

**TEXT: Ephesians 4:1-3**

**TITLE: “Our Walk Along the Avenue”**

**ILLUSTRATION** – A few weeks ago we had the funeral service for Ed Shipman here at our church. Jason Garrett, head coach of the Dallas Cowboys, and Ed’s personal friend, spoke at the service. He told how that Ed was a man of great vision, but he also knew how to follow through on that vision. Jason told a story from his own teenager years when he was driving his car in the rain and he was frustrated that the windshield wipers were either going too slow or too fast. He thought, “I’m going to invent a windshield wiper that will let you vary the pace just right.” He even went home and told his parents about his vision. Well, as you can imagine, Jason Garrett does not hold the patent for variable speed wipers. No, that achievement probably goes to some engineer in Detroit. And Jason Garrett used that story to illustrate the fact that it’s one thing to have a vision ... it’s another thing to execute on that vision.

Two Sundays ago we shared with you the vision that emerged from our Re:Vision process. An important part of that vision is what we are calling “The Avenue.” **SHOW GRAPHIC.** It is the main business of our church, and any authentic NT church, to make disciples, to produce followers of Jesus, to bring people into the fullness of the life of Christ. We must take this command of Jesus seriously. The Apostle Paul put it this way:

**Colossians 1:28-29 - We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect (mature, complete) in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.**

So “The Avenue” will become the way that we obey Christ in making disciples. We want to move people along the path ... the avenue ... of spiritual growth starting from our very first contact when they click on our website or drive on to our parking lot and walk into our buildings. We’ll have a process for that, but you are a big part of that. When we come for Sunday Bible Study or for worship we come as a spiritual family ... this is our spiritual home. If you have a guest come into your home what do you do? You want to make them feel at home. And this isn’t just about customer service. This is about genuinely showing people the love of Jesus Christ. We welcome people because that’s what God did for us in Christ. We need scores of volunteers to do this well through our First Impressions ministry. At the end of the service go to our Welcome Center, look for the “I Am a Servant” table and you can sign up there. Members, when you come to Sunday Bible Study or worship, don’t just sit down; greet people around you. Some of them may be a guest.

But it doesn’t stop there. We want to help people move from saying, “I am a guest,” to saying, “I am a member.” In this we want people to be a member of God’s family through personal salvation and a member of Christ’s body through baptism and church membership. But it doesn’t end there. People who are saved become disciples. So the next intersection along The Avenue is “I am a disciple.” Again, the main business of our church is to make disciples. The ultimate fruit of the disciple’s life is “I am a servant.” So we mobilize believers to be faithful witnesses and servants for Christ in the traffic pattern of their lives.

Let's open our Bibles to Ephesians 4. Again, it is the main business of the church to bring people into the fullness of the life of Jesus Christ. We learn that from the Scriptures here in Ephesians 4 where we're taught that Christ has created and configured the church to become the AVENUE by which believers grow into the fullness of Christ. Whatever you think church is ... whatever you expect your church to be ... it must conform to the truth of Scripture. **Read Ephesians 4:1-3.**

**Ephesians 4:1 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

Now in v.1 do you see that little word "then"? Your translation of the Bible may say "therefore." That word signals an important shift in the book of Ephesians. Chapters 1-3 are deeply *doctrinal*. Chapters 4-6 are thoroughly *practical*. Ephesians 1-3 teaches about the *wealth* of our life in Christ. Ephesians 4-6 teaches us about the *walk* of our life in Christ. When Paul says in v.1, "live a life," it means "walk this way."

And in Ephesians 4:1-16 (and really all the way to the end of the book) we learn that Christ has created and configured the church to become the AVENUE by which believers grow into the fullness of this life in Christ. Here is what we learn about this life, this walk along the avenue. This walk is...

## **1. A CALLING**

**Ephesians 4:1 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the CALLING you have received.**

A calling is something that occupies us. But it doesn't occupy us like a hobby. It's like our life's work ... our vocation. If someone asks you, "What do you do for a living?" they're asking about your vocation. Well this word "calling" means just that. Our life in Christ isn't our hobby, our pastime, our social outlet ... it is our life's vocation. Do you see it that way? Is that the way you approach the Christian life?

This calling begins with our salvation. Earlier in Ephesians Paul prays for believers...

**Ephesians 1:18 - I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,**

We need to understand the hope to which He has called us when we are saved. So this calling becomes ours when we are saved. But we are not called simply as individuals. We are called into the Body of Christ ... the church. This is clear because, as we'll see, starting next week that Paul immediately moves from this admonition to live a life worthy of our calling in Christ to

our place in His Body. Again Christ has created and configured the church to become the AVENUE by which believers grow into the fullness of Christ.

This life is a calling, but more than that it is...

## 2. A RADICAL CALLING

**Ephesians 4:1 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

Paul says, “Walk this way, not the way you used to walk.” How did we live, how did we walk, before we were saved? We see that earlier in Ephesians 2 where Paul talks about how...

