Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – November 24, 2019

**The Mystery and Majesty**

**of Jesus Christ**

*How God’s Glory and Promises Find Fulfillment in His Son*

Exploring Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians

***Network: You don’t have to serve alone. . . nor should you.***

***Ephesians 6:21-24***

 Our familiarity with the Bible can be a very uneven thing. We may know some chapters and verses by heart from childhood, while other parts of the same book prompt an “I never saw that before!”

 The passage before us today is one that, like many invocations and benedictions, often is overlooked. Much as we tend to pass up reading the preface or introduction to a book story, we tend to do the same with greetings and closings of letters, as in “Dear. . .” and “Sincerely yours.”

 So while there may be more important parts of our reading in the “meatier” passages, we should not miss the rest. It is in these often overlooked sentences where the heart of the writer is expressed quite openly, and also where his strategies and intentions are clear to see.

 So today we are slowing things down a bit and focusing upon Paul’s final sentences to his beloved Ephesians. His words and their intensity may surprise you, as we remember what it took, in the first century, to get word to others. A trusted courier, a sea journey, and parchment protected from the elements all were part of the scene. But just as today, it often takes some reading between the lines to discover the whole message.

**Hearing the heartbeat of a Gospel networker. . .**

 The Apostle Paul often shares his desires to work cooperatively with other believers. For example, Romans 16:1-16, 21-23; 1 Corinthians 16:5-20; Philippians 2:19-30; 4:2, 3, 10-19; Colossians 4:7-18; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-10; 2 Timothy 4:9-22; *etc.* And notice that Romans begins and ends with Paul explaining his mission and how churches can be involved (Romans 1:1-15; 15:14-33; also, greetings in 16:1-16).

 Of course, the entire book of Philemon is about the restoration of a runaway slave to his master in a new partnership forged by and through the Gospel. The book of Acts, too (chapters 13-28) is a chronicle of this early Gospel network. In that light, consider Paul’s spirit of cooperation and teamwork in the Lord. . .

***Gospel networking means trusting others***. v. 21

 “Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister. . .”

 Key information must be exchanged in established relationships. To ask others to trust us, we must trust them first. Relationships risk.

***Gospel networking means full disclosure in serving.*** v. 22

 “How and what I am doing. . . will tell you everything”

 We do not have intimate knowledge of everyone in our network, but we make certain that our partners know our work and condition.

***Gospel networking means shared passions and life.*** vv. 23, 24

 *“Encourage your hearts. . . faith. . . grace. . . love. . . God the Father”*

The closest of all relationships is the common bond of Jesus in the Gospel. But our weaknesses test those ties, which require maintenance.

***Why it matters. . . Spiritual networking crosses all ethnic, cultural, and generational lines.***

*Spiritual networkers are not exclusive and cliquish. They always are looking for trustworthy people who may become partners in ministry. 2 Timothy 2:2*

 *Spiritual networkers are not naive. They know that some people are not trust-worthy, and that others may not allow you to get close. Matthew 10:16-18*

*Spiritual networkers are in good company. Noah, Abraham, David, and Nehemiah all were networkers. As is Jesus. Matthew 12:46-50*