**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Be an Encourager**

**Ephesians 6:21-24**

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 We are finishing our series in Ephesians, Brought to Life; Brought Together, looking at Paul’s closing words in Ephesians 6:21-24. These verses describe why Paul sent Tychicus and closes with a benediction or blessing. They are filled with Paul’s love and concern for the church and his desire to encourage them with his final words. Turn to Ephesians 6:21-24 as we read the text.

 My big idea – Be an encourager

**An Example of Faithfulness**

 Who is Tychicus? He was Paul’s scribe who wrote this letter as Paul dictated it and he delivered it to Ephesus for Paul. He was one of Paul’s traveling companions. Like Jesus, Paul gathered disciples around him to *encourage* them in following Jesus and *equip* them to disciple others. He mentored them to help shepherd and oversee the growing number of churches. Paul describes Tychicus as a beloved brother and a faithful servant. A beloved brother because as God’s children (5:1) we are members of God’s family, brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul had come to know and love Tychicus as they spent time together. The Spirit bonded their hearts as they shared life together around God’s mission. Paul also calls him as a faithful minister or servant. He was dependable, someone Paul could count on. He is not talking about a personality trait but Spirit shaped character, the fruit of faith. Faith in Christ leads to faithfulness to Christ and serving Christ. Tychicus is an example of someone whose faith led him to being faithful.

**An Example of an Encourager**

 Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus to encourage the church three ways: to bring this letter, to report on Paul, and to encourage them in their faith. First, Tychicus encouraged the church by delivering Paul’s letter. At first this may not seem very significant but it was the means of getting God’s word out and sharing it with God’s people. You may serve in some capacity that you think is not very significant, but it is helping to spread God’s word and the gospel.

 Secondly, Tychicus encouraged the church by reporting on how Paul was doing in prison (21, 22). Paul wanted to comfort them by letting them know he was ok. Sharing concerns, comforting and encouraging each other binds our hearts together. Paul is reflecting Christ here. The night before Jesus was betrayed he washed his disciples’ feet (Jn 13:1-20). And when Jesus is on the cross, he tells John to take care of his mother (Jn 19:26-27). All the while Jesus is preparing for and suffering for human sin, he is thinking of others. Paul follows his example, he is a bull’s eye for Satan yet he seeks to comfort others. Discipleship is following Jesus, in suffering if need be, and becoming like Jesus, having concern for others.

 Thirdly, Tychicus encouraged the church as Paul’s representative. As Tychicus traveled with Paul, he learned from Paul how to help churches by teaching, bringing correction, and addressing needs they might have (Acts 20:28-32). That word encourage means to *comfort* those who are afflicted, which we just saw with Tychicus giving the report. The word also means to *appeal* to someone to act or respond (Mat 8:5; Mat 8:22; Rom 12:1). And the word also means to *exhort* someone to walk obediently to Christ (Luk 3:18; Acts 14:22), or to warn someone about their actions (Acts 19:31, 21:12). It’s a common word in the New Testament and is used three times specifically calling Christians to encourage one other which leads me to my third point, we are called to be encouragers.

**Called to Be Encouragers**

 First, we are called to encourage one another with gospel truths in Scripture, to trust and rest in those truths (1 Thes 4:16-18; 1 Thes 5:11). Encouraging each other is explained as building each other up or strengthening each other spiritually (1 The 5:11). We see in these two references that we are called to encourage each other with truth whether that is comforting, exhorting, challenging, correcting, or warning each other with the goal that our faith is strengthened. I want to look more closely at the third reference, Hebrews 10:23-25. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging Jewish Christians to remain faithful to Jesus because they are being tempted to abandon Christ and return to Judaism. First, we are commanded to hold fast (rigid, unbending) to Christ as our only hope because He is faithful (23). We hold fast by thinking about how we can stir one another to love and good works, living obediently. We do this by not giving up meeting as some have but instead, we are to meet to encourage one another and even more as you see the return of Christ coming. None of us can live the Christian life outside of the encouragement of others. So, we must gather Sundays, in Life Groups, in Discipleship Groups, and over coffee or a meal or just to hang out with this purpose - to encourage one another so our faith is strengthened. Try to swim alone in the Christian life and you will drown. Let me challenge all of us, prayerfully consider how we can encourage each other as we gather whether on Sunday or at your Life Group or at the coffee shop or on the river.

 God has made us one in Christ to gather to encourage one another to strengthen our faith. To share our burdens and struggles and hurts and hang-ups. And to comfort, encourage, and exhort each other with gospel truths so our faith is strengthened. The ministry of encouragement is not just for the elders or super Christians but it is for all of us. God has given you his Spirit so you can encourage others. Let me challenge all of us, prayerfully consider how we can encourage each other as we gather, whether on Sundays, in Life Groups or Discipleship Groups or at the coffee shop or on the river.

**Response:**

* How is God speaking to you?
* Ask God how can you encourage others every time you gather.

**Life Group Questions:**

1. Who was Tychicus and how does Paul describe him?
2. Why was Tychicus’ service significant?
3. Why did both Paul and Christ both think of others when they themselves were suffering?
4. When life is hard do you tend to think of others or yourself?
5. How does that speak to you?
6. What are some of the different ways the word encourage is used in the New Testament?
7. Why is the ministry of encouragement so important?
8. Share a time that you were encouraged by someone else
9. Why is it so hard to speak to each other about hard stuff?
10. How can we overcome this?
11. How is God speaking to you in this message?
12. How are you to respond in obeying God?
13. How does this passage relate to you own discipleship?
14. How does this message help you in making disciples?