

## **The Purpose-Driven Life**

Eph. 3.1-13

Series “Ephesians”

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**Illus. Card in Journal** - I carry in my journal a 3x5 notecard that I look at nearly every single day. Here it is...it’s close to being 25 years old. On one side, I have on this card what I believe my life purpose...on the other just some short statements, words, phrases that motivate me and keep before me what I need to be focusing on each day.

I came up with this purpose...I should say, I believe the Lord gave it to me in 2003. Debbie and I went away for our year anniversary. Her aunt and uncle had a lake house (I’m a big spender!) and so we went for a few days, and she was going to leave and I had never done this before, but I decided to stay behind for three days and pray and fast.

I had only been doing ministry for a few years, and I just wanted to seek the Lord and hear from the Lord...I didn’t turn on music or a TV...I’d wake up, get into the word and spend the day reading, walking, praying – going to bed early because it was dark and I was scared out there by myself!

But, in those three days just through my time with the Lord and seeking him in prayer, I believe he dropped in my heart my life mission and purpose.

It’s three statements, and again I look at these nearly every single day...and if I was to die today, if I can check these off the list, I’ve died a happy and successful man.

1. Pursue Christ and follow hard after him
2. Love and lead my family (at that time it was just Debbie!)
3. Be a faithful pastor to a local church (knew God had called me to be a pastor – didn’t know that he would take the next 20 years to develop me and prepare me for Champion Forest, but I’m so glad he did...and this is all I want to do)

If I can do these three things...I believe I will have accomplished what God wants me to do in life. This has served as a “North Star” for me for many years...it helps me stay focused on what’s MOST important and has served as a “funnel” if you will for what I say “yes” to and “no” to as opportunities present themselves.

To use the words of Rick Warren’s best-seller, to the best of my ability, I’m living a *Purpose-Driven Life*. And that’s what I’m going to entitle the message today: **The Purpose-Driven Life**

This is really what I think of when I read this passage of scripture that we are looking at today because we are going to see what’s on Paul’s 3x5 card so to speak! We see his life mission and purpose.

Paul, is going to give us in (Eph. 3:1-13) some insight into what it is that makes him tick...he's going to reveal what it is that stirs him and keeps him going. Let's look at it.

**Eph. 3:1-13 – “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—<sup>2</sup> assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup> how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup> When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup> which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.<sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. <sup>13</sup> So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”**

Now, remember, this is originally a letter written to a church that Paul planted. This would have been received and read in a sitting...they didn't get to take it home with them and study it or take it apart paragraph by paragraph.

These chapters and verses and the fact that in the copy we have in our hand, it's broken up into sections is something bible translators did to help us find our place in the letter and digest it a bit easier.

The original readers had none of this...this is just one flowing letter. Important to remember because (v. 1-13) is Paul's train of thought coming off of what he had just written (Ch. 1 &2).

- Paul has outlined thus far spiritual blessings we have in Christ (Ch. 1).
- He has written concerning who we were BEFORE Christ and what God did to make us “in Christ” (Ch. 2a).
- (Ch. 2b) – Paul wanted the believers to understand that not only has Christ raised them up, but he has brought them together. He has united Jew and Gentile– this was HUGE.

If you missed last week's message, go back and listen! It's following all of this, that Paul writes: **Eph. 3:1 – “For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus** (interesting because he is in reality a prisoner of Rome, but the way Paul sees it – God's ordaining his steps – he's a prisoner of Christ) **on behalf of you Gentiles...”**

This is ultimately what has him in prison! What has him in chains is his ministry to the Gentiles which enraged the Jewish leadership to the point where Paul was arrested (Acts 21-28) and is awaiting a hearing before Emperor Nero.

Now, I stop right there because Paul stops right there...and instead of building on his point of “For this reason...” – it’s like his mind wonders and for the next 12 verses he goes on a bit of a digression concerning his life mission and purpose.

He’ll pick up...and we’ll pick up the “for this reason” NEXT week, when he prays for them – see it there in (v. 14) – “for this reason I bow my knees...”

So, let’s look at this digression...and I think what makes him chase this bit of a rabbit is how he describes himself as being a prisoner on behalf of the Gentiles because this is what appears to get him going.

Now, we’re going to see two major truths in this digression. First, we’ll read that God has given Paul a revelation. Second, we’ll read that God has given Paul a responsibility.

Let’s first see that: **God gives Paul a revelation**

**Eph. 3:2-6 – “assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, <sup>3</sup>how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. <sup>4</sup>When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, <sup>5</sup>which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”**

So, Paul writes and he’s NOT powering up on these Ephesians – and we’ll see this in just a moment, but he does kind of checkmate them here in the sense that he boldly states that God has made known to him a “mystery”.

We see this word three times in these five verses we just read, a total of six in the thirteen verses this chapter is composed of.