**Ephesians 2:2 - You used to live (walk) when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Satan), the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.**

Before you were saved you followed the ways of the world, not the ways of the Lord. You followed Satan, not the Savior. You were disobedient; now you are obedient. This is a radical calling to walk in a new life. Later in Ephesians Paul will drive this home:

**Ephesians 4:17 - So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live (walk) as the Gentiles (pagans who are far from God) do, in the futility of their thinking.**

**Ephesians 5:2 - Live a life of love (walk in love), just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**

**Ephesians 5:8 - For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live (walk) as children of light**

**Ephesians 5:15 - Be very careful, then, how you live (how you walk)—not as unwise but as wise,**

This is a radical calling, but it is also...

## 3. A DANGEROUS CALLING

Ephesians is one of what are called Paul’s “Prison Letters.” Many of the books of the NT were written by a man locked up for his faithfulness to Jesus. That’s why he starts v.1 by saying...

**Ephesians 4:1 - As a prisoner for the Lord...**

He's a prisoner "for the Lord," held in a Roman prison. But whether in prison or not he is a prisoner "in the Lord." He lives his life in union with and in connection with and under the control of Christ.

**ILLUSTRATION** –There is something very potent about the challenge that comes from a person in prison, or someone who is in danger of going to prison for their faithfulness to Christ. I think about the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, that German pastor who, during WWII, dared to confront Hitler and the Nazi's, along with the weak church that wouldn't stand up in the face of Nazism. In his book *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer wrote, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Those words are powerful because they come from a man who is living it out as a prisoner.

And so it is with Paul as he speaks as "a prisoner for the Lord." Walking this way in Christ, living a life worthy of our calling, is worth sacrificing everything for, including your freedom. It's not just an enjoyable hobby or a comforting pastime. When we fully live this life it can be dangerous. God is calling us out of our soft-living ways to bear whatever we have to bear to be faithful in Christ.

This life is a radical calling, a dangerous calling and ...

#### **4. AN URGENT CALLING**

**Ephesians 4:1 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

Focus on those words in v.1, "I urge you..." This is not a little suggestion or recommendation like saying to someone, "I urge you to try out the new coffee shop on Magnolia." No, this is much stronger. Paul says to these believers, "In light of the wealth you have been given in Christ, in light of who you are in Christ, I beg you, I insist on it in the Lord ... walk in a manner worthy of your calling."

This life is also...

#### **5. A HIGH CALLING**

**Ephesians 4:1b - Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

Notice the word "worthy." Ancient readers of this verse would have an image in their minds of a set of old fashioned scales, like you might have seen in the produce department of a grocery store. There's a tray on one side and a tray on the other side. You want five pounds of peaches, so you put a five pound weight on one tray and you add peaches until you get five pounds on the other tray. They equal out. One side weighs as much as the other.

Here's the point: Do your *works* weigh as much as your *words*? Does your *behavior* weigh as much as your *beliefs*? Does your *conduct* weigh as much as your *confession*? Does your *practice* weigh as much as your *preach*. Does your *walk* weigh as much as your *talk*?

This is a high calling. Live a life that is consistent with that calling. To believers in Thessalonica Paul preached...

**1 Thessalonians 2:12 - Live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.**

For the believers in Colossae he prayed that...

**Colossians 1:10 - You may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,**

We don't try to make ourselves worthy so God will save us. No God saves us by His grace and mercy. And so having been accepted in Christ we now strive to live a life worthy of that high calling in Christ.

**ILLUSTRATION** – There's a legendary story about the day that the famous Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great, heard of one of his young soldiers who was being rebellious and disobedient to his superiors. The young man's name also happened to be Alexander. Alexander the Great ordered that the young soldier be brought to his tent. When the soldier arrived Alexander the Great began to question him, "Have you been disobedient to your superiors? Yes. Have you been derelict in your duties as a soldier? Yes. Then young man, either change your behavior or change your name." You see, the young soldier's behavior was not worthy of the renowned name Alexander.

**QUOTE:** About a year ago Beth Moore wrote a blog based on our text this morning. Specifically she challenged us to live out these truths in our culture that is increasingly hostile to the Gospel. Listen to just one paragraph: "Bemoaning will not help us. Believing will. We here in the west have, generally speaking, gotten away with living out our Christianity selfishly, carnally, politically, lazily, and, forgive me and include me, sloppily. We've left it for the professionals to do for us while we've tried to stay buffered on neutral ground. That's not going to work now. Christianity has grown too inconvenient. These are days for sanctification. These are days to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we each have been called. Let's clear out the cultural camouflage from our closets and go ahead and be willing to *look* different from the world and *love* different than the world."

So church, let's be done with shallow living. Be done with selfish living. Be done with sloppy living. Be done with sinful living. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ.