

Ephesians

Paul, the Prisoner of Christ Jesus

Ephesians 3:1

May 4th, 2025

I. Introduction: Hope Deferred

The proverb says, “Hope deferred makes the heart _____” (Prov. 13:12). When our hopes, our expectations are put off, this can make us spiritually sick; it can make us angry, bitter, resentful, cynical. It can even send us into a downward spiral of despair ending even in unbelief. In order to guard against such things we would do well to learn from Paul and his faithful life of serving Christ. We ought to learn to set our expectations like Paul set his, for Paul knew what to expect of His Lord. He knew what to expect from this life. As a result, he was unmoved despite all that he faced; he remained tireless in joy, tireless in service, tireless in loving the people of God. And this mindset is captured right here in how he speaks of himself, saying, “I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you, Gentiles.”

II. An Overview of Paul’s Missionary Work

After the Lord rebuked Paul on the road to Damascus, blinded him, and gave him instructions in how to recover his sight, the Lord commissioned him. The Lord Jesus chose Paul to be in His service, to herald forth the name of Christ before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. This was a significant task, and Paul was faithful in carrying it out. Immediately after recovering his sight, he began preaching Christ Jesus. The Book of Acts focuses primarily on three of Paul’s missionary journeys.

- *Acts 13-14*: The first missionary journey started in Antioch in Syria; Paul was accompanied by Barnabas and Mark. He preached in the synagogues, especially to Jews and God-fearing Gentiles. His journey was riddled with opposition. He was even stoned and left for dead. Eventually he returned to Antioch, until he set out again.
- *Acts 15-18*: His second missionary journey was after the Jerusalem Council, which affirmed the Gentiles’ inclusion into the people of God. Silas joined Paul and later Timothy and Luke joined Paul. They revisited some of the churches, preached in Philippi, in Thessalonica, in Athens, in Corinth. And they again met with opposition. They faced riots, imprisonment, opposition from the Greeks. And then they eventually made it back to Antioch.
- *Acts 18-21*: For his third and final missionary journey, Paul and his companions spent over two years in Ephesus, even disrupting the silversmith trade leading to a riot. They also visited Philippi and Thessalonica again, Corinth, the churches in Galatia. And then they travelled to Jerusalem in order to bring a collection for the poor saints there. In Jerusalem, Paul was arrested on a false charge. After a series of trials he was sent off to _____. And in Rome, after a time of house arrest, Paul would be beheaded under Nero.

III. Paul, the Prisoner of Christ Jesus

Paul understood the story God was telling, and his expectations matched God’s reality. It was during the time of his house arrest in Rome when Paul wrote Ephesians as well as Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In our passage, therefore, Paul is speaking literally; he was, literally, a prisoner at this time. But Paul is not just stating a fact. He understands this fact in the light of _____. These chains are the Lord’s chains. This imprisonment belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus has decreed it. Jesus presides over it. Jesus has purposes for it. Paul is not the

prisoner of Rome—he is the prisoner of Jesus Christ. He acknowledges wholeheartedly Jesus’ hand and purpose all throughout his present trial.

Also notice that Paul not only knows that Jesus has good purposes in his imprisonment, but he also knows what that purpose is. He is the prisoner of the Lord, “for you the Gentiles.” Jesus has sanctified Paul’s ministry and his sufferings for _____. Jesus has given Paul—trials and all—to the Church, for her good, and for His glory.

IV. Learning from Paul

Imitating Paul, we can rightly match our expectations to the story we are in by structuring our minds and tuning our hearts to match what God has revealed.

First. Paul could see the bigger _____ that his life was contributing to. Paul lost his life in Jesus, and so his life could be spent for Jesus. What Jesus wanted of Paul, that’s what Paul wanted for Paul. Even in affliction and when he met with opposition, he still belonged to Jesus. If he was in prison, then he was the prisoner of Jesus Christ. If he was a freeman, he was the freeman of Jesus Christ. If he was opposed, they were opposing Jesus Christ’s ambassador. If he brought life and joy and fruit, it was the life and joy and fruit of Jesus Christ (Rom. 14:7, 9).

Whether we are parents or childless, married or single, sick or healthy, poor or wealthy, young or old, this is a call for us to lift our head up and see the bigger picture of what Christ is accomplishing in this world. This is an act of _____. You often cannot see this with your bodily eye. Christ takes all of our faithful and imperfect lives, and He uses them for His own purposes, to accomplish great things, far beyond what we can imagine. Knowing and firmly believing this gives us the kind of ballast that Paul had throughout all of what he faced.

Second. Paul kept in mind that his life was not _____. Like Paul, we belong to Jesus, and Jesus is busy giving all that He has and all that He is, for the life of His Church—both those who are already numbered within her fold, and those who have yet to join us. If Christ is giving Himself for the life of His people, that means we ought to be giving ourselves for one another.

It’s not hard for us to think about this in the context of service. But what about in our sufferings and the trials we face? It is harder to see these things as being for *others*. But Paul saw this from a different angle. He saw his sufferings not just for others in the sense that he was giving himself for them. But he saw the very *afflictions* and *trials* he faced as being for others in the sense that as he endured hard times and faithfully walked through them, and as he saw the Lord deliver him out of his trials—that salvation he experienced was itself a _____ for the people of God. See 2 Cor. 1:3-7.

All that Paul suffered as he faithfully walked with the Lord was all for the Church. As he suffered and saw God faithfully aid him through it, he could then share that comfort with us, so that as we face trials of our own so also can we take heart knowing that the same God who delivered *Paul*, will also deliver *me*.

V. Come & Welcome to Jesus Christ