Ephesians, Part Two
Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible, and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

All right, well, this is episode two of a five-part series. We're doing "exploring Paul's letter to the Ephesians." These were five different teachings that I did when I was a teaching pastor at Door of Hope, contributions I made to exploring the book of Ephesians for our church community there.

This is a teaching based off of chapter 3. It's where Paul explores the kind of people group that has come into existence because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. And the main thing that made Paul's heart beat was the fact that Jesus wasn't just Israel—ancient Israel's—messianic king, but rather, he was also the risen Lord of all humanity. And what that means was that it was his job to create communities of people who were following Jesus that were intentionally multi-ethnic and diverse in every sense of that word. And that was an important *pointer* to the truth about who Jesus was—that he was actually the Savior and Lord of all humanity.

We are currently living in a time where ethnic division—the division of people who were very culturally different from each other—is a charged and tragic divide in Western culture—and, specifically, American culture right now. And especially the fact that whole swaths of Christianity, in American culture, have been hijacked, or co-opted with political and cultural forces that are actually creating and *sustaining* those ethnic divisions of status and power in our own culture.

And Paul the Apostle's heart would be broken to know that that's the case. His vision of what the people of Jesus are to be is *fundamentally* different than the human tendency to cloister with people who are just like ourselves. The good news about Jesus should generate a movement in the local church that's the *opposite* of that.

And so that's the vision and the heartbeat of that, is that we're going to explore in this teaching on Ephesians, chapter 3. It was very challenging for me. It continues to be. And I hope it is for you, too. So let's dive in and learn together.

[Musical Break (03:16—03:21)]

So I invite you to open your Bibles and turn,with me to Ephesians chapter 3. So again,

just to kind of paint the big picture: we have the Apostle Paul, and he's writing this letter to a number of different churches, I think, in the region in and around Ephesus. It's in modern-day Turkey—kind of, in western Turkey, by the coast. And Paul spent a lot of time and invested in a lot of relationships, sharing the Good News about Jesus in this area. And a lot of churches—communities of Jesus—came into existence during that time, and so he's writing to them.

And really his basic purpose is to, kind of, summarize and paint the big picture, to remind them: one, of the Gospel, the story of the Gospel. But specifically about how it is that these communities of people, in these cities around Ephesus, are mostly non-Jewish people—Greeks and Romans—who are not Jewish at all. And his basic message is that, through Jesus, they have been welcomed into the covenant family of God's people.

Now, Ephesians, chapter 3, what Paul's talking about here—what he's really focusing in on—is probably, almost certainly *not* what any of us woke up thinking about this morning. And it's this. He's trying to get at the question: how is it that you and I, most of us being non-Jewish people—so I'm guessing, maybe, you have an eighth, or a quarter, Jewish blood in your background, somewhere. So the vast majority of us sitting in this room right now, we're not from any kind of Jewish background.

And Paul is moving towards this issue of: how is it that you and I, who are not Jewish people, but in Jesus—the Jewish Messiah—we have been included into the covenant family of God? How did that happen? Which I'm guessing is just not a burning question for most of us—[Tim laughs] you know what I'm saying? Like you didn't think, "Oh, I'm non-Jewish, but somehow I'm part of the Jewish heritage now." Like, "What?" You didn't think about that this morning. You know, you're thinking about, whatever, Raisin Bran or something—whatever, your coffee. Probably most of us think about our coffee.

And so the challenge of certain parts of the Bible, and this part of the letter of Ephesians, is that Paul's, like, really focusing in on something that most of us, like, don't really care about and don't really think is an issue. So *wee—yay*, so there you go.

But I actually think that this—we're focusing on the first half of Ephesians, chapter 3—this actually speaks a really profound and important word to us, Door of Hope, sitting here, in twenty-first century, inner Portland. But we need to, kind of, take a deep dive into the dense substance of what he's saying before we get punched in the gut at the very end. So you guys, we have some ground to cover—are you guys with me?

Okay, so let's dive in here—no, we're not going to dive in here. Sorry, I have to show you a picture first, because I usually show you pictures before I—anyway, that's just my way. So I want to show you a building, and I just kind of want to frame the significance, for today, of what Paul's getting at, in Ephesians, chapter 3, here.

So usually I show you pictures of people who died a long time ago, and then tell you stories about them. Not today. I'm showing you a picture of a building that still stands today. So this is a church building, and it's located right at the center of the town of Nazareth, which is the town where Jesus grew up. It's a small city, or large town now. There's about 100,000 people—is that a large town, or a small city? I'll let you be the judge of that. So whatever, it's 100,000 people living in Nazareth today.