He calls this a “stewardship”. This is an important word: it’s translated elsewhere as the word, “management” or as the word “plan” in (v. 9). It typically refers to the idea of administration.

Paul is saying that by God’s grace, he’s been made an administrator...he’s been given a stewardship over a mystery that was not made known to previous generations.

**Illus. Unsolved Mysteries** – I think I’ve told you before one of my most favorite shows growing up was the show, *Unsolved Mysteries*. You remember, the one with the creepy music.

I'd watch this as a middle school kid and get worked up! Short sidetrack on this...my freshman year at Ouachita (tell Gurdon Light story)

Now, when Paul uses this word, "mystery", it's not like the Gurdon Light! Like it's this secret thing that no one can figure out!

Instead, it means something that is finally revealed that has previously been kept under wraps.

**Illus. JFK files** – Last week, a BIG deal was made about the new JFK files that were going to be released. The mystery to what happened to him was finally going to be revealed. Turns out it was pretty anti-climactic, but the idea is the same.

What has been kept hidden is finally revealed.

This is what Paul is saying he had been made a steward of...that God by his grace had entrusted to him a mystery that (v. 5) – "was not made known to the sons of men in other generations..."

This is Paul declaring that he had been given, direct and special revelation from God. Again, he's not powering up, but he is showing them his apostleship!

Now, let's look at what this mystery Paul has been given the privilege of revealing. He clearly states it in (v. 6).

**Eph. 3:6** – "This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."

Throughout the Old Testament, we see the promise of Gentiles being included in the plans of God...like we see it early in scripture!

**Gen. 12:1-3** – "Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

How's that going to happen? All the families of the earth? Here's another one from:

**Isaiah 49:6** – (messianic promise) "I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

There was always this promise of the Gentiles being included in the salvific plans of God, but it was never disclosed how?

And Paul says, "God revealed it to me." We know from Paul's own testimony that he was out seeking to destroy those that followed Jesus.

**Gal. 1:13 – “For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.”**

But, on the way to Damascus to make some arrests, God arrests him! Paul has his (Eph. 2:4) “But God moment!

God intervenes...blinds him with the light of his glory and calls him to repentance! He still has scales on his eyes...he can't see, and God calls a man named, Ananias to go lay hands on him and pray for him.

Ananias does not want to do this because he knows Paul's reputation...he's scared of him, but he obeys God because God speaks to him and God says this about Paul:

**Acts 9:15 – “But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.”**

And this is what we see throughout Paul's ministry, him taking the gospel message to the Gentiles. It seems that at some point early on –God revealed this mystery he speaks about in (Eph. 3) to Paul.

I think the revelation that Paul was given occurred in the intense three-year discipleship program where God had Paul solo in the desert of Arabia. Paul writes of this in:

**Gal. 1:15-17 – “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,<sup>16</sup> was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone;<sup>17</sup> nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”**

**Illus. Time Away** – Just want to say, God does BIG things when we take the time to break away and be with him. This is why I'm such a believer in camp...Freedom weekends...taking a day to be with the Lord.

I think about the 3 days fast I did with the Lord and he gave me my purpose and mission...Paul was away for three years and God revealed something special to him!

Listen, you may not can get away for a few days, or even one day, but you can get away for an hour each morning and get alone with God. He will reveal his truth to you! It's not going to be anything new or “secret” – that was for the “prophets and apostles”, but he WILL reveal to you truth...and show you purpose and give wisdom and direction!

We just need to get alone and silence distractions. I wonder what all God is waiting to reveal to us, if we'll just make the time!

God revealed to Paul the mystery that the Gentiles are fellow heirs...they are not just included in the people of God, God by way of Christ has made a new people...a new man...the two (Jew and Gentile) have become one “in Christ” and are now members of the same body.

This was the revelation given by God to Paul. Secondly, though, let’s look at how: **God gives Paul a responsibility**

**Eph. 3:7-9 – “Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things...”**

Do you see the responsibility? Paul was (v. 7) made a minister – all by God’s grace by the way. You remember me saying, “Paul was not one -upping the Ephesians...he wasn’t powering up!

Paul NEVER did that when he talked about himself. He sees himself as a “prisoner of Christ” ...he refers to himself in this passage (v. 8) as “the very least of all the saints”. Paul rarely spoke of himself, but when he did it was always with a pretty honest assessment.

**1 Tim. 1:15 – “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”**

Paul KNEW it was the grace of God that saved him AND the grace of God that called him...he was who he was and able to do what he was able to do only by the grace of God. He calls it a “gift of God’s grace” (v. 7).

This gift included with it a responsibility to:

- (v. 8) - preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ and to...
- (v. 9) - make known the mystery (that the Gentiles are fellow heirs) to everyone he can...

