

What Is Your Reason?

2025-10-12 – Ephesians 3



From prison in Rome, Paul wrote asking for prayers of strength that he would keep preaching the Gospel as he ought to. His focus in his letters and his life was to see the immeasurable power, grace, and love of God proclaimed by all the saints who were chosen. This Sunday, we will look at how Paul's life is an example of the incredible work of the Gospel and how we should strive to make our own lives living testimonies of the same good news.

Good morning. If you've got your Bibles, I want to invite you to open to Ephesians chapter 3. I'm already in the early stages of grief this morning because we're coming to the end of Ephesians 1 through 3 today. And I don't know about you, but I love Ephesians 1 through 3.

Everything we've been covering is, as we look at what it means that we're one body, saints standing side by side. And we're only at the halfway point of the book, but the first half of the book of Ephesians is this beautiful picture of what God has done and how the gospel has come to us and how we should respond from a mindset, from a worldview.

And I feel so valued when I read these passages, and I hope you have felt the love of God each and every week.

You see, we started in Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 through 14, after hearing that you're a saint if you're a believer. We talked about how every blessing that God has given, it comes from him and the first and foremost of those blessings, for all who are believers, before the foundation of the world, God chose you. That is such a grand statement. He chose you. You are his child. You have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. You have been reconciled to him. He has richly poured his grace upon you. He has given you an inheritance. He has sealed you by his spirit and you have assurance for all eternity.

We started with that grand picture of the gospel. And then we moved to looking at Christ, who is at the center of the gospel. The Father, Son, and Spirit always have been, always will be, have no beginning, have no end. And from before, "let there be light" was uttered. Christ knew that the cost of creation was his death on the cross.

But God, through his immeasurable power, brought Christ back to life. And God, through his immeasurable power, for all he had chosen, he brings us from dead to alive. We were dead in the trespasses of our sins, and yet through Christ, we have been made alive through his great love. By grace, we have been saved.

And the beauty of the promise is not just that he's like, "All right, you're saved now, good job." But through his immeasurable grace, his immeasurable power, dead to alive, his immeasurable grace, we do not deserve it, and yet we have become his masterpieces, displays of his glory and grace for all eternity.

And if you were here last week, we talked about how the greatest divide in human history, the divide of Jew and Gentile, has been overcome. Those who were far away by birth and those who were near by birth, through Christ, all who believe are made one. And in being made one, we have become the very place where God dwells. We are the temple, and Christ himself is the cornerstone.

And if you, if you've been following, we're going from very broad—before creation—to the work of Christ, to how we fit in, to how all of humanity, Jew and Gentile, fit in, and today, we're going to look at one man and how he fits in because as we come to the end of Ephesians 1 through 3, we start with the incredibly broad story and we move to the life of Paul, and through his life we see an example of someone saying, based on what is said in Ephesians 1 and 2, here's how we should respond.

What is our reason for serving the Lord?

And the question for us today, as we come to the end of this first half of Ephesians, is **what is our reason for serving the Lord?**

And to work through this today, we are going to look at Paul's reason that he gives. And at the end, we'll work from Paul's reason to what should be our reason for following the Lord. What should be our reason for serving the Lord?

And when I say serving here, Paul calls himself a servant of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We're not just talking right now about serving inside the church, but about living our lives in service to Christ, which is what Paul does with his whole life from the moment on the road to Damascus that he has an encounter with the Lord.

And so today we're gonna look at his reason, and then we're going to look at what ours should be.

And as I ask this question, **what is your reason for serving the Lord?** I want to make sure to bring up a few answers that I as a pastor hear regularly. Sometimes people talk about, "Well, the reason I serve is because he's done so much for me. And so I want to do things back for him." And that's not, it sounds good, but when you kind of flesh it out, sometimes people are like, "Well, the scales, he's done everything. So I'm going to do everything in my power to kind of even it out." And of course, there's nothing you could ever do. If you think you can even the scale at all, you do not understand the gospel. He has done everything. He has wiped away every sin and praise the Lord for that. Every good work you do is one he prepared for you from before time began.

Some of you may be thinking, "Well, I don't deserve the gospel, and so since he saved me, I'm going to do my best to measure up." And if you think that you and your own strength can measure up, you have misunderstood grace. We, as we seek to follow and serve, if we do it because we want to earn what he has freely given, we are wasting our time. We are treading water, we are not resting in the promises of what his word says.

