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Ephesians 3
Prisoners and Ministers
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Discussion Questions:

1. How would you have felt if you were Paul in prison? How do you think he feels about it now?
2. How can perspective on our purpose help us not just endure difficult circumstances but be fruitful?
3. What do you think of first when you hear the word “minister”? Can you think of a way you are or could be Christ’s minister?
4. What has serving Christ ever cost you?
5. What really spoke to you through this study?

Teaching Notes:

Paul built a strong foundation of our identity in Christ in 1-2.

In ch 3 Paul gets a little distracted down a rabbit trail...
...and he also gets a little more personal.

Paul shares he is a prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles.
Paul was not a prisoner of his circumstance.

Paul was a “Prisoner with a Purpose”
God’s purpose for Paul’s life was to serve Him...so...
...Whether he was free or chained, Paul was going to serve Jesus.

Big Idea: God’s purpose for all of us is to serve Him.

The biblical word for someone who serves is: minister.
We are all prisoners w/ a purpose & ministers w/ a ministry.

Title “Prisoners and Ministers”

Paul’s purpose was to serve the Lord.
His ministry was to preach the gospel to the Gentiles...

When our focus is on serving the Lord...
...even prison can have a purpose...

3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—
Paul is now going to go off on a giant rabbit trail...

2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you,

When Paul was saved, his name was Saul.

- He was killing Christians and throwing them in jail himself.
- He was not immediately received, he didn't have a place.
- He spent time in the desert learning and growing and training.
...And those times were pivotal.

1. Ministers need preparation.

God prepares His ministers because ministry is hard.

If your character isn't developed, you will crack w/the pressure.

3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: 6 that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

Gentiles were new spiritual territory...

...and Paul was called by God to reach them.

Paul was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles because...

...God had revealed to him the mystery of Christ and the Gentiles.

2. Ministers discover mysteries in Christ.

We do not know what God is doing when He is preparing us.

We do not know what God has in mind when He calls us.

But He always calls us first to Himself...

Don't let fulfilling a calling get ahead of following Christ.

The mystery of your ministry is revealed in following Christ daily.

The Great Commission & the great commandment.

...go preach the gospel and make disciples and ...

...go love your neighbor.

But how do YOU do it?

God often leads thru progressive revelation & discernment...

...He says take this step. Then, take that step...

...Maybe He brings you a problem or a challenge.

...He guides you through it, you learn, you grow, you see.

...You keep moving forward, step by step, day by day

In time and through experience mysteries are revealed...

...One step leads to another, one ministry leads to another.

3. Ministers pay a cost.

Paul sacrificed his freedom for the chance of serving Christ...

...and seeing Gentiles set free from sin & alive in Christ.

Christ was willing to pay the cost of the cross for us.

Paul was willing to pay the cost of prison for Christ & the Gentiles.

What about us?

Are we willing to decrease so someone else can increase?

Are we pouring out so others can be poured into?

This is part of the self-denial it takes to follow Jesus...

...We don't just deny ourselves by choosing not to sin...

...we deny ourselves by choosing to serve Him.

I Corinthians 9:19

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all.

7 of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Paul was a minister, a servant, a prisoner of Christ...

...and it was a gift of God's grace & by God's effective power...

...that he did it.

4. Ministers get a gift.

To be given a ministry is to get a holy gift to treasure.

God gives us something that is His, for us to care for.

Ministry is a gift we unwrap, it may not be what we thought it was.

But it is made for us, chosen for us and revealed to us.

5. Ministers use His power.

Because it is His gift revealed, we need His power.

"Effective working" is the Greek word: *energeia*.

This is different than *dunamis* power.

Effective working means action, energy, operation.

It is not about how energized you are and excited you feel...

...It is about how spiritual you walk & how faithfully you live.

You may be thinking...that is fine for some, but not me...

...I am not good enough, important enough, holy enough...

...or just plain enough.

All this was given to Paul and Paul says this...

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;

6. Ministers get grace.

- The Spirit has revealed the mystery.
- Christ is unsearchably rich.
- God created all things through Christ.

God regularly chooses the least because He is the best.

And anything we have is by His grace not our merit.

On our own, none of us deserve it & none of us can do it!

But serving Christ is what we were made for.

The chance to serve is a gift we steward.

- There is a cost but it is worth it.
- So keep following Him faithfully & see what He reveals.
- And then do it by His grace and with His power for His glory.

If we want to get to the end and hear "well done"...

...we need to be His good and faithful servants now.