

THE BIG IDEA: When we're an open book, God can write stories that make a difference.

The Take-Off

There's something about a story that brings everything home, isn't there?

Not a make believe story - as good as those are - but a real story about a real person that points in a real way to concepts and ideas that seemed, to that point, to be mostly hypothetical.

Those kind of stories jar us and force us to consider that what we've heard or learned in a lecture, sermon, or classroom may actually work out in "the real world."

Not only do they grab our attention, but they grab the attention of a world around us that is watching and hoping that maybe what we've found is real.

Stories like how a friendship grew between an elderly woman and the man who tried to kill her.

[Share "An Amazing Act of Forgiveness" - <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/oct/09/local/me-20503>]

Paul knew the power of stories, too, and so he ended a letter that called a church to unity by mentioning the name of a friend who would have been an enemy if it wasn't for Jesus.

And so, in the closing paragraphs of his letter to the believers in Ephesus, Paul talks about Tychicus, and the way he describes him is the best illustration of the major themes that he's written about to this point.

1. He was FAMILY

- a. Paul called him a "dear brother"
- b. That sounds so trite and cliché because we use the word dear all the time and don't really mean it
- c. But what makes it so shocking is that Tychicus should have been an enemy
- d. Paul was a Jew and Tychicus was a Gentile
- e. We talked a little about the hatred between these two groups of people back in Week 5, but let's take a peek over in Luke 4 to see just how bitter it was.
- f. Jesus was speaking publicly in a synagogue for the first time and it was impressive
- g. Verse 22 even says that people were amazed at the gracious words He spoke
- h. But 7 verses later that same crowd is trying to kill Him. What changed?
- i. Jesus pointed out to a roomful of Jews that of all the widows and lepers in Israel, the 2 that God touched were Gentiles.
- j. God showing favor to Gentiles instead of Jews threw the Jews into a murdering frenzy.
- k. You can see, then, why Paul calling this Gentile a "dear brother" was such a big deal.
- l. Back in Ephesians, we learned that this kind of unity wasn't intended just for Paul and Tychicus or an old woman and a rapist, but for you and me and others who were separated by differences.
- m. Ephesians 2:12-13 and 19 make it clear that Jesus has done away with what divides us so that we can live united
- n. We WERE foreigners; we ARE family.

2. He was FAITHFUL

- a. Not only was this Gentile now like family, he was faithful
- b. Tychicus is mentioned 4 times in the Bible: once with Paul in the heat of angry mobs and the other times as a trusted messenger bringing reports of Paul's well-being
- c. It is possible that he himself carried the letter that we know as Ephesians
- d. Let me ask you? Are you faithful as a messenger of God's word?
- e. Jesus said in Luke 16:10 that faithfulness in little things leads to opportunities to be faithful in bigger things
- f. We know, then, that Tychicus was faithful in smaller areas long before he carried letters for God
- g. To the end, he was faithful to Paul's mission, Paul's ministry, and to his part in it
- h. Let's be honest, we all want good friends - faithful friends - like that, don't we?
- i. We want faithful partners, people that we'll grow old with and who will stay with us in the worst of times
- j. Proverbs 18:24 - Jesus is the best friend, and when He redeems us, something in us changes
- k. What we weren't, we become, and what we couldn't do before, we can do now
- l. Ephesians 2:1-2 and 8-9 are clear: we had no faith to save ourselves, but have been given faith that saves
- m. Hebrews 10:39
- n. We WERE faithless; we ARE faithful

3. He was FOCUSED

- a. Have you ever had a staring contest?
- b. I find that, for me, every time I start a staring contest I immediately need to blink, or there are suddenly a ton of things going on around me that distract me
- c. But Tychicus? This dude wasn't distracted. He was focused!
- d. Sometimes in church we lose focus on the main things, don't we? Or maybe we should say that we stay focused on the wrong things?
- e. We get caught up in one ministry versus another, one sin being worse than another or one cause being more worthy than another.
- f. Of course, the things that are focus-worthy are usually always the ones that we're passionate about!
- g. According to Ephesians 6:22, Tychicus had a purpose: let the believers know how Paul was and encourage them.
- h. His purpose had everything to do with others, and little to do with himself.
- i. But what's even more mind-blowing than the purpose was his determination and focus in not wavering from it!
- j. Remember, he was faithful!
- k. Perhaps Paul had his friend in mind when he wrote his last letter - 2 Timothy - and gave the instructions found in 2:1-7.
- l. Focus. Be a good soldier. Jesus has won the war and so we can stand and fight.
- m. Many soldiers have thought of potentially better ways to do things, but no good soldier would abandon his position of his fellow soldiers to go his or her own way.
- n. Why? Because we have a task to do, a part to play in a purpose that is greater than any one of us and greater because of all of us.
- o. In war, there are bullets and injuries and casualties and pain.
- p. That's why there are bunkers and foxholes and men and women standing side by side and back to back fighting for one another.
- q. When the bullets are flying, you don't call the friends who aren't faithful. Paul didn't send Demas who had abandoned him. He was in prison and needed someone he could trust, and so he sent Tychicus.
- r. This Gentile, who should have been an enemy to the death, was a focused, faithful friend.
- s. Their friendship in spite of their differences was the difference.
- t. Here was the living proof that everything Paul had written about - the power of Jesus to destroy what divides and the grace of Jesus to unite the divided - was true.
- u. Before Jesus, we'd be a roomful of people fighting for MY rights and MY way, but because of Jesus we are a roomful of servants laying down our rights and our way for HIS BODY.
- v. We WERE fragmented; we ARE focused.

The Landing

And so, here we are at the end of an amazing, soul-satisfying journey through Ephesians, and the temptation will be to simply file the notes away and go about business as usual.

But I want to call you to something so much greater than just filing notes. I want you to open the book of your lives and allow God to write a story that will make a difference.

In our culture, the more famous we become, the more private we get. But what allowed Paul to close this letter with such a powerful example of friendship with an enemy?

What has allowed an 80 year-old woman to stay friends with her attempted murderer?

Simple. They invited others into their lives, their stories.

Our Big Idea says this: **When we're an open book, God can write stories that make a difference.**

Will it be risky? Sure, but the only way for God to write these kind of stories in us is to allow Him to open us.

And that, my friends, is the change - the difference - that our city won't be able to deny.

We were closed and guarded, selfish and alone, but now we are open and trusting, focused, faithful and friends.

In Christ...

We. Are. Changed.