And lastly, and most devastatingly, I talk to Christians sometimes, and I've been guilty of this many times in my life, where I think of God's love towards me as transactional. And I'm doing things for him so he'll keep loving me. And of course, that's wrong. The greatest display of love in human history is Jesus Christ, who died on the cross in our place. There is no greater example of love than this. And if we're not careful,

we will let these seep in and become our motive for serving, and our motive for following the Lord. And then we will find ourselves not looking like the body of Christ, but looking like children of wrath like we were before.

And so my question for you is, **what is your reason for serving the Lord?** And this morning, as we look at Paul's testimony, we will see what the right answer is. And I pray that we will leave standing strong in that.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for this day. Father, we thank you for your immeasurable power and grace and love for us. We thank you that while we were dead in our sin, for all who believe you have made us alive. We thank you that it is not because we deserve it or earn it, but because of your immeasurable grace. And we thank you that you do all of this because of your immeasurable love. You knew us before the foundation of the world. You chose us and made us your children.

Father, I pray right now for anyone who does not know you, that today your spirit would open their eyes and that they would leave today rejoicing, that they are counted as a brick in the temple where your son is the cornerstone. I pray for all of us, Lord, that the Spirit would be moving, that you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear what your word has to say. And Father, I pray you would speak to me, and I pray you would speak through me. I pray these would be your words and not mine. We thank you, Lord, for the work of your Son, Jesus. It is in his incredible and matchless name we pray. Amen.

Well, our goal today is to look at **what is your reason for serving the Lord?** And we're going to do this by looking at Paul's reasons that he gives in Ephesians chapter 3.

What is our reason for serving the Lord?

Recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the Gospel

And the first thing we're going to learn from Paul is as we read Ephesians 3:1–7, is we're going to **recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the gospel.**

Now, if you don't know, Saul of Tarsus is Paul. And we'll get into that more in a moment, but I'm gonna use the name Saul today, and I'm gonna mess up, and I'm gonna say Saul, and then I'm gonna say Paul, but I'm saying Saul because I wanna hit you over the head with the fact that even his name was changed for the sake of the gospel. Because it is one of the most amazing things when you see the depth of what Paul did to proclaim the gospel. So we need to recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the gospel.

For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— assuming you have heard about the administration of God's grace that he gave me for you. The mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have briefly written above. By reading this you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. This was not made known to people[a] in other generations as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: The Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and partners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. **I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.**

Ephesians 3:1-7 CSB

To that end, we're going to read Ephesians 3:1–7. And in the Greek, this paragraph is one sentence. And it begins, ***“For this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles,”*** and then there's a dash. And everything after that dash until verse 7 is an aside.

And this is important for us today because if you were here last week, I preached about Jews and Gentiles. And I preached about how through the work of Christ, two have become one. And in this aside, this very large aside, Paul is summarizing the last three sermons.

I did that at the start of today. So I'm not going to do it right now. I'm not trying to cheat you out of some of the content today. I'm trying to tell you that Paul here is saying, as I have written above, by reading this, you are able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.

What Paul is saying here is everything I've said about the Jews and the Gentiles and about the gospel that was from before the foundation of the world and those who are chosen by God as his children. All of that, that predates creation itself, God knew. And in the Old Testament, this was considered a mystery of how will God reconcile the Gentiles to himself, those who were far away. And through the work of Christ, the two, those who were near and those who were far, have become one in Christ. Jew and Gentile, that barrier is no longer there for those who believe.

And so I'm not going to spend any more time on this except to say, it's here because we talked about it last week. If you want to know more about that in the temple imagery, go listen to last week's sermon, because it'll take me 20 minutes to unpack it again.

But it begins ***“For this reason. I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles”,..., I was made a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.”***

Paul, at the beginning and end, this is the tie-in for the whole passage where he's saying, I'm in prison for preaching the gospel to Gentiles. But I was made a servant of the gospel by the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power.

Paul's point is that his purpose in his life was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. That's the good work that God prepared for him from before time began.

And to understand this, we need to go and look at Paul's testimony. And we're going to do that by looking at how he went from Saul of Tarsus to Paul, the servant of the gospel.

