it's unique position among the epistles. This catholic epistle or, epistle to the whole church as opposed to the epistles to particular churches or to particular individuals, deserves special note.

I read the passage today because Kerry asked me to preach and I declined not having prepared and accepted only to give a missions report. But at the same time I feel strongly that on the Lord's day as the Lord's people gather it is first to worship and to pray and to hear The Word of the Lord."

Let me then jump quickly into a missions report and preface that by quoting from another word from the Holy Spirit through Paul in his notable letter to the church in Rome. The tenth chapter and the seventeenth verse says very succinctly, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The work of missions is primarily the work of proclaiming the word of God. St. Augustine is quoted as having said "preach the word everywhere you can and if necessary sometimes use words." I very much doubt that ever said such a thing and the poor man cannot defend himself this morning so I give him the benefit of the doubt, but if he said it, he was wrong. The proclamation of the gospel of grace is the essential task of the Christian church, when we do it the kingdom of God is extended and when we allow ourselves to be sidelined from that task, we die.

The work of Equip is a work of proclamation and the message we proclaim is the same one Kerry preached here so eloquently last Sunday. It is summed up in Eph. 2: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- NOT BY WORKS, so that no one can boast." Here Paul clearly states that there is nothing we can contribute to the work of Salvation it is something that starts, continues and ends with God. Our good works cannot add to it or detract from it, we are neither, worthy or deserving of it but God out of His great goodness chooses, as is His right to bestow it upon His people.

Yet Paul in Romans equally clearly states that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God," thus placing upon the church the obligation to join God in His sovereign and sacred activity by proclaiming the word of God.

Currently we in Equip are "Proclaiming" in fifteen countries, seven in the Americas, six in Africa, one in Europe and one in the far east. We use as strategies to create a platform for this proclamation, many tools. Today in Massese the little church meeting with Jeremy and Tamara Boone is made up primarily of prostitutes and their numerous children; most of the ladies and many of the children have AIDS. Jesus never had a congregation like this. When these woman arrive here they have rural skills living in an urban society. They have no skills but men will come and pay to take advantage of them and that is the only way they can keep their children alive. Quite an interesting congregation. These woman are hearing the Word of

## Sermon for July 11, 2010

God proclaimed and are beginning to turn their hearts to God and with Jeremy and Tamara help they are learning new skills, making jewelry and doing all sort of things to get out of the life of prostitution because when the Word of God is proclaimed and the grace of God is given and the forgiveness of God is received then the life of God is implanted and the work of transformation is begun and it's all happening in their lives.

North of Jinja Chris and Jane Sperling from Abbotsford are working in agriculture development with a program called Farming God's Way. Trying to help the community understand how the rain forest works and constantly renews itself and how when we farm in ways that spoil and use up the nutrients in the soil without replacing them then we don't have good harvests. They have these programs going in several communities and they have increased their harvest and produce enough that they not only can feed their families, but they have a little extra that they can sell so that can pay for medication and education for their children and they are so grateful they want to know what else Chris and Jane can tell them and they are able to proclaim the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and it creates the opportunity so people can hear and listen to the gospel.

In Liberia, David Waines, a school teacher from Richmond went out to Liberia over twenty years ago, all through the war, with his wife and brought up his children there. Sometimes diving under tables as shells began to fly, hiding from the marauders as they came through the city. The government soldiers were just as dangerous as the rebel soldiers. But they survived and they shared Christ and because they were there all those years, when their new president, a Christian lady, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Cerly (a graduate of Harvard University) returned to the country as elected president. She saw the devastation and set up government in a room in the parliament building that had no walls and no roof, turned over a card table and that is where she set up her office. She called ex-patriots all over the world to come back to be with her in the new government and she called the banks in America and various other countries and governments that could help her rebuild her country. She asked David Waines, an Equip missionary, and when someone would ask what happened she would say she wasn't there but David was. He could tell the story of mayhem and slaughter and degradation and brutality and the victimization of women and children. Today because of the work in community health evangelism, over 6000 people have been trained in the villages and 4000 of them are actively serving God as community health evangelists, taking care of medical needs and the President wrote that Equip, this tiny little missionary group that you support and helped to start, is the largest provider of healthcare in the nation. Why? Every one of those community workers knows Jesus. And when they've done their thing, they share the gospel. In fact, when Gord & I went there some years ago, we went into a village and they weren't sure of who we were. So they did a little skit to show how to avoid getting malaria. And just in case we didn't know Jesus, they did another skit to share the gospel. They wanted to make sure those Canadians knew that Jesus loved them and that His grace is extended to them. Isn't that beautiful? That is going on in thousands of villages in Liberia and the proclamation of the gospel, faith comes by hearing, is going on in Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi. In your bulletin today, there is a Presbyterian in Malawi and through her ministry and your support, the proclamation of the gospel is going on and faith comes by hearing and the Word of God has not lost its strength or power and people are coming to faith because you support your Presbyterian missionary in Malawi.

Why all the "strategies?" accompanying the "Proclamation?" do these good works add to salvation? No but they do flow from salvation. Let us return to the text with which we began Ephesians 2:8-9 but as Paul Harvey would say let us look at the rest of the story verse 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do." What we see here is that while good works contribute nothing to our salvation, the result that God wants to see in our lives when His work of salvation is affected is the outflow of good works. He created or recreated us in Christ Jesus so that flowing from our redeemed live would be work that testifies outwardly to the work that He has done inwardly. Why do I emphasize that? Because some have erred from the truth in teaching that the effect of the gospel only has personal and next world results, while the scripture teaches very clearly that when the work of God is effective in our lives the fruit is evident in time in our social responsibility as well as in eternity. His desire is that the evidence of our new life in Christ is that" men shall see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven.

Sermon for July 11, 2010

Pray for our Equip workers, to-day we begin another course of the Missionary Medicine Intensive at the Knoll. In two weeks, eighteen more students will converge on the Knoll for a one week intensive on Community Health Evangelism. Tillie and I meanwhile will drive home to begin again our courses in the fall and most excitedly to begin a year preparing a new director to assume the leadership of Equip hopefully next fall or by the end of next year. At which time we will assume a support role, teaching, speaking in churches and assisting in every the Lord allows.

Thank you for 27 years of faithful support and encouragement in our sojourn in missions.