**The Worthy Walk, Part 2**

**Ephesians 4:2**

**March 14, 2021**

1. Introduction
   1. It’s hard to believe that today marks the one-year anniversary of when the world stopped because of coronavirus.
      1. The original declaration was “15 days to slow the spread,” and here we are one year later.
      2. And what’s remarkable about the past year is that while the world came to a grinding halt and so many things stopped all around us, the kingdom of Christ marched on.
      3. The week before all of this happened, we had about 282 people at our Sunday morning service.
      4. Then after the shutdowns started, the following Sunday I think we had maybe 60 people show up.
         1. It was a surreal experience.
         2. People were spread out all around the worship center.
         3. No one came early, no one stayed after to visit.
      5. And then gradually, week after week, people slowly started to come back to the service.
      6. We had Easter Sunday outside, and we ignored the news when they contacted us to do a story on our Easter plans.
      7. The police stopped by to see what we were up to and got a chance to hear most of the Easter sermon, and then they went on their way without saying anything to us.
      8. And then by May, attendance was about what it was the year before.
      9. We looked around at the world around us, and schools were shut down, sports leagues were shut down, all children’s groups of any kind were canceled, and we prayed about it and our leadership agreed to have VBS over the summer.
      10. We might have been the only VBS in town, and we had over a hundred kids come to VBS.
          1. So many kids who had not played with other kids in three months, running, laughing, playing, and hearing God’s Word.
          2. And what was really incredible was the gospel opportunity God gave us.
          3. A number of the kids were from group homes, kids who did not know the Lord or the gospel got to hear about Christ right here, and God gave us the joy of ministering to them and being part of what He is doing in their lives.
      11. More and more ministry began taking place, and more and more people began to show up.
          1. 200s in July
          2. 300s in August
          3. 400s in September
          4. 500s in October
          5. And by Christmas over 600 a week hearing the Word, enjoying fellowship, and being transformed by the power of the Spirit of God at work through the Word.
      12. It all really culminated in a fitting way last Sunday.
          1. Not only were there more than 800 of you here for now three worship services, but Sunday night we had our baptism service.
          2. And we had ten people professing their faith in Christ and being baptized.
          3. What a glorious testimony of God’s grace it was, and what a way to cap off perhaps the craziest year any of us have lived through.
      13. Perhaps nothing stands in sharper contrast than the way the world looks at the past year, and the way we look at it.
          1. Of course, for us the year had its challenges.
          2. But what we have all seen over the past year is that however great are the challenges we face, God’s grace is greater.
          3. We have seen the reality of Romans 8:28 played out, that God does indeed work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.
          4. When the darkness of the world grows deeper, the grace of God shines even brighter.
          5. In fact, Paul tells us in Philippians 2:15 that God’s grace shines in this crooked and perverse world through us.
          6. We are the lights He has set in the darkness.
          7. We are the ones who are called by Him to shine forth His glory.
   2. Another way to put it is like this: We are saved by God’s grace so that we might walk worthy of His calling us into the church and out of the world.
      1. That’s what we are studying in Ephesians 4:1-6 as we continue our series in Ephesians.
      2. Look at what Paul writes…
         1. Paul is exhorting us to walk worthy of our calling, which as we saw last time is a calling to be members of the body of Christ as His new creation.
         2. We need to understand that calling to work worthy of it.
      3. I also want you to notice that Paul issues this exhortation from prison.
         1. He reminds them of this in v. 1, that he is the prisoner of the Lord.
         2. The literal rendering of that phrase would be *the prisoner in the Lord*.
            1. That’s vital to see because what Paul is saying is more than simply he is imprisoned for the sake of the gospel or he is the prisoner who belongs to Christ.
            2. Paul recognizes that regardless of where he is physically, spiritually he is in the Lord.
            3. He might be in prison, but the greater reality is that he is in the Lord Jesus Christ.
            4. He reminds us of the importance of our union with Christ if we would walk worthy.
            5. We must always think of ourselves in relation to Christ, who is the Lord.
            6. Whether we are in jail, or whether we are in Ephesus, or whether we are in Phoenix, we are as believers in the Lord, one with Him, so that everything we do is done in His presence.
            7. We want to walk worthy of Him because we are united with Him and in Him, the Lord.
         3. It’s also significant that Paul reminds them of his imprisonment as he writes this letter and exhorts them to walk worthy of their calling.
            1. Paul is not writing this from the comfort of home.
            2. Paul is not writing this as a Christian whose life is marked by ease and luxury and good times with friends.
            3. Paul is writing this from a Roman prison, chained to prison guards.
            4. And it’s as if Paul is saying, “Look, if I can walk worthy of God’s calling from a prison cell, you can walk worthy of God’s calling where you are.”
            5. He’s ripping away all of our excuses for our sin.