I'm going to be reading a couple passages today. The first one we're going to read through is Acts 22 and encourage you, if you've got your Bibles, to open up there.

From Saul of Tarsus to Paul the servant of the Gospel

Saul's upbringing was deeply entrenched as a Pharisee (Acts 22:1-3, Philippians 3:4b-6)

In Acts 22, we learn about Saul's upbringing. And his upbringing was deeply entrenched as a Pharisee. When he was born, he went, and I'll just read it to you, Paul in

“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you.” ... He continued, “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strictness of our ancestral law. I was zealous for God, just as all of you are today.

Acts 22:1, 3 CSB

Acts chapter 22. Paul is standing on trial. And the reason he's on trial is because he's been sharing the gospel, and because he's in Jerusalem, and because he brought a Gentile with him. The Gentile never came in the temple with him, but he was accused of bringing the Gentile in the temple, which would be a punishment deserving death if it was true.

And yet what happens is as he's put on trial, here's what Paul says. ***“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense before you. I am a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel.”***

Now you don't know this, and it's okay. But when he says, “Educated at the feet of Gamaliel,” you all should have gone, “Whoa.” Right? That's like if you see my jumper, I learned to shoot from LeBron James. Like that's, it's not true, but I joke here, but the point is, to the people in that room, tying himself to Gamaliel would be like if I came up here and said, “Hey, Billy Graham taught me to preach.” Like it's like that level of big deal in their day. Paul training under him, that would have been like, “Hey, you guys gotta listen to me,” and everyone there would have begrudgingly said, “We kind of do.”

“I was educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the law of our ancestors. I was zealous for God just as all of you are today.”

Paul begins by connecting him to them and also saying, by the standards you have, I would have been in a place of prominence if I was still here.

If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.

Philippians 3:4b-6 CSB

In Philippians chapter 3, Paul also talks about the grounds of his birth, and he says, ***“if anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more. I was circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, regarding the law, a Pharisee, regarding zeal, persecuting the church, regarding the righteousness that is in the law, blameless.”***

In Philippians 3, Paul is talking about if by earthly standards we could be saved, I'm as close as it gets. And yet the point of this passage is not for Paul to say, I've earned my salvation. If you read Philippians and come away thinking you can earn your salvation, you did not read Philippians. Paul is saying here that if you think there is a worldly way that you can be saved, I had a better chance than you ever will by the Old Testament standard, and yet none of it matters.

Now, let me put this in clear language for us today. If you were born of Christian parents, if you were baptized as an infant and then as you got older you got a believer baptized and you did all the things, if you got a Timothy award, if you went on every youth trip, if you served every Sunday, if you passed out

more bulletins, you picked up more communion cups that were left in the seats, if you served the most coffee, if you do all of the things, if every weekend you go out and you proclaim the gospel to others, if you do all of this in your own strength, if your parents were pastors, missionary pastors in a closed country, and you serve with them and you do more than them now, if you are doing it in your own strength, nothing. You cannot be saved by any work of the flesh.

If you are here trusting in your upbringing or your background or your education, if you graduated from Moody and then went to Trinity and then got your doctorate in Cambridge or wherever and did all of the things educationally. It doesn't matter. What matters is the work of Christ. If you rely on anything else, you are like Paul pre-conversion. And that's a bad place to be.

From Saul of Tarsus to Paul the servant of the Gospel

Saul's upbringing was deeply entrenched as a Pharisee (Acts 22:1-3, Philippians 3:4b-6)
Saul's hatred of Christians was well known (Acts 7:57-58, 8:1-3, 22:4-5)

Saul of Tarsus, his upbringing, was deeply entrenched as a Pharisee.

Saul was also known, his hatred of Christians was well known.

In Acts 7, when Stephen is martyred, the first martyr after Jesus's death and resurrection, the first person killed for their faith in Jesus. When Stephen was martyred, Saul of Tarsus was not old enough to be there throwing stones, but he was in a position of prominence. He was like the top aide to all of the Sanhedrin priests. And he was there, and they all laid their garments at his feet, and he approved of what they did.

I persecuted this Way to the death, arresting and putting both men and women in jail, ⁵as both the high priest and the whole council of elders can testify about me. After I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to arrest those who were there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished.