It was not that size when Jesus grew up there. The ruins of first-century Nazareth are actually not far from this building. You can go visit them and what they have dug up, and

so on, in terms of the size of the buildings and how many there are. The max population of Nazareth in Jesus's day was about 500. So he's from a small, Podunk, hill-country town—that's where Jesus is from.

And this church right here, it's a Catholic church building, and it's called the Church of the Annunciation. And it's there to commemorate the moment in the story where the angel comes to Mary and announces to her that she's pregnant with Jesus, the Messiah. Therefore, the Church of the Annunciation.

Here's what's really cool about this church—and I'll show you a painting. How many of you are familiar with this painting, right here [referring to visual]—at least, this image? It's kind of a fixed image in Western cultural history, or art history. What's the name of this painting? The "Madonna and Child," yeah. So this is depicting Mary, the mother of Jesus, and then sweet baby Jesus, who's not smiling—smirking, maybe [Tim laughs]. I'm not sure. He's . . . nothing. And this is painted by the Renaissance painter, Raphael, in the early 1500s. And this image has become, kind of, a "fixed image" in Western art, cultural history, history of Christian art, and so on.

Now, there's a few things that should stick out to us. Actually, there's one major thing that should be very conspicuous to us as we look at this painting—and what is that? They're *white*. [Tim laughs] For goodness sakes—they're white. [Tim laughs] Baby Jesus was a white Anglo-Saxon—wow, that's news to me, right? So last time I heard, he was Jewish—right? So yeah, that's really interesting about this, is that they're both depicted as fair-skinned, white Europeans, essentially.

And so that raises a whole set of issues because, of course, like, people weren't utterly blind to the fact, were they, that Jesus was actually Jewish—and maybe some people were. I think there's something deeper going on here—is that when the story of Jesus, when the Good News about Jesus enters into a culture, because it speaks to such a deep—the Gospel speaks to such a deep, universal human experience of our lostness, of our lost sense of identity and innocence, and our desire for meaning and hope and purpose—that whenever the Gospel goes into a culture, usually human beings, we just can't help but talk about and think about and even depict Jesus in light of our own cultural background, and so on. And so you get a white European depicting Jesus as a white European.

Okay, here's what's so cool about the Church of the Annunciation. When you go into the building—they built this church in the late 1960s—and what they did is, they commissioned artists, Christian artists from all around the world, all these different countries around the world—to paint this painting, but using their own culture's traditional imagery, traditional clothing, colors, symbols, and so on.

And so you walk into this cathedral and you're just surrounded by dozens of images of the "Madonna and Child," but from *every* possible culture you can imagine. So I can't really recreate this experience—[addressing audience] I'm sorry, front row people. I didn't even think about that. So—you can look online, sorry. So I'll just kind of name the countries. This won't recreate the experience, but you'll just get the idea—some of them are really, really cool.

So Singapore, and Greece, and Ecuador—they're standing on this moon, which means something, I'm sure—but I don't know what it means. So Ecuador—Ecuador. Next one: Bolivia, and Romania, and Vietnam. Next one: Korea. I really like Korea, because I like

the floral art. China, Croatia—which, that's quite striking, isn't it? [Tim laughs] It's super striking. Thailand—I love Thailand. So it looks so Thailandese—[Tim laughs] I'm not sure, it just looks really . . . Scotland, that's "home team" for me. There it is—that Scottish baby Jesus, right there, right? [Tim laughs] So he looks like me as a kid. So Scottish. Italy.

Next one—these are my two favorites. They're from inside—and they're much bigger than the rest. The left is by a Kenyan artist. An artist from Kenya. And what's cool is, it's depicting all these Kenyans offering tribute to King Baby Jesus, with these kind of bowls. And then, can you guess—on the right? Japan, yeah. And so Mary's wearing this Japanese kimono robe, and so on. And what's cool about the ones from Japan is, actually, it's a tile mosaic. It's made up of thousands of little, tiny, shiny, colored tiles—so, so beautiful.

You walk into this building, and it's just all kinds of things are striking you. And the first thing that strikes you—at least, as an American, from coming in—is, just, like, "Holy cow, whatever Christianity is, it is not—and never was—a Western religion, first of all"—you know what I'm saying? And so there's very much the tendency—especially in American—at least labeling "white Christians" as all belonging to a certain socioeconomic class, belonging to a certain political group here in America, and having certain views on this or that policy and so on.

