

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Heaven on Earth_ Ephesians 3 To See Forever

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Hello friends, National Community Church, always great to be with you. Did you ever have a moment that changed everything? For me my earliest recollection, my earliest moment was at the end of August 1945. World War II was over and our family got on a ship, the MS Gripsholm Swedish liner, converted troop ship and we headed for South India. My parents had sensed the calling to be missionaries. We ended up there in a number of weeks. And the next year when I was about four and a half I started school at a British boarding school up in an area called the Nilgiri Hills in southwest India. What's great about that is that I got to go on a train to get there. It wasn't just a train, it was the particular train; still running was an old train then it's well over 100 years old now. This is the engine, it was a narrow gauge what they call a rack or a cog railway train because the hills was so steep that they had this third rail between the two narrow rails and it would catch and sort of ratchet it to help it up the hill. They use that for gradients that were more than 10%. The locals called it a toy train. It climbed 5,000 feet in about 18 miles. It had this wonderful whimsical name. It was called the Nilgiri or the Blue Mountain by translation, the Blue Mountain Express. Hardly, it took three hours to go 18 miles, average speed six miles an hour. And when you went though, you cross dozens, scores of deep gorges with waterfalls. And there were spectacular views and vistas from vantage points when you stopped to get water on this old steam train, vistas that would take your breath away. And there were fruit trees and animals and wild flowers. And then you ended up in a place like this, it was called Coonoor, one of the hill stations that the British used back in the colonial days. What it felt like was heaven on earth. I was in that school for three years, nine months out of the year. And my parents would come to see us once or twice a year because they were 150 miles away and that was a long trek back in the day.

I tell you that story to say that the first two chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians feels like that, to me. This 2,000 year old letter for me feels like that train ride. Because Paul journals his trip, if you will. His trip with Jesus, he takes us high, he takes us wide. He takes us around bends, he shows us views. He shows us God's creation and his purposes and his mercy and His riches, the fact that we were lost and then found. Paul paints this with broad strokes, bold colors. He tells us what Jesus of Nazareth, Christ Jesus, the Messiah has done heavenly realms and unseen forces at work, overwhelming centuries of tradition and culture and beliefs and distances between groups of people. Paul tells us all this, he reminds us about it. Just in the last chapter, he kept saying remember, remember. And he brings us in these first two chapters, the hope of bridging differences, crossing the chasm and the categories. And he zeroes in on the chosen people of which he's a part, versus everyone else called goyim or Gentiles, of which I'm a part and maybe a bunch of you.

I loved it last week when Heather talked about the twist and the plot. I quote Heather, she said, I'm reaching for my glasses here, by the way. She says, "It's the chosen people of God are expected to live in peace with these people, Gentiles, who are not circumcised, who do not follow the law, that have the

smell of pork on their breath, that do not observe the Sabbath. And Paul says, "Peace has been made in Christ." Jesus has preached peace to those who are near and those who are far." He's talking about a whole new deal, a whole new community, whole new place. And he uses building terms, construction language, if you will. I think in my imagination that he might very well have the Temple of Artemis that sat above Ephesus. It was this huge temple that Pastor Mark described in the first week and it was full of pagan practices and promiscuity and perversion, and Paul sees a different building. He doesn't see a pagan temple filled with the death and debauchery. What he sees is a living temple, redeemed, transformed people, every tribe and nation, a community of peace and life. That's what he has been articulated in the first two chapters on that journey.

And now we get to chapter three, verse one, and Paul, what's the word, digresses? That's the word that one of the commentators that I was reading said, it happens, you know, and some of you who are a bit older, you get this. My son-in-law, Van, who's married to our eldest daughter, Erica, some years ago, he said, "Pop, because I like stories. He said, pop, you have a brain, like one of those old jukeboxes." Some of you remember, Happy Days with the Fonz, where you go over and you put in a quarter and you get two songs, and two 45 RPM records come around, and they drop one after another into the slot and you get whatever song. And Van would say to me, "Pop, I say a word and your mind does that. It swings that record around and drops down a story." I think that's what's happening here with Paul, one of those moments, he's on this sweep talking about the kingdom. And then he sort of sits back and reflects about who he is and how he got to this moment in time. A little like the Blue Mountain Express pausing to take on water and see, when you look out in one of those stops, forever, when you stop there at a place like this and a place like this in particular you get to see forever.

So Ephesians three one says it this way, "*For this reason* (the reason he was just talking about the building of the building) *I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.*"

In one sentence, you know, we've talked these past weeks about identity, destiny and then this week and next week about authority. In one sentence, he captures that for himself. "*For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.*" This was the guy who just a few decades ago had one goal. And that was to take prisoners on that road above the Golan Heights, heading toward Damascus way back then. It was about noon time and Acts nine tells the story of what happened. He was chasing the people who followed that Jesus person, the imposter, the poser, the one more fake Messiah in his mind, because he was steeped in his culture, and his religious traditions and his faith. And on his way to capture people who follow Jesus, he gets captured. And when he gets captured, he'll say stuff like this, it looks like I'm a prisoner of the Romans sitting here in this jail writing this letter, what I really am is the prisoner. Definite article I am **THE** prisoner of Christ Jesus.

