

## The Great Responsibility

### Ephesians 3:1-6

Turn with me this morning to the book of **Ephesians 3:1-6**. We have up to this point been looking at what Paul describes for us as the “spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms.” Things that we as Christians possess, not because of our abilities or performances, but simply because of God’s kindness to us. God has given us a new found freedom, he has begun a process of revealing spiritual wisdom, and he has taken our normal everyday lives and now intervenes by the power of the Holy Spirit and is constantly at work on our character, our behavior, and our boldness.

We have what we have because of Jesus Christ. God loves you so much that he will not let you remain the same. He will always be doing something within all of us until our last breath on earth. That is what gives life meaning – it isn’t simply to eat, sleep, work and play. But each day should be marked by a sense of anticipation of “what is God going to do next?”

As we look at the life of Paul, a man who seemed to have purpose in trying to destroy the early church, we find that God intersects his life and gives it meaning beyond what Paul could have ever imagined. God allowed the Apostle Paul to play a key role in the Christian faith and today, because of Paul’s willingness to be used by God, you and I sit here with hope. Let’s look at Paul’s words in our text:

*<sup>1</sup> I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles\* . . .  
<sup>2</sup> assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. <sup>3</sup> As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. <sup>4</sup> As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. <sup>5</sup> God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. <sup>6</sup> And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.*

I want you to first notice the attitude in which Paul writes his words specifically in verse one. He calls himself a prisoner of Christ Jesus. As you look at the book of Acts you find that Paul gets thrown into a roman prison. He could have very well said that he was a prisoner of Caesar but instead he understood that the one who truly had the final say was Jesus Christ. Even though it may have seemed like Paul was simply having a bad day or bad luck, Jesus was, and is, the one who still has control over history. Jesus is the one who is in control and nothing will happen without his allowing it to happen. **1. Paul knew that Jesus was in control and embraced his circumstances. (A Prisoner of Jesus)**

I think a Christians all too often we forget who is in control. We think that we are simply having a bad day or bad luck instead of asking the one who is in control, what he is doing, or trusting that he knows what he is doing. I know that I question God all the time. I don't understand why things are the way they are but I know I must trust the one who truly does have control and who according to Jeremiah 29 tells me that he has plan for my life that will build a future and a hope. **Nothing in my life happens by accident but is all a part of a greater plan that I know God is orchestrating.** In fact, scripture even tells me in **Romans 8:28**:

<sup>28</sup> *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

There is a teaching within some Churches that state that if there is suffering in your life that you are doing something wrong. Did Jesus suffer? Did his disciples suffer? Yes! **Suffering is a normal part of life.** It is what we do in the midst of suffering that is the critical question. Paul know that despite his imprisonment that God was going to still use him and that it was all part of God's plan. Paul stated in **Romans 5:3**:

<sup>3</sup> *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.*

Look at Paul's heart in **Philippians 1:19-20**. Even in the midst of his trial, his perspective was on the fact that God was in control:

<sup>19</sup> *For I know that as you pray for me and the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will lead to my deliverance.* <sup>20</sup> *For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.*

Paul knew who was in control and yet realized that he had to make sure that he didn't give up. He trusted that as he lived through whatever was thrown his way, that he would be one who would bring honor to Christ. Everything he did and went through, he saw as God's plan. **Don't give up too soon and walk away from what God is trying to do in you. Embrace your circumstances and live your life in honor of Jesus Christ.**

**2. Paul was a prisoner because of his obedience to God. (Because of my preaching to you Gentiles).** This wasn't a statement of blame but a statement of privilege and meaning. Look at Paul's words in **Ephesians 3:13**:

<sup>13</sup> *So please don't lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.*

Remember that part of Paul's reason for writing this letter to the Ephesians is because there is division in the church over who is more special – the Jews or the Gentiles. All through the Old Testament we find that God revealed himself to His chosen people the Israelites, the Jewish people. But now God wanted to reveal himself to everyone. In fact,

the very reason Paul was thrown in Jail was because of this. We find the scenario in **Acts 22:21-23**:

<sup>21</sup> *“But the Lord said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles!’”*  
<sup>22</sup> *The crowd listened until Paul said that word. Then they all began to shout, “Away with such a fellow! He isn’t fit to live!”* <sup>23</sup> *They yelled, threw off their coats, and tossed handfuls of dust into the air.*

One word threw the Jewish people into a frenzy and that was the word “Gentile”. “How could God now reveal himself to unclean and uncivilized people? We are the chosen people and no one else!”

I remember as a college student at our Foursquare Bible College a time when me and a friend went out to a hang out at Ventura beach. We were down by the water in a place where there were restaurants and shops and we are approached by two men who clearly were living on the streets, hungry, needing help. It was a pretty cold night and they were looking for some money for coffee.

Now, I know you don’t just give out money because all too often it gets used for alcohol or other things, so we decided that we would take them out for coffee. We walk into a diner and they clearly won’t let us get a table because of the two gentlemen so we took the coffee to go.