And this—walking into that church just obliterates that. And you're just like, "Whatever Christianity is, it is way *bigger* than any small experience of it that I've had in my"—whatever, however many years you've been alive. It just bowls you over that this is an ancient, multicultural, international movement of Jesus's people. It just overwhelms you as you go into the building. And it raises all kinds of questions—having this experience and seeing all of these Christians depicting Jesus from within their culture.

It raises the question, first of all, that that church is even standing in that town. How do you explain the fact that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, who grew up in small, podunk, hill country—he grew up in the sticks, right? He's this Jewish rabbi, messianic figure. How do you explain that 2,000 years later, he is this universal figure who was looked to—by now, after 2,000 years—by billions of human beings, from every background you can imagine—all looking to Jesus as the one in whom they find meaning and hope and salvation and restored relationship with God—how did that happen? How do you *explain* something like that, just as a historical fact?

I mean, Christianity is the most culturally diverse religious movement in the history of the human race. That's *remarkable*. How did that happen? And however it did happen, it *did* happen, which should just immediately humble every single one of us. Because what it does is: you walk in there, and you realize, like, the form of Christianity that I know—that you may have happened to grow up with, or that you've come into contact with, positively or negatively—that's just such—one tiny sliver of the expression of the Jesus movement, in one place at one time. And that there's just this whole other thing that I have no clue about—all these diverse and different expressions of people following Jesus.

That is what Paul wants to get us in touch with in Ephesians chapter 3. Paul's driving passion was that Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, was a savior, and a figure who came to do something for all people, of all places, of all times. He was very much the Jewish

Messiah for all nations. And again, that's not the burning issue for most of us, but the issues at work here are actually pretty core to, just, the basic human story. That's what we're going to touch on here tonight—you guys with me,\ here?
Okay, so let's dive into Ephesians, chapter 3, and watch how Paul works this out. Surgeon General's Warning: this is dense. That's why I have the whiteboard here with me.
So "I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus"—and just to—a reminder: is "Christ" Jesus's last name? It's not Jesus's last name. It's a title that means "Messiah" or "anointed king." So I'm going to say "king." So, "I, Paul, the prisoner of King Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles"—which just means "non-Jewish" people—"surely you've heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you."
Now he's alluding—he just actually revealed something, for the first time, in the letter so far—and that's where he's sitting as he writes it. Where is he sitting, as he writes the letter? He's in a prison cell. I'm like, "Whoa, okay." So if you didn't know that already from reading the book of Acts, he's sitting in a prison cell. And he calls himself a prisoner of King Jesus, which is kind of ironic because whose prison cell—what government's prison cell—is he sitting in? He's sitting in a Roman prison cell. But he's like, "Yeah, the Romans—incidental, whatever. So I'm first and foremost a prisoner and a servant of King Jesus."
And for whose sake is he sitting in that prison cell? What's he say? "*You* guys, you Gentiles." Now he's not laying a guilt trip right now. He's stating a fact—a fact, here. And he's actually just alluding to a story that you're supposed to know. And since probably most of us don't know it, let's put our thumb right here, and—I do this from time to time—why don't you flip back about fifty pages with me to the book of Acts. The book of Acts, chapter 21.
How did Paul end up in prison—and how is it for the sake of "you Gentiles," who live in and around Ephesus? Here's the story. Acts chapter 21. We're going to start at verse 17. So Paul's been out-and-about for about, over a decade now—moving into new cities, he gets work there as a tentmaker—he worked with leather. And then he would just get to know people—Jewish people, non-Jewish people—and start talking about Jesus. And people would put their faith in Jesus, and he would start building up little church communities, and then move on to the next town.
And so he's been doing this for a decade now. And he wanted to come back to Jerusalem with some friends, where the whole Jesus movement got started. So verse 17, Luke, the author of Acts, he writes here, "When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters there, they greeted us warmly. The next day, Paul and the rest of us, we went to go see James and the elders who were present there."
Now James is the brother of Jesus. And he became a real prominent leader in the Jewish Christian community in Jerusalem. So he's going back to, like, "home base." This is where the whole Jesus movement got started and exploded from—was right here, in Jerusalem.
And so Paul greeted them—this is verse 19—and he reported, in detail, everything God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard about this, what's their response? [Asks audience] Are you awake? You're awake. I know you're awake—your eyes are all open. So what's their response here? Yeah, they're really

excited. They praise God. They're like, "Holy cow, all of these non-Jewish people coming into faith in Jesus, the Jewish Messiah—this is awesome. This is so exciting." And so they're super thrilled.

