

Living effective Christian lives

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[0 : 00] I want you to imagine that you're looking for a job. You've probably been in this situation, looking for a job, scouring the newspapers and the internet ads to see if there's any job that matches your skills and your experience and what you're looking for.

But imagine, as you're looking through the job descriptions, you find this one. So, seeking someone to work for us who is able to travel to unknown locations with no guarantee of safety, including a high risk of imprisonment and possibly death.

In addition to regular work hours, you will be required to work evenings and weekends. And for this job, you will receive no fixed remuneration. Thus, it is suggested that you keep options open for alternative employment to support yourself and there will be no medical aid or unemployment insurance included either.

Now, would you apply for this job? Do you agree? No one in their right mind would apply for a job like this, right? Well then, the Apostle Paul must have been out of his mind, because that's exactly the job he signed up for.

As the Apostle to the Gentiles, he knew what was in store for him when he took his job. Well, suffering, imprisonment, poverty, long work hours, and a high likelihood of death.

[1 : 19] And yet, he signed up for it. And not only did he sign up for it, but he even considered it a great privilege to do this job. And that's what we see in our passage this morning.

He exposes a little bit of himself to us. Look in your Bibles how he begins in chapter 3. This is, in fact, the first time in the whole letter he's mentioned the situation that he's in. Verse 1, he says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles.

So, he just mentions in passing he's in prison. Oh, by the way, Ephesians, yeah, I'm in prison, and it's because of you. So, he was in prison in Rome when he wrote this letter.

And we read in Acts, which we're going to do in our growth groups this week, that he'd been arrested specifically for the work of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. And so, if he was any of us, you'd expect him to write something like this.

I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, you Ephesians, who really owe me one, because look where I've landed up because of you. Now, get some money to come bail me out.

[2 : 22] Now, that's what we'd expect he would write to these people. But he doesn't. He doesn't hold any bitterness towards the people for whose sake he's in prison. Rather, he says this about his job.

Look from verse 7 in your Bibles. I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me to preach to the Gentiles.

And so, not only does he say his job is a gift, but it's one that he doesn't even feel he deserves to do. Paul signed up for possibly the worst job on the planet.

He's been suffering for the sake of these Gentiles. And yet, he considers it all a great privilege. Is he out of his mind? Well, no. He was very much in his right mind when he wrote this.

So, why then does he consider this job that he's doing and suffering for, why does he consider it such a privilege? Well, that's what he explains in this section of Ephesians.

[3 : 26] That's why he writes this part of his letter. And he basically says, in summary, that it's all because of the importance of the message he realizes that he's been entrusted with.

He sees himself as a messenger of such an important message from God to humanity that it's worth all the suffering he's suffered to deliver it.

He's like the first marathon runner. I don't know if you know the story of the origin of the marathon. Every marathon today is run in honor of a military messenger.

There will be a picture behind me of what he most likely looked like. His name was Philippides. Now, Philippides ran a 40-kilometer non-stop run through treacherous terrain from Marathon to Athens after the Battle of Marathon to deliver the news that the Persians had been defeated.

And then he promptly dropped down dead after delivering the news from exhaustion. And he was made famous because of that. You don't have to be very clever to be famous, it seems.

[4 : 31] I mean, you might think he was just stupid. He should have hydrated more or, you know, warmed up or paced himself or whatever. But obviously the point is he considered, and this is why there's statues of him and this running event that takes place in every country is named after him.

Because he considered the message he carried far more important than even his own safety and his own welfare. Well, so did Paul. Paul was very much like Philippides, the marathon runner.

Because he realized that the message he's got to deliver, the revelation he's received, is far more important than his own comfort or safety. And so what is it about this revelation that Paul's received that's got him so excited and so worked up and so willing to suffer for and even forget himself?

Because, you know, this is the first time, as I said, in Ephesians that he even mentions his situation, he's started to reveal this great message from God. And he's kind of totally forgotten the situation he's in.

He hasn't asked for help or anything like that. He's forgotten himself. And so what is it that's got him so excited? What is it at the heart of this revelation that's driven Paul to make all these sacrifices?

[5 : 41] Well, that's what he tells us in this passage. And I think we can sum it up well in three phrases that he uses in this passage that describes this revelation, which I want us to consider in turn.

And they are the boundless riches of Christ in verse 7. And in verse 10, the manifold wisdom of God. And in verse 18, the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. These things sum up the message that Paul carries.

And I want us to look at each one of them. So let's look at firstly verse 7, the boundless riches of Christ. I'll read from verse 8. It's not verse 7, sorry, it's verse 8.

