

**Ephesians: Living in Sync with Reality**  
**Part 6: Joyfully Captive to Jesus**

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**Ephesians 3:1-13**

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.” – **Matthew 6:21**

**I. Valuing the Most Valuable – Paul’s Great Passion**

Paul is one of the most influential people in history. He’s also deeply misunderstood.

What do we really see from Paul’s own writing? Someone who deeply loves Jesus. Someone who is so filled with Jesus’ joy, even in the darkest of places – in a prison cell – that he can’t help but be breaking into prayer.

Paul values what God has revealed in Jesus – what he calls “the mystery of Christ”, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He’s come to orient his life around the gospel and given himself to make this news known in costly and sacrificial ways.

To live in sync with reality means letting the truth of the gospel break into our hearts. When we look at the goodness of the good news, our hearts will be caught up in this same passion for loving Jesus that we see in Paul.

“For us the one truly great value, the “pearl of great price” ought to be God’s revelation in Christ... The gospel is not one item among many. It is all Paul had and all we have. The gospel of grace, of death and resurrection, of inclusion with God’s people should be given central place. We need to be gospel people; that is what the word evangelical denotes.”

– Klyne Snodgrass

“This word [evangelical] is so debated and abused that often it becomes hardly usable.”

– Klyne Snodgrass

The word evangel comes from the Greek we translate as “gospel” or “good news”. *Euangelion*. It’s the word Paul uses in our text. So “evangelical” is a way to say that the “good news of Jesus” is at the centre of who we are and gives shape to all of life.

May we follow this example of Paul’s – to love Jesus, and value his gospel in such a way that may be costly, but ultimately beautiful and true. May we live in sync with reality so that our hearts are caught up in the joy of knowing and loving and following Jesus.

## II. Joyfully Captive to Jesus – Paul the Prisoner of Jesus

“For this reason, I, Paul, *the prisoner of Christ Jesus* for the sake of you Gentiles...”  
– **Ephesians 3:1**

He is bound up in – and bound *to* – the life of Jesus, and the task Jesus has given him.

Historically, Paul is a prisoner of Nero. But theologically Paul was a prisoner of Jesus Christ long before. Paul was “captive” to the grace of Jesus and bound up in his purposes.

Can you say the same of yourself? Like, what “has your heart” so to speak? What is your life’s purpose bound up in?

“You may be an ambassador to England or France  
You may like to gamble; you might like to dance  
You may be the heavyweight champion of the world  
You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls

But you're gonna have to serve somebody...  
Well, it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody.”  
- *You're Gonna Have to Serve Somebody*, Bob Dylan

Paul “identifies” as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Jesus has all of him. Does Jesus have all of you?

## III. Mission-Shaped Purpose – Paul the “Least-er”

“Although I am *less than the least* of all the Lord’s people this grace was given to me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.” – **Ephesians 3:8**

Paul creates a new word just to say how “least” he is.  
He takes a superlative adjective “least” and adds a comparative suffix “-er”  
So “Least” and “-er.” “Least-er” “Least-est-est.” “The smallest of all.”

Is this a sort of false humility – a guise for a prideful spirit underneath it all? Is it an insecure “fishing” for compliments? Is it a lack of “self-esteem”? No. He really means it. His work was to literally see Christians killed. He says it like this in his speech in Acts 22:4: “I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison.”

Who will God choose to be the apostle, the messenger of the boundless riches of Christ?  
Someone who was deeply in need of grace – and experienced it.

Paul knows that by valuing Jesus as his first and best, he moves lower. He goes 'down' for the sake of others (i.e. Philippians 2:1-11). His new identity as a prisoner and a servant calls him to take this "administration of grace" and give it away for the sake of others.

God loves to work in all the small things.

"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

– **1 Corinthians 1:26-29**

And we are bound up in this mission. For, as Paul says of God, "His intent was that now, through the church [through us!] the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms..." – **Ephesians 3:10.**

As we treasure the gospel, as we are joyfully captive to Jesus, we are now bound up in the mission-shaped purpose of making the manifold wisdom of God clear through our corporate life.

1. God works in and with and through the little.
2. We minister out of our own story of God's grace in our lives. What has God entrusted you by his grace? What "administration of grace" are you working out in whatever small ways you can?

This text leaves us with three questions:

What do you treasure most deeply?

What defines you?

And how can you connect your own personal story to God's purposes for you in his mission?

In what seems a deeply ironic twist, Paul the chained one, who envisions his life as being a prisoner *of* Jesus for the sake of others – he says we now approach God with "*freedom.*"

"In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory."

– **Ephesians 3:12-13**

When we become captive to Jesus, a prisoner of Christ, this is where we become truly free. Free from the bondage to sin and death. Free to come before God our Father knowing our misdeeds, our sin and rebellion have been put out of sight – "in him, and through faith in him." Free from the crushing weight of trying to create and perform an identity for ourselves.

And, ironically, knowing the ways in which we too are made “small” and humbled – where we recognize our flaws, failures, shortcomings, and sins – that doesn’t lead to a lack of confidence but our very reason for it. Because of Jesus’ grace toward we come with confidence to the Father.

***Receive This Blessing:***

In your identity as ‘prisoner of Christ Jesus,’ in your captivity to Jesus, be truly free.

In your “littleness” and the places you sense your “least-er-ness”, live with confidence the task God has given you for the sake of others.

Of all your “loves”, that which you value, may your heart treasure the greatest treasure we can ever know, Jesus Christ and his gospel.

May you be ready to give deeply, in costly sacrificial ways, even facing the kind of pressure that comes from this commitment, because your story is caught up in the grace of the grace as well.

Amen. Let it be.

## Life Group Discussion and Reflection

### Open Up

What are some of your highest values? How did you come to adopt those?

### Dig In

1. **Read Ephesians 3:1-13.** In what ways do you see Paul “valuing” the good news of Jesus? What is he willing to give in order to live in accord with that value? How does that challenge you?
2. In Ephesians 3:1 Paul describes his own experience of being a “prisoner of Christ Jesus” as a key element of his own identity.
  - a. Have you ever thought of yourself in those terms before? Why or why not?
  - b. How might adopting an identity of being “captive to Jesus” shift how you think about what you do with your life?
3. Paul has come to understand his identity and mission as caught up in the “administration” of grace that was given to him. He ministered out of his unique story and unique calling.
  - a. How would you describe how God’s grace broke in for you?
  - b. How might that unique story play into your unique calling? Is there a particular way you feel God calling you to be a “good steward” of the grace you’ve received? Describe that to your group.

### Pray

Take time to give thanks to God for the ways God has worked out his grace in those in your group. Pray for each other, that you would lean deeply into your identity as captives of Christ and steward the “administration of grace” given to each person. Pray for any other requests for your group.