We began to speak to them about Jesus Christ and the hope that is found in him, and they began to share how as children they had gone to Sunday School but as life progressed that they walked away and wondered if God would want anything to do with them anymore. We were able to explain God’s unconditional love for them and we were able to lead them through the sinners prayer.

Who knows, maybe today they are still serving God? Maybe that was the turning point for them? Simply because two strangers didn’t care what they looked like and shared Jesus with them.

**God doesn’t look at whether or not people have it together, he looks to see how lost and broken they are and how he can make them new.**

Despite how the Jewish people responded, it didn’t stop Paul from continuing his quest. Paul knew that he had new purpose. In fact, look at **verse 2** in our text:

*As you already know, God has given me this special ministry of announcing his favor to you Gentiles.*

In the Revised Standard Version **verse 2** reads like this:

*“...assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,”*

I like that word stewardship because it has with it the idea of oversight, management or responsibility. He knew that he was playing a critical role and he took it seriously.

**3. Paul was going to do what Jesus had asked him to do despite what people may think, say, or do. He had a responsibility to fulfill. (Verse 3)**

Look at Paul's words in **1 Corinthians 4:1-4**:

*<sup>1</sup> So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's mysteries. <sup>2</sup> Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful. <sup>3</sup> As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. <sup>4</sup> My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide.*

The key to fulfilling any responsibility is to be faithful (pressing through). **God has given us, Hope Chapel Healdsburg, the responsibility to reveal Jesus Christ to our community.** A responsibility that none of us should take lightly, but one in which we must remain faithful and let God lead us. It was a privilege for Paul and it should be a privilege for us as well.

What happens in any church however is that we let the evaluation of others hinder what we do. We let other people's ideas or opinions to creep in and we let it alter us from our original course or leading from God. We tend to react to the circumstances and our emotions. But **True responsibility reacts to God's leading and His purposes instead of man's interpretation of life.**

Look at **verses 3-5** of our text:

*<sup>3</sup> As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. <sup>4</sup> As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. <sup>5</sup> God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets.*

**4. Paul was responding to what God himself and shown him and taught him personally.** We see that specifically in verse 3. We read in **Galatians 1:12**:

*<sup>12</sup> I received my message from no human source, and no one taught me. Instead, I received it by direct revelation from Jesus Christ*

Based on Paul's own words we know that Jesus Christ revealed himself to Paul and had taught him. We find another example of this in **1 Corinthians 11:23** when Paul describes how Jesus explained the Last Supper to him. He writes:

*<sup>23</sup> For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself.*

Although not many of us have a divine visitation from Jesus Christ, God now teaches us through his Holy Spirit. Notice in verse 5 – “now he has revealed it by the Holy Spirit.” **The Holy Spirit is God’s voice to the believer.** We find a good example of this in the person of Peter. In **Matthew 16** Jesus asks Peter who he thinks Jesus is and Peter responds that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus then replies in **verse 17**:

*<sup>17</sup> Jesus replied, “You are blessed, Simon son of John,\* because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being.*

There are times when we have these “Peter Moments” when it is clear that what we understand is not but a divine intervention and revelation. Those teachings are not to simply fill our minds with knowledge but there is a purpose behind why God is showing and teaching us certain things.

That means **I have to be in the scriptures, reading it, memorizing it, doing all I can to understand its truths, so that I can gleam from them and hear from them the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit wants to come and teach me things so that my obedience might become someone else’s opportunity.**

Paul learned these things from Christ, he put it into action, and his obedience produced the greatest opportunity to the entire world. Paul’s obedience opened the door of Jesus Christ to the rest of mankind.

You and I sitting here this morning is the result of Paul’s actions, his suffering, his obedience, his sense of responsibility, and his response to God’s leading and teaching. He learned from God the greatest part of God’s plan – that salvation is for everyone. Look at **verse 6** in our text:

*<sup>6</sup> And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.*

Can you imagine how privileged Paul must have felt knowing that he was going to make an impact on the Kingdom of God? That everyone would have the opportunity to receive an inheritance from God, find a place of support and help with other believers, and be indwelt by the Holy Spirit who will teach us the mind and heart of God? Paul’s overwhelming sense of responsibility was never overshadowed by anything else in life. In fact, **it was this responsibility that gave Paul’s life meaning.**

**God comes to us this morning and tells us that we have a responsibility that gives our life meaning – that those around us may find hope and purpose again.** God wants us to know that our obedience can and will become opportunity for others to see and hear the God. May we not be tossed to and fro by the opinions of others, but may God’s voice steer us through the storms of life and through the serenity of his peace.

May our great responsibility move us to action, not so we can fill a building, but so that lives may be filled with the presence of God's Holy Spirit. And that when all is said and done, we may see our lives as honorable expressions of praise to our Father in Heaven, who despite who we were, made it possible for me to reconnect with Him once again. Let's pray!