Although I am less than the least of all of God's people, this grace was given me to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ.

And to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God who created all things. Okay, now, first thing we need to know is that a mystery in the New Testament refers, it doesn't refer to kind of like a whodunit detective story like we use the word mystery today.

[6 : 49] It refers to something previously hidden and now made known. And so what was previously hidden to humanity and now made known, what Paul calls, well, it is what Paul calls the boundless riches of Christ.

That's the mystery that he's talking about, that was previously hidden and now made known. In other words, what's been made known to the human race is how you can benefit, how you can be enriched by Jesus Christ.

That's this mystery that's now been made known through the gospel since Jesus came. Now, of course, there are many charlatan preachers out there, we know full well, who try to convince people that by becoming members of their church and paying a lot of money, they will be given by Jesus great material blessings, wealth and health and prosperity in this life.

Is that the kind of riches that Paul is actually talking about here? Well, no, because he is by no means materially rich. And so if he was bearing a message of riches here and now, he was kind of failing and missing the point.

But that's not what he's talking about when he talks about the riches available to you and me through Christ. Paul just gets by if that. And yet in Corinthians, Paul says, I have nothing and yet I possess everything.

[8 : 07] What is he talking about? What are these riches available to God's people? How does a person really become rich in Jesus? Well, he's already explained that in chapter one, which we already looked at a couple of weeks ago, verse 18.

In his prayer for the Ephesians, I'll remind you, he says this. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

So what are the riches that he's talking about? Remember when we looked at this? We learned it's talking about the inheritance to come for a Christian. We learned that a Christian's true wealth is not measured by their bank balance or how much property they own, but in what they will inherit in the life to come.

Do you remember? We looked at that. And that wealth, those riches, far beyond any riches that we could have on earth, is what Jesus dying on the cross made possible to you and me who don't deserve such blessings.

The forgiveness of sins, the removal of the penalty of death, and so access to God and eternal life in a new physical creation one day that does not end and that has no suffering or death or all the shortages of this fallen world.

[9 : 34] Where we will enjoy blessings and pleasures and riches beyond what this world could ever give us. A real physical life. Those are the riches that Paul is talking about.

God's inheritance that he wants to give to his people. And that's the great mystery that's been made known to the world that that is now available. There is an open door to that world.

Those riches are now available to anyone who believes in Jesus, no matter who they are or where they come from or how much money they have. So the cleaner in the mansion in Bishop's Court can now possibly be more wealthy than the owner of the mansion.

From an eternal perspective. And that is world changing news. It totally flips on its head our socioeconomic structure. And the way we think about who's rich and who is poor, doesn't it?

That is world changing news. That the riches of Christ are now made available to anyone who comes to him in faith. And Paul was the one who got to share that news with the world.

[10 : 40] For the first time, really. With all those people. Those Gentiles who thought that they were excluded from God's promises. Who thought that they had no hope of the life to come. No way they could qualify it.

Well, Paul got to break the good news to them. You know how it feels when you're the first to tell someone good news? You know when you take a message on the phone for someone else that tells them that they got the job that they've been looking for.

And you get to be the one to tell it. It's such a great feeling, isn't it? To be the first bearer of good news to someone. Or to be able to tell your employees that they got a big Christmas bonus this year.

It's a nice feeling, isn't it? To share some piece of information that will make a person's day better. Well, Paul got to tell all these people something that would make their eternity better.

And so can you begin to see why he was so excited about his job? Despite the suffering that he had to go through to do it. Can you begin to see that?

[11 : 43] What was driving him? So let's ask ourselves. How keen are you and I to share that same news with other people? Because that's what we get to do in this stage of history.

Paul and the other apostles are dead. They're gone. And so now it's our job. The mantle has been passed to us. The church. We are the ones entrusted with God's good news to humanity.

That news that eternal riches are available to anyone through faith in Christ. No matter who you are. They're available to your friend, to your work colleague, to your squash partner.

And you get to be the one to tell them about it. What a privilege. And so will you. Will you be inspired by Paul and his example and be as excited as he was to share that news?

As willing to forget yourself and endure whatever sufferings that might get you. Because that's the first reason Paul was so keen to share this revelation from God.

[12 : 50] But there's another. It's what he calls, secondly, the manifold wisdom of God. This was an aspect of this revelation that he brought. It revealed not just something about us and our future, but something about God himself, which he was so keen to share, which he calls the manifold wisdom of God.

Look what he says in verse 10. And this is pretty epic. It's probably my favorite verse in this passage. 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.