It's very interesting that designation, because mostly we say, he's Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ or Jesus Christ of Nazareth. But Paul, in a number of his writings, flips it and puts Christ the title, the office, first Messiah, the anointed one. I had a professor in college who had a theory about that. I don't know if it's

right, but it's interesting. He said, because Paul met Jesus so dramatically, as the Messiah on the road to Damascus he uses that title first, so he speaks about Christ Jesus. At that moment, on his way to stop the nonsense he got knocked down by a light brighter than the noonday sun. He is struck blind, he's blind for three days, 72 hours, he doesn't eat or drink, he has to be led by the hand into Damascus.

And God in His infinite ways of working, because he's got his people everywhere, those followers of the way those followers of Christ Jesus, they're all over all around the world and countries and cities and villages and boroughs. And, he has one of those in Damascus, more than one. This one's name is Ananias. And Ananias has this (I keep looking for my glasses), Ananias gets this word from the Lord.

Acts nine chapter 11 - The Lord told him, "*Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.*"¹² *In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.*"¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "*I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem.*"¹⁴ *And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.*"¹⁵ *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument"*

See, Paul thought he was chosen, he was part of the chosen people but this is more particular, this is **THE** prisoner of Christ Jesus.

"He is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel."¹⁶ *I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.*"¹⁷ *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, (I love that part - "Brother Saul") the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*¹⁸ *Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized,*¹⁹ *and after taking some food, he regained his strength."*

You see, the scales fell off of his physical eyes in some ways, but way more than that happened. In that moment in time, he began to see forever 180 degrees turn around. He found out who am I? Why am I here? Where do I find my power? All in that one moment in that one frame of reference.

It goes on to say in Acts 9:20, "²⁰ *At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.*"²¹ *All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"*"²² *Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah."*

What could compare to this 180 degree turn around today? I mean, like, what? Somebody switching parties? I don't think so. Somebody's going from pauper to prince? Well, that's getting better. How about

I once was blind but now I see? That's good. That moment became a springboard for the rest of Paul's life. You never forget those moments when life shows up. We feel it in these verses in chapter three. You have moments like that, when something happened, something was resurrected; some blindness in your view of life was eradicated.

For me, of course, and you've heard me talk about this a lot. It was seven years ago, when Ruth who suffered sudden cardiac death or, you know, rhythmic heart failure, up in Estes Park, Colorado, about an hour from where I'm talking to you. When she was in a coma, we didn't know that she would live or ever wake up and she did within short order. And it was her coming back that was so profound; I will never forget my feelings. I'll never forget that moment but there's another moment. She was in the hospital for about 10 days after that and in rehab because once your brain takes that kind of an insult, you know, it takes a while for eye hand coordination, all that kind of stuff. She had to learn to walk just in that short timeframe. But we were sitting watching her eat, because when somebody comes back like that, and you're so happy, and it's so fresh, it's like watching a one year old. You know, you can turn off your TV, just watch a one year old and it's pretty interesting. And she was there and she was eating a little soup and some bread. And so the kids and I were sitting around just looking at her trying to have conversations and she reached out and took a piece of bread, started to put it in her mouth and hit her chin and it dropped into her lap. And she looked down and grinned said, "Oh, you old fumble fingers." And then she looked up at the rest of us sitting around and she said but I did just come back from the dead. I said, "Yes, I remember that moment."

I remembered another moment, 50 years earlier, when I was trying to get up the courage and you've heard me share this, but I don't care, I'm going to share it again. 50 years earlier, I was trying to get up the courage to tell her I loved her. My parents deal was coming apart their marriage so I was very hesitant to use the 'L' word because I thought if you went there you're in it's over and all that. And she had a good sense for things. She's not a person of a lot of words spoken but she has some very powerful words written and she sent me a card. And she just had written these words in Elizabethan English that went something like this, well not something - exactly like this. "Ask for my white gloved hand. The hills to pearl will turn the sand to diamonds. Ask for my lips to kiss each star the setting of a diadem shall be. But ask for my love and heaven to earth shall come. My love be thine." And I read that I said, "Hey, hey, hey."

There are moments when heaven comes to earth, when resurrection life shows up, when scales fall from our eyes. So here in chapter three, verse one is that pivoting moment, and as he gets past that phrase about prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ, or prisoner of Christ Jesus, Paul starts stacking truth upon truth and concept upon concept. And I'm only have these first few verses but next week, I think its Pastor Josh is going to be talking to us about those other verses. And Paul is on a roll is like that train heading down hill at way faster than six miles per hour this is where he gets to by verse 20.

