

Ephesians 3 (Part 1): 1-3 • Who's In Charge of Your Life?

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We're in Ephesians chapter 3. Here on Sunday morning, we're going through the Book of Ephesians. And Wednesday evening we are going through 2 Chronicles and we're getting ready to finish that study here in the next couple of Wednesdays.

Ephesians chapter 3. We're going to just take the first 3 verses. Let's read those now and we'll pray.

Paul writes and says: *“¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.” (ESV)*

Stop there. Let's pray.

Thank You, Father, for Your Word. Thank You for the glorious insights that we gain from it. Thank You for the wisdom, and thank You, God, for Your ability to speak to each and every heart. You are the Lord of every heart, and You know every person, every issue, every concern, and I pray, my Father God, that You would speak to all of Your children.

And Lord, even for those who are not yet Your children, I pray that You would speak words of grace and insight, and bring them, Lord God, into Your family. Be with us, Lord, as we get into Your Word. We ask it in Jesus' precious name, amen.

There's— it's really verse 1— there's something here in verse 1 that just caught me as I was reading through it, and I wanted to talk to you about it today. It is the statement where Paul says that he refers to himself as, *“a prisoner for Christ Jesus.”*

By the way, that's the way the ESV renders that verse, *“a prisoner for Christ Jesus.”* I found it interesting, however, that in every other modern— and even not modern—English language translation that I looked at, it is rendered as,

“Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus.” If you have something other than the ESV, which is what I'm reading from here, yours probably says, *“a prisoner of...”*

And frankly, I think it's a fairly significant difference between those two words because if I were to say to you, I am a prisoner for Christ Jesus, it tends to give you the impression that I'm doing Him a favor; I'm doing it for Him. But to say, I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus, literally gives you the idea that I am His prisoner.

And though that may sound a little bit weird to you and I, I believe that's what Paul meant. I believe that's what he was saying. Paul wanted to convey to you and I, he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

And although that is weird for you and I to hear— because we've read through the Book of Acts, and we know that it was the Romans who arrested him; we know that it was the Romans who imprisoned him, and so we know that he was essentially a prisoner of Rome.

For us to hear a prisoner of Christ Jesus, we wonder, what was Paul thinking? What was in his mind? What made him say that? I am a prisoner of Christ.

Well, someone might just say, well, it sounds like fatalism to me. Are you familiar with fatalism? Let me put the definition up on the screen for you so it will help you out a little bit.

Fatalism (fa.tal.izm)

- noun

the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable.

It is the belief that all events are predetermined, and therefore inescapable. It's— this is the way it's going to happen. And somebody who goes through life with a fatalistic attitude essentially just says, well, there's no changing it, anyway; so, it is what it is; we are what we are, and so forth.

But if you read enough of the apostle Paul's writings, you know that he was not a fatalist. That was not what was going through his mind; that was not his attitude; that was not what he was thinking.

Somebody else might say, well, I think it shows that he was a determinist. I don't know if you've ever even heard of that one. What is determinism? Let me put it up here for you.

Determinism (de.ter.min.ism)

- noun

the doctrine that all events, including human action, are ultimately determined by causes external to the will.

It is the doctrine that all events, including human action, are ultimately determined by those things that are outside of our will. In other words, it—and by the way, I think this is a fairly common belief among people of the world.

Essentially, I believe people in the world hold to an idea that, essentially, we're just victims of circumstances. We're going through life, doing our best, trying to live the best life we can, but then something happens that's completely out of our control. We didn't plan for it; we didn't ask for it; we didn't even want it, but there it was, boom, right in front of us. We might even despise what happened to us, but there's nothing we could do to change it because, you see, life is just that way. That's in essence, determinism. I'm at the mercy of circumstances. I'm at the mercy of life.

Did Paul feel that way? No, I don't think he did. I don't think Paul believed that he was a victim of circumstances. What was it that actually moved Paul to describe himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus? Well, for the apostle Paul, it all came down to one very simple question: Who is in charge of my life?

Think about that for just a minute because I think that was the question that Paul ultimately had to ask and answer. Who or what is in charge of my life? Because you see, as we said, technically speaking, Paul was a prisoner of Rome. I mean, it was the Romans who put chains on him, right? Led him away, apart from his own will, and incarcerated him. Technically speaking, you could say Paul was a prisoner of Rome.

But there was only one problem with Paul saying that. There's only one problem with those words coming out of his mouth, and that is that Paul knew that Rome wasn't in charge of his life, and he couldn't say what he didn't believe.

How are you and I supposed to look at all this? I have to be honest with you and tell you that I think that a good many Christians— and again, I'm talking about followers of Jesus Christ; I'm talking about people who have recognized their need of a Savior, and they've come to Jesus as the Savior, and accepted what He did for them on the cross. I believe that many of those people every single day betray their true belief in who or what is in charge of their lives by the things— by talking about the things that they are facing.