Okay, so I just want us to pause and get this for a second. So the idea here is that as the gospel spreads across the Gentile world and people are saved through faith in it and have access to God's eternal riches in Christ.

And they find eternal life. When they do that and they put their faith in Christ, they become new people. We learned this last week, didn't we? If you truly believe the gospel, it transforms you from the inside out into a new type of human with different priorities and different relationships with the people around you.

And so the church, the collection of these saved, transformed people from all different nations and races and cultures, become the beginning of a whole new humanity that will one day inhabit the new creation.

[14 : 22] And so the church is kind of like a trailer for that new humanity to come. The church is here to show off to the world God's plans for what's to come, but not just to show that off to the world, but profoundly to show it off even to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

To show off God and his wisdom and his plans and how he's achieving this great new world to come. We get to be the first taster of that, not just to the world, but to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm, the population of the spiritual world, angels and demons, all the spiritual beings that we forget actually exist and influence our world today, but they very much do.

And we're told here they look down to this earth. They see this new humanity starting to grow in the church. You and me starting to live out our new lives as citizens of heaven.

And then they realize what God is doing. And so they either glorify him more if they're on his side or they despair if they're not, because in seeing the church, they realize that their fate is sealed and God has already won.

And so we learn here. It's amazing truth that the church on earth is actually central to God's plans from the beginning of time to reveal his glory to all creatures on earth and in heaven.

[15 : 52] The church is central to him doing that. Us, you and me. Flawed, ordinary looking human beings is central to God's plans to reveal his glory on a cosmic level.

And Paul got that and he knew that and he felt so privileged to play a key role in serving the early church, even though they were flawed groups of people with their issues and squabbles who looked weak and unimpressive on the surface.

And yet Paul could see through that and he knew that these people, God's church, were in fact the center of God's cosmic plan from the beginning of creation. And that's why he was so willing to serve the church and to suffer for her.

We should really challenge each one of us, shouldn't it, to consider how we view the church, our church. What is your attitude towards your local church here at St. Mark's?

Ask yourself, how much effort and time are you willing to sacrifice for your church? And that can easily be seen in your weekly schedule.

[17 : 06] How much money are you willing to sacrifice for your church? How much energy are you willing to sacrifice for your church? How much time praying for your church are you willing to give?

Because if, like Paul's saying here, the church is central to God's purposes on earth, then surely it should be central in our lives too, if it's so central to what God is doing. Not pushed to the periphery of our lives like it so often is.

I'll just come to church when I can afford the time. I'll come to church when I've got free time, when I've got energy to do it. I'll go to growth group, you know, when there's nothing else more important in my life.

Career and family and even recreation get in the way, don't they, of our involvement with our church. But you see, if the church is important to God, it should be important to you too.

It should be seen in what you prioritize in your life. If the church is central to what God is doing on earth, it should be central to what you are doing on earth.

[18 : 16] Is it? I challenge you, this passage challenges you to make it your goal to become a responsible church member, to invest yourself in your church, to serve your church with great energy, to pray for your church with great zeal, and to strive to make it stronger and more effective in this community so that we can display God's glory to those who are watching both from earth and from heaven.

Will you do that? Because that's the second reason Paul was so keen to share this revelation given to him. But then there's another aspect of this revelation, finally, that he was so excited about, and we see it down in verse 19.

I'm going to read from verse 17, in fact. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Okay, so what he's praying here, is that he's praying that the Ephesian Christians would have supernatural power to get just how much Jesus loves them.

Because they need supernatural power to get that, because it's so vast and bigger than they could ever imagine. There's a well-known quote, the greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return.

[20 : 02] Isn't that cute? It is, but there's a lot of wisdom in it, isn't there? In that you actually need to learn, not just to love, but you need to learn how to be loved.

Am I right? You need to really learn how to be unconditionally loved. That's what this quote is saying, but it also reminds us of the one thing that all humans desire.

Above all else, we actually all just want to be loved. Our deepest desire, no matter who we are, from the biggest, roughest Afrikaans rugby player, to the little old lady, everybody deep down inside, just wants to be loved by someone else.

Well, what Paul is praying for these Christians is that they need to learn just how much they are loved by Jesus. If they're ever going to be, as he says, filled with the fullness of God.

Notice, he says, I pray that you may know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the measure of the fullness of God. They won't be filled with the measure of the fullness of God until they get it, until they get how much they're loved.