Acts 22:4-5 CSB

Let me read for you what Acts 22:4–5 says. “I was zealous for God just as all of you are today ***I persecuted this way,*** The word “way” here means Christians. ***To the death arresting and putting both men and women in jail as both the high priest and the whole Council of Elders can testify about me after I received letters from them to the brothers, I traveled to Damascus to arrest those who were there and bring them to Jerusalem to be punished***”

Not only was Saul building up a case against Christians and punishing and imprisoning Christians in Jerusalem. He was a part of the first wave to say, “Now that we've scattered the church, let's go chase them down and drag them back.”

Saul's hatred for Christians is well documented. In Acts 22, as he's being put on trial for preaching to Gentiles, he's reminding them, “You guys all knew this about me. At one time, you applauded me for what I was doing.”

But then he keeps going.

From Saul of Tarsus to Paul the servant of the Gospel

Saul's upbringing was deeply entrenched as a Pharisee (Acts 22:1-3, Philippians 3:4b-6)
Saul's hatred of Christians was well known (Acts 7:57-58, 8:1-3, 22:4-5)
Saul's testimony of his conversion was abundant concerning how radically he was changed (Acts 22, Philippians 3, Galatians 1, Ephesians 3)

Saul's hatred for Christians was well known, but if you keep reading in Acts 22, he talks about his encounter on the road to Damascus with Jesus Christ, and how he was saved, and how though he was blind, like scales falling off, he was able to see. And as he was transformed by the gospel, the transformation was so radical. If you read the book of Acts, the early church in Jerusalem, when Saul tried to come back and spend time with him, his name was still Saul. When he tried to say, "I wanna come, I wanna be a part of the Christian community here," no one trusted him. No one trusted him at all. And eventually he winds up preaching to Gentiles. And it's when he starts preaching to Gentiles that he changes his name to Paul.

Now, there's arguments that Paul was his Roman name from birth, and so he was Saul by Hebrew, and then he was Paul by Greek name. There's arguments that he switched from Saul to Paul because Saul in Greek sounds kind of like an inappropriate word. There's all of these different reasons, but think about the pride this man had. Saul of Tarsus, circumcised the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, of the nation of Israel, studied under Gamaliel, and a Pharisee, a Pharisee leader, somebody who was going to do great things, and now he's willing to go by a different name so that there are no barriers to the Gentile people.

That transformation is incredible. That transformation is the type of transformation that there is no logical reason in the world anyone would ever do. Paul never made money off being a Christian. In fact, Paul would have been in a very secure place in Jerusalem before his transformation, before the Lord worked in him.

From the moment he became a believer, his life was marred with beatings and punishments and imprisonments. When he's writing the letter of Ephesians, the deep irony of this letter, when he's writing this letter to the Gentiles, and reminding them he is in prison, the first time we meet him, he's doing everything he can to imprison Christians for talking about the resurrected king. He's beheaded at the end of his life for telling Gentiles about the resurrected king. He's changed his name and did everything in his power that all he could point to the gospel would come to know the Lord.

Read 1 Corinthians 9. ***"I became all things to all people, that some might come to know the Lord. I've thrown off everything that hinders, that I might run the race set before me."***

The story from Saul to Paul, the prisoner of the gospel, is one of the most incredible stories in the New Testament. And when we read it, we see how the gospel takes someone from dead to alive, and how God, through his power and grace and great love, does incredible things and impossible things through all people.

What is your reason for serving the Lord?

Recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the Gospel
Make sure our service is undeterred by earthly circumstances

What is your reason for serving the Lord?

The first thing we learn from Paul is he reminds us of his past, and we need to recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the gospel. He's in chains and he's not bothered by it. Instead, he is rejoicing that he gets to keep preaching the gospel.

As we keep reading, we need to make sure our service is undeterred by earthly circumstances because Paul's service is never deterred until they cut his head off. Paul keeps preaching the gospel and finding new ways to preach the gospel through the whole course of his life, and we need to take seriously his call and his example.

This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints—to proclaim to the Gentiles the **incalculable** riches of Christ, and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things. This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. So, then, I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory.

Ephesians 3:8-13 CSB

As Paul keeps writing in Ephesians 3:8–13, he's a prisoner for the gospel because he's been preaching to the Gentiles, which he's able to do because God empowered him to do that through his grace.