People say, “Oh, well you don’t know what my spouse is like,” or, “Oh, you don’t know what my boss is like,” or, “Oh, you don’t understand what my kids are like,” or, “You don’t know what I’m suffering through right now.”

But Paul says, “Look, I’m in prison! Not to diminish your own trials and sufferings, but your circumstances are not an excuse to sin. Your circumstances are not a justification for walking unworthy of your calling.”

You can’t point to your circumstances and say, “Well, when things improve, I’ll walk worthy of my calling.”

See, the goal of the Christian life is not pleasant circumstances.

The goal of the Christian life is to walk worthy of Christ so that we are pleasing to the Lord.

In Colossians 1:10, Paul prays for the Colossians, that they would **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects.**

The aim of the Christian life is not to do what pleases me but to do what pleases the Lord.

That’s the real issue; that’s the real goal.

We live in a society and culture that is obsessed with doing what pleases ourselves.

In fact, that has been framed over the past year as doing what is safe.

Whatever we do, we must make sure that we are doing what is safe.

Paul wasn’t interested in safety.

Prison wasn’t safe.

Paul was interested in one thing and one thing only: to walk worthy of his calling.

You know, the worldly mindset focused on self so easily bleeds over into the church.

It comes right into our mindset about life.

And so what Paul says in Ephesians 4:1 about his imprisonment and the call to walk worthy is a life-changing, world-altering perspective.

Our entire lives are driven by this single aim: to walk worthy of our calling so that we might please Him!

So Paul mentions his imprisonment to remind us of the centrality of the mission and to take away any excuse we might bring for why we cannot in our present situation follow this exhortation.

* 1. How do we do this, set this focus so that we walk worthy of our calling?
     1. We have to understand our calling, first of all, as we said – we are called to be members of the body of Christ.
     2. And second, we must cultivate our character.
        1. The first item Paul mentions is humility.
        2. Humility is defined by two things.
           1. First, it views God’s will as supreme.

The truly humble person trembles at the Word of God.

The truly humble person does not live for himself, but for the glory of God, submitting himself to the will of God.

* + - * 1. Second, humility views others as more important than oneself.

It takes the mindset of Christ, who did not come to be served but to serve.

It looks out for the needs and interests of others.

The world is always looking out for itself and its own needs and desires.

The Christian should manifest humility by seeking to care for the needs of others.

It’s how Paul puts it in Romans 15:2…

Our goal is not to build ourselves up, but to build up others, to edify others, to do what will be beneficial to them.

* + 1. Paul lists another virtue we must cultivate to walk worthy of our calling in v. 2…