[21 : 16] That's how important it is. But not just them, us as well. If we're ever going to be truly transformed people who joyfully obey God day to day and glorify him in this world and reflect who he is, one thing needs to happen in each one of us first.

Each one of us need to realize how much we're actually loved by Jesus Christ. And then we need to realize it more and more and more each day.

In fact, it's something we'll never fully grasp. It surpasses knowledge, Paul says, and yet you can always grasp it a little better each day. Also, look at how Paul says in verse 17, you need to be rooted and established in love.

Two illustrations he uses. And he says that's in fact a prerequisite for grasping Christ's love more and more.

You actually need to be rooted and established in love. Now that could mean being rooted and established in Christ's love or being rooted and established in our love for each other as the church.

[22 : 31] Which is it? Well, I think Paul is actually referring to both in that phrase rooted and established in love because really those two loves, Christ's love for us and our love for each other, if you like, we'll use last week's terms vertical and horizontal.

Vertical love, horizontal love are so intertwined and closely related you can't separate the two in the life of a Christian because they support and reinforce each other.

It starts with encountering Christ's love on the cross for you. Believing that for yourself. That Jesus loves you enough to have taken all your sin against God on the cross.

All the wrath that you deserve from God on the cross in your place totally forgiving you. If you don't believe that then you do not trust in Christ and you are not saved.

and you need to speak to me or the person who brought you to church today. You need to because that is central. Getting that, understanding what Jesus did on the cross for you is absolutely central not just to your life on earth but your eternity.

[23 : 41] Do not leave this place without addressing that if you do not trust in what Jesus did for you yet. But then when you do get that and if you have gotten that then it changes you from the inside out when you finally understand the love of Christ your creator displayed for you on the cross when you get that it changes you it transforms you and it teaches you to love other people with the same kind of love Jesus showed you.

And then that love when it works in the church community is in fact the means by which Jesus carries on loving you day to day. Practically.

As we Christ's body inspired by the love of Christ that we've encountered for ourselves as we then that love then overflows into our relationships with each other as we look out for each other care for each other give our time to each other pray for each other love each other that is in fact Jesus loving his people through his people.

And so that meal that was cooked for you the other day that money that was given to help you as you were looking for a job that phone call to check up how you were doing when you were sick that was Jesus loving you through his people because they wouldn't have done that if it wasn't for him.

He's behind it because he's the one who loves you more than you could ever understand. And that Paul says must be the root of your life and the foundation these two illustrations he uses one botanical illustration root and one construction illustration the foundation that's actually what the original word means the foundation of a building so just like the root of a tree is the thing that helps keep it stable in all the storms and also gives it life and just like the foundation of a building is what keeps it firm keeps it from toppling over so knowing that Jesus loves you unconditionally and is for you even when you are not for yourself knowing that will be the foundation that gives stability to your life when all the storms come that's what gave David his stability when he wrote that psalm we read earlier and that's what gave

[26 : 07] Paul his stability even when he was rotting in a Roman prison and that's what he was so excited to share with the Ephesians and with you and me and that's why more than praying for other things he prays just that they would grasp how much Jesus Christ the son of God in heaven loves them right now that he realizes is the key and the center to them living effective Christian lives and so that's what he prays for them that's what they still needed to get and that's what we still need to get more and more each day if you feel that you're not being effective as a Christian if you feel you are not living the life that Jesus called you to live you just struggle to live it you don't know how to do it it's probably because you don't get grasp the love that Jesus has for you that is the key to unlocking a fruitful

Christian life according to Paul we as believers need to dwell on this fact daily that Jesus loves me we need to dwell on this fact as we believe in what he did on the cross that means just through that faith that we have that he's given us as a gift it shows that he loves us deeper than we could ever know you need to let that be what you rest in each day not your your your TV shows or your your recreation or the even the love that other people have for you that's not what you are meant to rest in and find your your peace in but rest in the love that Jesus has for you that needs to be the foundation of your life so that like Paul you too can count it a privilege to serve and suffer for him and with that let us commit ourselves to

God in prayer yes Lord we thank you for this example of Paul and the message that inspired him to give of himself fully to sharing that revelation with the world we pray Lord that you would give us that same zeal to share this good news of Christ's riches with the world we pray Lord that we would be inspired to tell people about what you've revealed in the gospel that we would be a church that displays your manifold wisdom even to those in the heavenly realms and we pray Lord that you would help us each day to dwell on and find our peace and stability in the love that you have for us help us each day to get it more and more and realize that we could never get it fully so that we would serve and sacrifice for you like Paul did we pray this in Jesus name amen to God

I twitter you love I you you you people to