“This grace was given to me, the least of all the saints, to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of Christ, and to shed light for all about the administration of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things.”

Now, there's a whole lot said here. First and foremost, when we read the word mystery in the New Testament, it's not a mystery. It's referring to what Christ did to bring Jews and Gentiles together in God. We who were separate from near and far have become one in Christ. That's the mystery. And it's the shedding light on that mystery is that that was the plan all along, because before the foundations of the world, God chose those who would be his, those who would be his children. God doesn't get to the New Testament and say, “We need a bigger house.” He knows from the beginning.

And Paul, in his administration of the gospel and preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and telling them about the **incalculable** riches of Christ is telling them what God intended all along. When God said to Abraham, “Through you, I will bless all the nations of the world,” God knew exactly what he was saying. And he knew he was going to do that before he said, “Let there be light.”

Now, I love when I read Ephesians 3:8, and Paul says, ***“this grace given to me, the least of all the saints.”*** The least of all the saints. This guy calls himself the least of all the saints. And remember, saints is a term for believers, not a specific quality of believer. All believers are saints. And Paul says, “I'm the least of all of them.”

And when you hear that, you might be like, “Well, I think I'm lower. I didn't write a third of the New Testament. I'm not a martyr in Rome preaching the gospel before the emperor.” No. But what Paul is referring to is he knows who he was before. In his power, before he was transformed, he did everything

he could to end the lives of Christians. And he sees how wicked he was, and he sees how undeserving he is. And yet he sits in the proclamation of God's power and grace.

As he keeps going, he says, ***"This is so that God's multifaceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens. This is according to his eternal purpose accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him."***

All of that together, again, we're summarizing last week's sermon, but in the sermon last week, we talked about how Jews could be near the temple. Gentiles needed to be further away. And yet now we all have boldness and confident access because we are built on the foundation that is found in Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone, and if you are a believer, he dwells in you. Through faith in him, we are fully connected to him, and nothing can take us away from that.

Paul writes this from prison in Rome, trusting that his access to the Father cannot be deterred or taken at all because of the work of Christ Jesus. No matter what situation comes up in your life, there is nothing that can separate you if you are a believer. Nothing can keep you from God.

And he ends with this. ***"So then I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory."***

Here he is saying, you hear I'm in prison, and you're discouraged, or you're disheartened, but don't be, because I'm still preaching the gospel. In fact, and I've mentioned this in this series already and get used to me mentioning it, it's my favorite thing at the end of Ephesians chapter 6, after Paul says, "put on the armor of God and pray for one another," he says, "also pray for me." And when Paul says, "Pray for me," he says, "Pray not that I would be released from prison, not that I would get a really good lawyer and get a plea deal or something." No, what Paul says is, "Pray that I would be bold to preach the gospel as I ought to."

I would probably pray that my situation would change. Paul prays that he would not stop preaching until his death. He is undeterred by earthly circumstances. He's undeterred by his present circumstances and he's undeterred by his past, the shame of being one who imprisoned and sought to kill Christians. He's undeterred by that because he knows the power of the gospel in transforming him. He's undeterred by the powers of the world because he knows that he is in Christ and nothing will ever take access from him away.

What is your reason for serving the Lord?

Recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the Gospel

Make sure our service is undeterred by earthly circumstances

Look at what Paul does here. It is so wonderful and amazing when he shares about his life in Ephesians. It is a picture of someone who embodies the gospel. Well, we should take heart knowing that he has done this.

Do you know when Paul was Saul before he was before he was a believer? If he would have come in here today, I think we have more Gentiles than Jews in our church by quite a few. He would have been disgusted. And yet by the end of his life, once he was transformed, he'd come into a place like this and he would be

rejoicing that the nations have come together to worship God. And that is a transformation that only comes through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the gospel. Make sure your service is undeterred by earthly circumstances.

What is your reason for serving the Lord?

Recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the Gospel

Make sure our service is undeterred by earthly circumstances

Pray with a posture that proclaims that He has accomplished the impossible

And the last thing we're going to see today, and from the example of Paul, is we need to **pray with a posture that proclaims that he has accomplished the impossible**. Pray with a posture that proclaims that he, God, has accomplished the impossible.