1. Gentleness (v. 2)
   1. Gentleness is a virtue that is difficult to understand, especially in our contemporary context.
      1. It was often translated as meekness in the past, and that gave it the connotation of being weak or soft.
      2. We also live in a world that is opposed to truth, especially the truth stated directly and clearly, and so the virtue of gentleness has often been redefined to suit the mores of the world.
      3. It’s often understood as being *mild*.
      4. In fact, one dictionary definition of the English word *gentle* is to be mild in temperament.
      5. If we want to cultivate this characteristic of being gentle, we need to understand exactly what it means.
   2. The starting point to understanding gentleness must be the Lord Jesus Christ.
      1. Look at Matthew 11:29…
         1. In this verse, we find both of these concepts in Ephesians 4:2 – being humble and gentle.
         2. Jesus describes Himself as being gentle and humble in heart.
         3. In other words, what Paul has called us to exhibit in our own lives in Ephesians 4:1-2 is nothing less than the character of Christ who displayed both of these traits.
      2. In Matthew 21:5, we see Jesus described as gentle once again…
         1. Jesus, in His kingship, is defined as being gentle.
         2. This is His character that we are called to emulate.
      3. When we think about Jesus being gentle, what does that mean as we read through His life?
         1. This is an especially relevant question for the gospel of Matthew, because it is only in this Gospel that Jesus is described as gentle, and so what picture does Matthew paint of this?
         2. We see gentleness displayed in the Lord in several ways that make sense to our typical understanding of what it means to be gentle.
            1. For example, we often seen Jesus touching those He healed in a way that showed compassion.

When He healed Peter’s mother-in-law in Matthew 8:15, we read this detail: **“He touched her hand, and the fever left her.”**

That healing touch that seems to gentle and kind!

Or in Matthew 9:25, when Jesus raised a little girl from the dead, we read, **“He entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.”**

Again, we see the gentleness of the Savior, coming to the bedside of this little girl and touching her cold, lifeless hand until it warmed and brimmed over with life.

All of this is summed up for us in Matthew 9:36, where we read…

Jesus looks out at the crowds of Israel not with anger or rage but with compassion.

He sees them as sheep who are lost, in need of the tenderness of a loving and faithful shepherd.

* + - * 1. When Jesus taught, His words often make sense in the context of gentleness as we typically think of it.

We have already seen Matthew 11:29, where Jesus calls those who are tired and weary to come to Him and find rest.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He pronounced a blessing upon the gentle, using the same term as we find here.

After a woman had touched Him and been healed of a bleeding illness, He told her to take courage.

When the children came to Jesus in Matthew 19, we see how tenderly He treated them and desired they be allowed to come to Him.

* + - * 1. And of course, we see His other miracles of compassion and gentleness upon people besides healing.

For example, it says in Matthew 14:14 that Jesus saw the large crowd that had followed Him and that He felt compassion for them.

And we read in this passage how Jesus fed the multitudes because of His great compassion for them.

The same thing takes place again in Matthew 15:32, where Jesus explicitly tells His disciples that He feels compassion for the crowds and doesn’t want to send them away hungry, and we see His gentle care for their physical as well as their spiritual needs.

* + - * 1. Finally, toward the end of Jesus’ life, we see His gentleness often on display.

When He thought of the judgment that would come on Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37, He mourned and grieved over it.

And in Matthew 26:10, Jesus stood up for a woman who was being rebuked by His disciples for anointing Jesus with expensive oil.

* + - * 1. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, and indeed throughout all the Gospel accounts, we see Jesus acting in a way that makes sense to our understanding of gentleness.
      1. The problem is, though, that these pictures of Jesus are not the full picture.
         1. If we isolate these instances, we may end up with a lopsided view of gentleness.

We may end up thinking that the truth must never have any bite to it.

We might think there is no place for strong statements and declarations.

We might end up thinking that everything must be mild and feel compassionate to the hearer.

But we have to take the full picture of Christ to understand what it means that He was gentle.

* + - * 1. For example, remember that passage we mentioned in Matthew 21:5, that says that Jesus is gentle?

If you keep reading the passage, eventually you arrive at verse 12.

And what happens in verse 12?

This King who was gentle and riding on a donkey walks into the temple and starts throwing furniture!

He’s not just overturning tables, He is chasing people out of the temple, forcing them to leave.

And you might get whiplash reading about how gentle Jesus is in verse 5 and a mere 7 verses later see this exact same gentle person physically removing people from the temple and throwing tables over!

* + - * 1. Interestingly, just before Jesus described Himself as gentle and humble in heart in Matthew 11:29, He pronounced doom on the cities where He had performed His miracles!

Listen to what He said in Matthew 11:21-24…

Here’s a brief summary of what He just said: “To hell with you.”

And not in a slang or corrupt way, not as a cussword, but quite literally He says, “You will go to hell” in verse 23.

Immediately after making this statement, He calls people to follow Him because He is gentle and humble in heart!

How many people do you think standing there that heard the pronouncement of doom on those cities would have thought to themselves that Jesus was the embodiment of gentleness?

No one in our culture would think that.

* + - * 1. And then we have the longest pronouncement of woe found in the Gospels by Jesus in Matthew 23:1-36.

Here’s just two samples from this chapter where Jesus excoriates the religious leadership of His day.

Verse 15…

Is it gentle to call someone a son of hell?

Is it gentle to call their entire missionary enterprise one gigantic recruitment effort from the pits of hell?

Verse 33…

Didn’t our parents teach us that it’s wrong to call people names?

Serpents, brood of vipers!

Those are not compliments for people who believe that serpents represent the devil himself!

You devils, you sons of Satan, you will be damned forever to the fires of hell!

Gentle Jesus, meek and mild!

* + 1. What do we make of all of this?
       1. Some people might say that the first things we looked at are the things we are to imitate.
       2. The other things are especially unique to Jesus and we are not to imitate Him in those ways.
       3. The problem with that is the example of the apostles.
  1. Let’s look at the apostles for a minute.
     1. Let’s start with James.
        1. James 3:17…
           1. James follows the example of Jesus here in gentleness and reminds us that God’s wisdom is gentle.
           2. It is reasonable and merciful and so on.
        2. And then James says this in James 4:3-4…
           1. Woah!
           2. Is James teaching with wisdom in James 4, or did he abandon that wisdom that is gentle and peaceable and merciful when he came to this section?
           3. To call a group of professing Christians adulteresses doesn’t scream gentleness, does it?
     2. And then we can look at Paul himself.
        1. We know Paul walked in gentleness because he told us in Ephesians 4:2 that the worthy walk is a walk of gentleness.
        2. But listen to what he says to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 10:1…
           1. That’s called sarcasm!
           2. And he says it immediately after saying that he is urging them by the gentleness of Christ!
        3. When we come to Galatians 3:1, listen to what Paul says…
           1. He calls the Galatians foolish, or to put it more starkly, moronic!
           2. He says they have been bewitched!
           3. Is he walking worthy here, in gentleness?
        4. And then look down at Gal 5:12…
           1. I wish these false teachers would mutilate themselves.
           2. In other words, I wish that when they were circumcising themselves, the knife would slip and they’d cut off more than they intended.
           3. Woah, Paul.
           4. What is that about?
           5. Is that gentle?
     3. Paul says in 1 Cor 11:1…
        1. We could look at that and say that when he tells the false teachers in Galatia to mutilate themselves he is not imitating Christ.
        2. But the problem with that is that we see Christ saying equally strong statements against the false teachers He encountered, so it seems like Paul is imitating Christ when he says that.
        3. And so is that compatible with gentleness?
        4. Does being gentle really mean always being mild-mannered?
        5. After all, it’s Paul who said in 2 Timothy 2:24-26…
        6. Was Paul doing that, or was that just for Timothy to figure out on his own?
  2. I hope that by now you are starting to see that these passages on gentleness are intentionally arranged in Scripture to dispel the notion that gentleness means we imitate Mr. Rogers rather than Christ.
     1. So what does it mean to be gentle as we look at all of these passages?
     2. It begins like humility, with our attitude and posture before the Word of God.
        1. Look at James 1:21…
           1. That word **humility** is the same word in Eph 4:2 translated **gentleness**.
           2. To be gentle means first of all that we are under the power of the Word of God.
           3. To use the terms of horse training, it would be a horse that has been broken so that its full power is now under the control of the master.