In other words, the challenges— they talk about the challenges; they talk about the circumstances; they talk about the things; they talk about the people that are pressing in on their lives as if those things and those people are in charge. And even though we like to tell people that Jesus is the Lord of our lives, we betray that language many times by how we talk about our tribulations, how we talk about our trials, how we talk about the things that press against us. We tell a different story when we talk about those things.

And here's why: it's because the troubles in our life have a way of convincing us that they are in charge. When we're going through difficult seasons, we're going through hard times, those problems, those issues, they scream at us and they say, I'm in charge of your life now; I'm in control; I'm calling the shots. And even though we might resist that voice for a period of time, it keeps going and it keeps going and it keeps going until, ultimately, we cave in, and we believe it, and then we confess it with our mouth.

And I hear Christians doing it all the time. Suddenly, when trials and difficulties get so bad, they begin to transfer this authority, in their lives from the Lord who saved them to whatever they're now going through, and they say, well this is now in charge; this is now the thing that is in control in my life.

Here's the deal; here's the deal. Jesus showed us a different way to address these sorts of things. A different belief, a different—I'll even go further than that. He showed us a different reality when we're going through challenges. When the voice of trials and the voice of difficulties is screaming in your ear and saying, I've got you, you're mine, and I'm in control, and I'm calling the shots now, Jesus sets an example of something else— another way to respond if you will.

It all happened during a particular conversation that He was having—well, it ended up being a conversation; it didn't really start off that way—but you'll remember that Jesus was hauled in front of Pontius Pilate after He was arrested.

We're told that He stood there before Pilate and the Jews were standing nearby the religious leaders, and they were throwing accusation after accusation at Jesus, but we're told that Jesus did not say a word. He did not respond at all to the things that they were accusing Him of, and that really got Pilate's attention. And finally, Pilate spoke up, and when Pilate talked, that moved Jesus to speak. All those accusations didn't move Him to speak at all. But something Pilate said, did, and I want to show it to you.

It's from John chapter 19. I'll put it on the screen. Look at this.

John 19:10-11a (NIV)

“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” (And) Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

Here's the reason I'm sharing this with you. You see Pilate's statement there? That's the voice of trials; that's the voice of tribulation; that's the voice of trouble; that's the voice of pain; that's the voice that says to you, don't you realize I have the power to kill you? Don't you realize I have the authority to snuff out your life?

That's what it says. That's what it whispers—forget that—that's what it screams in our ear. And ultimately that is the voice we give into, and our speech begins to show that. When we're talking about our trials, when we're talking about our problems, we talk about those things as if we're reiterating, yeah, this thing has the power; this thing has the authority; this thing is in charge.

I want you to notice what Jesus said. Can we put that back up for just a moment? Jesus' response is so vitally important for us to see.

John 19:10-11a (NIV)

“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

He said to Pilate—and you got to know He looked Pilate straight in the eye—and He said, *“You wouldn't have any power over me at all if it had not been given to you”* by My Father.

And in that one single response, I believe Jesus addressed one of the most pressing issues facing the majority of Christians today, and it answers the question, who is in charge of your life? Because you see, even though Pilate was getting in Jesus' face and saying, don't you realize I'm in charge? Don't you realize I have the authority? Jesus came back and said, you would have nothing if it had not been given you by My Father in heaven.

Listen, people, here's the point. I believe that what Jesus did for us here is He expressed for you and I what is the birthright of every born-again child of God:

that you and I can say this same thing no matter what you're facing, no matter what is screaming in your ear trying to convince you it or that thing or that person is in charge, you can come back and say, you would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above.

The question is, who is in charge of your life? That's the question of the hour, isn't it?

One way that the apostle Paul answered that question for you and I here in verse 1 of Ephesians chapter 3 is by saying Paul— *“I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”* You see, Paul was doing something for you and I. He was answering a question. The question is, who's in charge of my life?

Jesus is in charge of my life. Yeah, but Paul, that doesn't look like it because right now you're a prisoner. Yeah, but you don't understand. I'm a prisoner of Christ Jesus because, you see, He's in charge. Yeah, I know the chains that were on his wrists and probably on his feet belong to Rome, but guess what? Rome belonged to Jesus, and that's the point; that's what Paul understood. He knew that his Savior, his Lord, was sovereign even over Rome, and so he was able to say with confidence and by faith, I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus.

And that is what you and I can begin to declare in our own lives no matter what we're facing.

The reason this is so important for you and I to hear today is because, you see, our culture is trying very badly to get you and I to consider ourselves victims. It wants us to believe that we are victims— whether we're victims of circumstances, or we're victims of other people, or we're victims of our upbringing, we're victims of this or victims of that.

All that does, people, is put you into a pity party, and that's not going to help you or anybody else for you to sit around just saying, I'm a victim; if people in my life, or if circumstances wouldn't have been the way they were, things would have been different; it would have been better. They'll never get better when you have that attitude.

When you begin to understand that God allows certain things in our lives, it really changes the way we think about what we're going through.

I got to be honest with you. Even though I told you 3 weeks ago I had surgery, I knew that I was going to need surgery back in February, and I never said anything to you because I didn't want to say anything to anybody. I didn't want

it to get in the way. But I was thinking about it a lot. You can imagine, even standing up here teaching week after week, I was thinking about it a lot.

You know what one of the most comforting things I held in my heart during those times? The Lord knows; God knows, and He has allowed this in my life. And so, I could say I'm a patient of Dr. so and so, or a patient in the hospital of such and such, but I chose to believe that I was a patient of Christ Jesus, and it made all the difference.

It made all the difference because, you see, ultimately, our God is either sovereign or He's not. And if He's not, then I think we should probably take our Bibles and toss them out because they're really no good to us. But if He is truly what He says He is, if He is truly who He says He is— the sovereign, eternal, almighty, all-powerful God— then you and I can rest in that regardless of what is happening in our lives.

You see, about the time you and I are being convinced that we're victims, God comes along and says something else about you and I. Let me show you this from Romans chapter 8.

Romans 8:37 (ESV)

... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

It says that, “*...in all these things (whatever you're going through, actually, what we are is) we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*”

Now, I know some of you who are going through really hard times right now are probably thinking to yourself, pastor Paul, I don't really feel like a conqueror right now. Yeah, well, a couple of weeks ago, neither did I, but the good news is it's not about how we feel; it's all about who we are because of who He is, and because He is sovereign and in control.

Listen to me, people, because He is sovereign and because He is in control, you and I now are more than conquerors through Him. But that's the only reason why. I mean that's it; that's the only reason why we are more than conquerors. We are what we are because of who He is. Right? And that's all there is to it.

He is the one who is truly in charge, and because He is truly in charge, you are safe in His arms. And because you're safe in His arms, Jesus can say things like He said in John 14:1 when He said:

John 14:1 (ESV)

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

When I was raising my kids at home and they were having a difficult time—they're all grown now—when they were upset and crying or whatever, I'd scoop them up and hold them in my arms, and I would say, it's okay; it's going to be okay; don't let your heart run away with you; don't let your heart be troubled. I may not have used those exact words but you parents know those are the things we say to our kids.

Here's the point: we don't really have the ability to make it so. We say it to our kids when they're upset and crying, we go, it's okay, it's okay, don't let your heart be troubled; just trust. But here's the point: we really don't—we're saying that to our kids because we want them to feel like they're safe, like they live in a safe environment. But really, I didn't—as a father, I didn't tell my kids this, but—I didn't really have the ability to back up those words entirely. You know what I'm saying? Because I'm not in control; I'm not in charge.

Good thing my—well, I mean, all my kids learned that eventually when they grew up. They probably thought I was Superman when they were little and then they learned that I was anything but when they got older, but hopefully that trust transfers to the Lord who says that statement and has the ability to back it up.

He has the ability to say to you and I, don't let your hearts be troubled; I've got this; I'm in charge; I'm in charge! All these things that you're afraid of, they're under My dominion; they are under My control; I am the Lord of those things. You a prisoner? Well, then, you're My prisoner. Are you a patient? Then you're My patient.

You see, that's the point of this whole thing. It's why God can say to us in Proverbs 3 passage that you all know. He says trust in Me with all of your heart. Who can say that? Who can say to you and I, trust in me with all of your heart? Who has the power to say that except God? I can't say that to you. I couldn't look you in the eye and say, trust in me with all of your heart. Goodness gracious.

But God can say it. Do you know why He can say it? Because He's in charge. He's in control. He is the Lord of all. That is how He can say—otherwise it would—what kind of audacity does it take for somebody to say, trust in me with all of your heart, lean not on your own understanding, but in all your ways,

acknowledge me and I will direct your paths. What kind of power does it take to make that promise? It takes the power of being in charge.

Guys, do you understand? Here we are, born-again Christians, but we're not yet convinced God is in charge. And that is the reality of the situation.

You see, here's what I want to encourage you to do. Whatever you're going through right now, I want to encourage you to say to the Lord: that thing is not in charge in my life; You are. This thing that is going on in my life, in my body, in my heart, in my family, in my relationships, in my finances, in my work, whatever it may be, whatever it may be, that thing—although it screams to me and says, I've got control here—you tell the Lord, you confess with your mouth, in prayer, to the Lord: I just want to just say right now that thing is not in charge; You are, and I choose to trust You. I call You Lord, and I need to start believing that You really are Lord of all, King of all kings, Lord of all lords. Sovereign above all. Eternal in purpose.