For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom **every family** in heaven and on earth is named. I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Ephesians 3:14-17a CSB

So Paul finishes talking about his imprisonment, and don't be discouraged by it. And then in the final verses of chapter 3, he says this, ***"For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."***

Now, first and foremost, every family. Paul here is talking about all those Jew or Gentile that have come to know the Lord. He is speaking of the broad purpose of the gospel that God has known from before the foundations of the world. Something that before the work of Christ, a Jewish person would have said, "I kneel before the Father, from whom our people, are saved." But again, the mystery is now known, and we should rejoice in this.

He also says, "I kneel." And I just want to take a moment. This isn't the main idea of this passage. But if you never kneel when you pray, I want to encourage you. You don't have to do it all the time. But if you are physically able to kneel, someday ***every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord***. And if you know that now, it's worth bowing to him. He is king. He is worthy. I don't always kneel when I pray, but I do kneel when I pray often because I want to have the right posture before the Lord to acknowledge who he is, to acknowledge that it is he seated on that throne and not me.

And so Paul kneels before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. And he prays that the Father may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

This is a summary, by the way, of Ephesians 1 and 2. All the big ideas are there. That the riches of his glory, that we would through the riches of his glorious grace, that he would pour it out upon us, that we would be redeemed, that we would be reconciled. We who are his chosen children, a part of his family. He wants us to be strengthened and to be a part of the dwelling where Christ is the temple. This is everything we've read so far summarized.

And I keep pointing this out because he's not moving on to new ideas. He's building and building, and here's where he's headed.

I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:17b-19 CSB

"I pray that you being rooted and firmly established in love," and remember last week, we are the temple, right? If you're a believer, Christ is the cornerstone, and he's building upon it. We're becoming the temple. ***So I pray that you would be rooted and firmly established. It's language for foundations of a building, and that you would be rooted and firmly established in love that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width and height and depth of God's love, and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.***

Now, it's going to take a minute to get firmly established in love, that we might comprehend the width and depth and height and length of his love, and then look how he describes Christ's love. It surpasses knowledge. The word surpasses there, it's the word we've seen for the immeasurable power and the immeasurable grace of God. And now it's his immeasurable love.

Paul is saying, "I pray that you would be rooted in the love of God and that you would come to understand that which you cannot comprehend because it is immeasurable." He is saying, as you seek to understand God's love for you, the height and depth and length and width of it, you'll never get to the end. Being filled with the fullness of God is not something that in this life you'll say, "I'm full now, God." You in this life will never fully fathom his affection for you.

And it is such a wonderful promise to rest in. I wish I understood all of it, and I'm so glad that I don't. I am so glad that for all eternity we will rest more and more in the reality of his immeasurable love for us.

If you are a believer, you are a believer because of his power and his grace and his great love for you. None of those are things that you could accomplish on your own. None of those are things you are worthy of or deserving of. And none of those are things that you offered something to him that made him think, "all right, this is a good trade for me." No. His grace and his power and his love for you are immeasurable.

Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us—to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:20-21 CSB

And this brings me to one of my favorite passages in scripture. ***"Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever."***

I love that prayer. When I do benedictions, if I didn't prepare ahead of time I always go to Ephesians 3:20–21. I confess that but I go there because when I read ***"now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think"*** it fills me with such joy but I have to tell you before preaching this series I've never thought

of the depth of what is being claimed here because what he's able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think, he did before the foundation of the world.

You and your own strength, outside of the gospel, would have never turned to God and said, "God, I need your power and grace and love to save me." And yet he chose you. Isn't that amazing? The prayer you would have never known you needed to even pray, he paid the price. Before you could ask or imagine it, your worth is entirely bound up in his power and grace and love for you. And from before time, he knew you, he loved you. And it's such an incredible thing to sit in the truth of this.

When we read these words "now, to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us," it's also not just about the past and what he's already done, but it's about what he will do. Ephesians 1, when it talks about Jesus lifted and seated on the throne with the name that is above every name, with power and authority, he's above every ruler and authority in this age and the ages to come.

We cannot fathom what eternity will be like. We cannot know even what we should ask of him or think about it. And yet he's already prepared it for us. And it's to him that we should give glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

What is your reason for serving the Lord?

Recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the Gospel

Make sure our service is undeterred by earthly circumstances

Pray with a posture that proclaims that He has accomplished the impossible

So what is your reason for serving the Lord? Paul starts by talking about his testimony. And so we need to recall how Saul of Tarsus became a servant of the gospel. We need to make sure our service is undeterred by earthly circumstances because we see that throughout the course of Paul's life. And we need to take his example seriously.

Look at how Paul prays. We need to pray with a posture that proclaims that he has accomplished the impossible, not us. Look at all that he has done and rejoice. He's done far more than we could think or imagine.

So we started with the question of, What is your reason for serving the Lord? And I'm just going to give you the right answer right now. And I'm going to give you the right answer because Ephesians 1:3 through the end of chapter 3 is Paul laying it out.

What is your reason for serving the Lord?

Because of His immeasurable power that brought me from dead to alive, His immeasurable grace that He richly poured out on me, and His immeasurable love by which He has chosen me to be His child from before the foundation of creation to be a masterpiece of His glory for all eternity, I serve God doing the works He prepared for me that others would also become saints who know His power, grace, and love.

It doesn't start with "I serve because, by the way." It starts with this, because of his immeasurable power that brought me from dead to alive, something you could never do, impossible for you to do. *Because of his immeasurable power that brought me from dead to alive, and his immeasurable grace that he richly*

poured out on me, though I did not deserve it, and his immeasurable love by which he has chosen me to be his child from before the foundation of creation, to be a masterpiece of his glory for all eternity. Because of these, I serve God doing the works he prepared for me, that others would also become saints who know his power, grace, and love. And this is all for his glory.

What an incredible thing to realize. And what an incredible thing to rest in. If you ever wonder, does God love you? Does he care for you? Does he value you? If you ever wonder, am I deserving of it? All the answers are found in Ephesians 1 through 3. We're not. But he who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us He saved us by his power and his grace and his love and to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever amen.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven we thank you that while we were dead in our sins while we were children of wrath by nature and by choice, while we were fully separated from you by our rebellion. We thank you that you have sent your Son. And we thank you that it wasn't just a momentary decision by you, but from before the foundations of the world, you knew the cost of creation and you willingly paid it, that we could be your children, chosen by you.

God, we thank you for your immeasurable power that brings us from dead to alive. We thank you for your immeasurable grace. We do not deserve to be alive in the first place, and yet you have made us alive through your grace. And we thank you that this is all because of your immeasurable love. We do not deserve your affection, and yet you have chosen us. We do not deserve forgiveness. And yet you have made us your children, that we would spend eternity with you.

We thank you, Lord, that we are called masterpieces by you, displays of your glory and power and grace and your great love. We pray, Lord, that we would take seriously the testimony of Paul. And in our lives, Lord, we pray that we would follow after you in the same way, not worried about what we might lose, not worried about what in this life may come up, but we would trust that we have full access to you through the work of your son.

We praise you, Lord, for the work of Jesus. We praise you that he is the cornerstone, and it is in his holy and precious name we pray. Amen.



Digging Deeper – **What Is Your Reason?** – Ephesians 3

1. What stood out to you from the sermon?

Read Ephesians 3

2. What stands out to you as you read through the passage?
3. How does Paul refer to himself throughout Ephesians 3? What does this tell us about his attitude before the Lord and toward other believers?
4. Think about what you know about Saul of Tarsus. Who was he before the Gospel transformed him? (hint, Acts 8, 9, and Galatians 1)
5. How does Paul's imprisonment affect his ability to proclaim the Gospel?
6. What does Paul's imprisonment mean concerning the effectiveness of his ministry?
7. What circumstances arise that cause you to struggle to keep Christ at the center? What would Paul say about these struggles?
8. How often do you pray while kneeling or bowing before the Lord?
9. How do Paul's prayers in verses 14-21 inform how we should pray for one another and ourselves?
10. What can we learn about God from how Paul prays to him in these verses?
11. What do you think of the idea that God does far more than we ask or think?
12. In Ephesians 1-3 we see God display his immeasurable power, grace, and love for us. Sit for a moment and consider that all three of these are far more than we could ever comprehend. How do these three make you want to respond to God?
13. Take some time to end in prayer by sharing prayer requests and praying for one another.