           4. The person who is gentle has had his will broken, his self-centeredness broken, he has put aside the things that are displeasing to the Lord and he sits under the Word of God.
        2. That is the proper posture of the Christian, isn’t it?
           1. We do not stand over the Word of God as judges of the Word, but we sit under the Word of God and let it judge us, guide us, direct us, command us, teach us.
           2. The only way we can be gentle is to receive the Word of God.
     3. What about when it comes to our attitude toward and treatment of others?
        1. Harold Hoehner explains it so helpfully in his commentary, when he says that gentleness is “the conscious exercise of self-control, exhibiting an intentional choice of gentleness opposed to the use of power for the purpose of retaliation.”
        2. Here’s what gentleness looks like in relationships with other people: We never use our power, our knowledge, our strength, or our resources to retaliate against people who wrong us.
        3. Jesus strongly rebuked people, and those rebukes had some serious bite to them, but He never retaliated against anyone for a personal offense.
        4. Paul had some strong words to say to the Corinthians and the Galatians and in other passages about various opponents, but Paul never used his power to take revenge or to get back at someone who had done him wrong.
        5. Hoehner went on to say that gentleness can be compared to a well-trained guard dog: always angry at the right time, and never angry at the wrong time.
           1. If you have a guard dog, you want that dog to treat your children with kindness, you want that dog to be kind to your invited guests.
           2. But if someone breaks into your house and attempts to harm your children, you want that dog to do everything in its power to tear that person apart.
           3. You don’t rebuke your guard dog and say, “Now be gentle,” when an intruder threatens your kids.
           4. Gentleness has a proper context.
        6. Another way to think about this is the picture of a shepherd.
           1. The shepherd has to be gentle with the sheep.
           2. You don’t want an abusive shepherd who yells at the sheep and mistreats the sheep and hits them or kicks them when he’s upset, who lets them go without food or water.
           3. You don’t want a shepherd who yells and screams at sheep that try to wander off.
           4. At the same time, you don’t want a shepherd who treats wolves the same way he treats the sheep, right?
           5. That’s not a gentle shepherd!
           6. That’s a shepherd who really doesn’t care about sheep and perhaps guises it under the façade of being gentle!
           7. The gentle shepherd has a rod and a staff, and he uses them appropriate to the situation, to rescue the sheep and to drive off the wolves.
     4. Gentleness, then, is a bit more complex than just having a mild manner.
        1. In fact, it really has very little to do with being mild.
        2. Gentleness is to have your stubborn, sinful will broken and now under the authority of God’s Word.
        3. And it’s to use the power and strength and wisdom God has given you for the benefit of others, not for yourself.
        4. You make sure that you are never retaliating against others for personal offenses.
        5. But true gentleness is also protective, especially in this context of those in the body of Christ.
        6. A true shepherd never looks gentle to a ravaging wolf.
        7. Just because a wolf condemns a shepherd as not being gentle doesn’t mean the shepherd isn’t gentle.
        8. Just because a burglar thinks your dog is mean doesn’t mean your dog is mean.
  3. We are called to cultivate the virtue of gentleness if we would walk worthy of our calling.

1. Conclusion
   1. Let me ask you a question this morning: How personally do you take things in your life?
      1. How easily are you offended by others?
      2. See, if you want to cultivate gentleness, you need to make sure that you minimize how often you are offended.
      3. Because gentleness never retaliates against people for personal offenses.
      4. And the best way to avoid retaliating against others is to be unoffendable.
   2. And that requires us to come to where we started: the goal of our lives as Christians is singular: to walk worthy of Christ so that we please Him.
      1. If we come under the authority of God’s Word, and our entire life’s mission is to please Christ for His glory, we will cultivate the gentleness that is the fruit of the Spirit.
      2. We will manifest a humility that is concerned for the welfare of others, and that will lead us to a gentleness that uses what God has given us for their good and His glory.