²⁰ "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

And I'm saying yes, you know, I mean, it's if his pen had sound, it would be shouting, by the time he got to that verse. Anyway, you'll hear that next week, I digress just like Paul.

Ephesians, 3:2 & 3, ² "Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly."

He said it before my mission is toward you. Please hear me, please get this he says, I have been given a special grace, a special arena of management and stewardship. And it's that I'm telling you Gentiles, that you're not a far off, I'm telling you that you don't have to be Jewish, that we're both going to be this something else called the church. In short, he says, you're in the legacy; you're in the will so just hear that.

"8 Although I am less than the least (verse eight) of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things."

You say, we already heard that, we heard it in the last chapter, we're hearing it again. Yeah. And you're hearing again, things that are important people say over and over and over again. And he he's saying it isn't just the Gentiles can be redeemed through Christ Jesus, but God is making a whole new thing, his church, and he connects it this way; the riches of this thing are untraceable, they're boundless riches, this is the language. They're inexhaustible; they're past finding out in short, you can't get your head around it. It's such a profound thought, in truth

Ephesians 3:10 to 12, ¹⁰ *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, (there's that heavenly part again) ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Manifolds an interesting word, it means variety of colors. You know, we have these sunsets here in Colorado that really are spectacular, we're at 5,000 feet, the air is clear. And more than one night, Ruth who makes quilts, and uses pastels and bold colors and patterns, and she's a gardener and works with roses, she'll look out at a Colorado sunset and say, "How does God put those colors next to each other? How does he do it and it looks right? It's great how he does that?" Well, it's his manifold wisdom that looks like that. All these pieces coming together, you never thought could work and they do when his spirit is in it.

And then he goes on to say, in the same text, that this should be made known to authorities and rulers in the heavenly realms. He comes Paul comes from this backdrop of understanding that there are powers that were both good and bad, out there beyond us in some way. And even though I don't fully comprehend that, a commentator by the name of Weiss said this, "Through the church, the angels can see the mystery of redemption. They're not redeemed creatures. So the church becomes University for the angels, every saint a professor." I love that thought and the opposite powers that are at work they see that their territory is being taken away. The darkness is being destroyed by light, that death is being destroyed by life. Paul preaches, powers unleashed God creates his church. Powers can't understand it, they only see it demonstrated.

Ephesians 3:12, ¹² *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*"

I like this freedom and confidence part. Literally it means freedom of speech. You want freedom of speech, right here, say anything you want to God; thank him, petition him, ask him, rail at him. Some of us have cursed him and here we are. We weren't vaporized in that moment because he understands we don't see clearly. He understands that his spirit needs to transform us to see who he really is.

¹³ *"I ask you, therefore, (verse 13) not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory."*

This temporary inconvenience, pain and privation, it's for you. That's how it is. So because I'll do anything to get this message to you Gentiles, Paul says, I'll do anything, I'll go anywhere, sit in any prison, suffer death, just so you can hear me clearly. And in that hopefully begin seeing clearly.

So twice a year, our folks, my sister and I were in that school, our folks would come to that school and my dad would tell the folks down at the front area that he was there and they would send somebody for me. I lived in a little area with small boys; it was called the bird's nest. And I knew my dad was there. My dad was a big guy. My dad was almost 6' 3" 240, good looking dude. I don't know what happened to this generation, it skipped but he had a full head of hair and just wonderful man. And I would start on my short little legs racing down that driveway. And we had a game that we played, where I would leap into his arms and he would hug me then he'd grabbed me by my legs, and I'm standing up this way, he grabbed me by my calves, and he'd lift me up over his head. And when you're only two feet tall, or two and a half feet, and somebody lifts you up that high so you're like 15, or however high it would be anyway, its way high. What happens is that before you were looking at this, and all of a sudden, in your little face, things light up, because you can see forever. That's how it is.

My question to you today is would you like that, to see forever, to have a vantage point from where God stands? If you're in a place where you say I'm in a dark place, I'm in a place where what I understand is obscured, I'm weighed down by all the junk and the garbage and the baggage that I carry. Maybe you're

not in that particular place. But you say I just need to be free by becoming grasped by the Most High like Paul. If you need that, if you need the scales gone I'd like to encourage you this morning just to have you click that raise hand button. If you're watching online with us or if you're watching on demand or on Vimeo or YouTube, you can click the follow Jesus button and fill out the form. So glad, so glad to take you on a journey not on the Blue Mountain Express but on the grace of Jesus Christ that takes us to a place where we really do see forever.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this moment in time, for your grace, for the mercy that abounds, for the boundless riches of your manifold wisdom. Thank you, Lord that you find us in the silliest, saddest places, hiding behind our guilts and our successes sometimes railing against you, like Saul did and you tag us and say you you're it. You literally in our spirits knock us down so we can stand up and be whole and new and a redeemed people. Thank you, Lord, for your grace in this moment. We love you for that. In Jesus name. Amen.

God bless you. See you soon. I hope