He was given a revelation and a responsibility and the two were tied tightly to one another. This was a stewardship placed on his life...and this is why you see such passion from Paul as he writes not just the believers in Ephesus, but in all of his letters.

Paul is purpose-driven. He’s been given a revelation and a responsibility.

This was not simply written on a card for him to look at every day, it is written on his heart. This revelation and responsibility fueled everything he thought and did. He was purpose-driven.

Now, what’s the application to all this? I get it. Paul is purpose-driven. How’s that going to help ME during the middle of the week?

Well, based off this passage let me draw out three points of application and I want to do this by asking you to think about a few things.

### 1. Think about your calling

Paul had a unique and special calling on his life to preach to the Gentiles and declare this mystery God had revealed to him about the Jew and Gentile becoming one “in Christ” to the world. And this calling drove...influenced...and directed all that he did.

Like Paul, you have a mission and purpose...you have a calling!  
What is it?

Since I called this sermon, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, I took my copy of Warren’s book off the shelf. Here’s from the opening pages:

**Rick Warren – “The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose.”**

? – What’s on your card? Get alone and ask God what the purpose of your life is, and I can guarantee you that like Paul, he will reveal it to you and I also guarantee you that it’s going to have something to do with the gospel...it’s going to have something to do with making Christ known. It starts with him.

Think about the calling God has placed on your life!

### 2. Think about the Church

One of the major truths that needs to be emphasized and it’s highlighted in this passage of scripture - specifically in (v. 10-11), is the beauty, importance, value and necessity of the Church.

**Eph. 3:10-11 – “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord...”**

Paul LOVED the Church...the revelation and responsibility that God had entrusted to him both had to do with the Church. This was something special – that “in Christ” there was no longer (Gal. 3:28) Jew, Greek, slave, free, male or female!

Instead, “in Christ” and because of Christ, there is ONE body! As mentioned last week in (v. 11-22), the wall of hostility had been broken and now the Church has been formed! Christ died for the Church...the Church is the bride of Christ.

And Paul says here in (v. 10-11) that through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God is on display to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This is incredible...we'll see this A LOT in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. There is a HUGE emphasis in the unseen world.

- Chapter one – we've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...
- Chapter three – the church is displaying the wisdom of God to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies...
- Chapter six – we'll read about the war taking place in the unseen world between us and the principalities of darkness...

The unseen world is real. And Paul shares here that the Church of the Lord Jesus (which was a mystery before) and now that it's been unveiled it shows off the manifold, multi-faceted, greatly varied wisdom of God.

So, get this and don't miss it! The Church – the redeemed people of God who have been brought near to God and brought near to one another by the blood of Christ – this Church as it worships Christ and advances the Kingdom, it displays the wisdom of God to the unseen world.

There is another world out there...and it's got a keen interest on what we're doing in here. 1 Peter chapter one teaches that we have that in which the angels long to look! They are created being made to worship God.

- They don't know what it is to be redeemed...bought by the blood of Jesus...
- They don't know what it is to be sanctified by the Spirit of God and to grow in holiness...

This unfolding of God's divine plan intricately involves the Church and when I read this verse of the heavenly authorities looking on, I remembered a picture during Covid and thought, "this is exactly what this verse is saying."

### **Illus. Pic of soccer match c/o Coronavirus**

I see this pic and to me these soccer teams represent the Church. We are the players playing in this game called life. And while the stands look empty, in actuality if God allowed us to see the invisible, we could see they are there full...every seat taken!

We are surrounded by angels and demons looking on...interested in seeing God's manifold wisdom being revealed as God sovereignly moves, using us, the Church to help advance his Kingdom and bring history to a close.



It's an amazing thought! And yet the tragedy is some of us don't even know there is a "game" going on!

We're over here playing in trivial things that at the end of the day don't matter one bit! Sometimes, we don't think anyone is watching, so we slow down...we don't put in our best effort...we think "does what I do as a part of the Church really matter?"

Well, it does! As the Church, we are witnessing to...we are showing forth the wisdom of God to the unseen world.

So, I want you to think about your calling. I want you to think about the Church. And then thirdly:

### **3. Be Committed to Both**

What on earth are you living for? Do you have a high commitment to the calling God has placed on your life? Do you know what that calling is?

What about the Church? Are you committed to the body of Christ OR are you just a casual attendee that doesn't think much about what all is going on here...we're doing more than putting on programs, having events and coming to a weekly worship service.

Christ and his Church is worthy of your greatest commitment...more than your hobbies...more than your kid's sports programs...more than just checking off a list that you came on a Sunday or signed up for a service project.

The calling God has placed on your life...like Paul, it should fuel everything you think and do. And the Church: we should be grateful to be a part of it...we should work to help move it forward and bring more people into it...we should center our lives around it.

Let's pray.

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