

DEEP SIX STUDY

February 21st, 2021

Jesus in the Letters – “The Prison Epistles: Behind Bars But Not Done”

MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS (You can view the full message on Facebook or at live.capecodchurch.com/live)

Opening: Paul traveled the roads and seaports of the Roman Empire to spread the Good News about Jesus and plant churches – and ended up in prison. While prison could have been a place of stagnation or defeat, Paul chose to use his time to gain clarity from God, and to share that clarity with some of the churches he’d planted by writing letters – four beautiful letters we know as “the Prison Epistles.”

1. The Fellowship of Jesus (Philippians 1:3-6)

- The church at Philippi was special, in that the members there had “partnered” with Paul – almost certainly in a financial way – to help spread the Good News to other cities. This partnership, or fellowship – moved the Philippian church from *spectators* of Paul’s work to *participants* with him.
- When we support the missional work of the church, it’s not just “giving to a charity” – we are partnering in fellowship with the global church by investing in the work commissioned by Jesus.

2. Jesus Plus Nothing (Colossians 1:15-20)

- Colossae, like most ancient cities, had a pantheon of gods and demigods that were worshipped by the people – who often picked multiple gods to follow in a blended, personal “religion.”
- Paul writes his letter to the Colossians into this polytheistic environment and includes a famous doxology that plainly states that Jesus doesn’t leave room for any other god – “Jesus plus *nothing*” is the only way to worship him. Faith in him is all-sufficient, since he himself is all-sufficient.

3. Jesus Messes With My Messes (Philemon 1:15-17)

- Paul writes to Philemon to address a sticky issue: Philemon’s runaway slave Onesimus is now Paul’s “son in the faith” – and Paul wants Philemon to receive him back as an equal, a brother in Christ. This was revolutionary; runaway slaves were criminals subject to punishment, even death.
- Paul’s take on slavery is part of God’s redemptive movement in history – taking his followers toward his ideal for the world one step at a time. To do so, he “messes with our messes,” subverting what we think is ‘okay’ to show us that it isn’t and to make us more like Jesus.

4. Before You Do Anything, Know This: Jesus Loves You (Ephesians 3:14-21)

- Ephesus, among the greatest of ancient cities, was largely dedicated to the worship of the god Artemis – the Greek god of fertility. Her worship included sexual acts with temple prostitutes.
- Into that environment Paul writes that Christ’s love is all his followers need – they don’t need sex, or money, or power – just the understanding of how unimaginably enormous Jesus’ love for us is.
- If we can simply imagine how much Jesus loves us, that glimpse of his love will fill us with everything we long for – satisfaction, power, fulfillment – leading us to live a life of *expectation*.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

These passages may provide additional insights related to the subject of this week's message. Verses from NLT unless otherwise noted.

Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 5:6-8; Galatians 3:26-28; James 4:1-4; 1 John 1:1-4; 1 John 4:9

Video of the Week: [Acts 13-20](#) by the Bible Project

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. There was a lot to digest in Sunday's message. What one thing was your biggest takeaway?
2. When you give to the church, do you typically think of it as an obligation, a donation to a charity, or as a partnership? Explain your answer.
3. Why is syncretism – the mixing and blending of different religions or worldviews into a composite “faith” – a problem for those who claim to follow Jesus? What's the big deal, for instance, of mixing a little astrology or Hindu meditation in with my Christianity?
4. Read Philemon 1:15-17 again. Paul boldly asks for Philemon to forgive Onesimus, his runaway slave, and receive him back as a “brother.” Yet he doesn't condemn the practice of slavery itself, or even suggest (directly) that Philemon should give Onesimus his legal freedom. Why do you think that is?
5. Read Ephesians 3:19 again. In what ways do the “gods of this world” – money, sex and power – keep us from fully experiencing the love of Christ and becoming “complete”?
6. The message ended with the idea that just a glimpse of Jesus' enormous love for us would/should lead us to live a life of “expectation.” What, exactly, would a life of “expectation” look like? How do we live that life out?