But then they say to Paul, they say this—they say, "You see, brother, also, how many thousands of Jews have come to believe. All these Jewish people are coming to faith in Jesus too. But see, here's the thing about the Jewish Christians who are in Jerusalem right now. All of them—they're zealous for the law. They're zealous for the law."

And for law here, you could insert the term—that you might know or you may not know—the word "Torah," which is just the Jewish term for referring to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. It's known as *the Torah* or *the Torah of Moses.* And specifically, it's referring to the commands—the Ten Commandments and all the other commands—given to Israel on Mount Sinai, about that covenant relationship with Israel. We'll talk about that in a second.

So they're super zealous about the commands of the Torah. And here's what they go on to say, "These Jewish Christians, who are super zealous for the Torah, they've been informed, Paul, that you're going around teaching all of the Jews who live among the non-Jewish people to turn away from Moses and telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What are we supposed to do here? I mean, everybody's going to hear that you've come."

And so what they tell Paul is, they say, "Listen, we just need you to act really Jewish for a while, while you're here in Jerusalem." Okay, now—so this is the backstory to Ephesians 3. Now here's the backstory to the backstory. The whole point of God redeeming his people out of slavery in Egypt—right, this is the story of the Old Testament—he brings Israel out of Egypt. He brings them to the foot of Mount Sinai to enter it. He binds himself to Israel in a covenant relationship.

And he gives them the commands of the Torah. And Bible geeks, you know that there are 613 of those commands in the four books of the Bible, there, in the Torah. And those commands were meant to do a number of things. They were to urge Israel to become a nation of *extreme* generosity and love for each other. Love for their neighbors. A nation of justice, as a light and a witness to the nations around them.

God also called Israel to become a holy and a distinct people, who are culturally different from their neighbors. And so there are a number, a lot of commands in the Torah that are symbolic or cultural. And they became, kind of, "identity markers" for the Jewish people. And they're the ones that—they're still the same ones that mark observant Jews as different from today. So, observing the Sabbath regularly—Friday night to Saturday night, male circumcision, and kind of strict, particular dietary restrictions, like not eating pork, and not ever having milk and meat together. You can't have a cheeseburger if you're an Orthodox Jew—of milk and meat, because it's a whole other—that would require a backstory to the backstory to the backstory, and we're not going to go there. So it's all of these cultural markers.

And essentially, as we're going to see, here's what happened—is Israel, because they're just broken, flawed human beings, like the rest of us, they failed to become a nation of justice and extreme generosity and so on. And what they did do is that they took these cultural markers—of Sabbath and dietary laws—and these became, kind of, these became ways of asserting their cultural identity over against non-Jewish people.

They became matters of cultural pride. And so Israel came to isolate itself more and more and more, cutting themselves off from non-Jewish people.

And so Paul, he comes into town, and he's telling, like he would tell us—like, most of us are non-Jewish here—"hey, Jewish Messiah died for you. He was raised for you. Place your faith in him. He's present here with us. He wants to completely transform and heal us and forgive us." And we'd be like, "Yay, that's good news."

And then he would say, "Now there are going to be some other Jewish Christians who might come in, and they're going to say, 'All the guys in the room, you've got to get the circumcised thing.'" And we'd be like, "Bummer, that's not rad"—right? And so this was a tension in the early church: do you *have* to become Jewish if you really want to follow the Jewish Messiah?

And there's all these people in Jerusalem who were like, "Absolutely, yes. And this Paul guy, he's way off base. He disrespects the Torah. He disrespects God's word, and he's leading everybody astray." And so they ask him, they say, "Listen, Paul, can you just work with us here? When you're in Jerusalem, just act as Jewish as you can." And so look what happens. Look at verse 27. And Paul says, "Yes, absolutely. Totally. I'll eat kosher this week. No big deal."

Look down at verse 27, "Now, when the seven days are nearly over, some of the Jews from the province of Asia, they saw Paul at the temple in Jerusalem, and they stirred up the whole crowd. And they were seizing him, shouting, 'Hey, everybody—Israelites—help us. This is the man. He's teaching everyone, everywhere, against our people—against the Torah, against our law, against this place, the temple, saying that the temple is no longer—the temple in Jerusalem isn't where God's presence is anymore. He's actually saying"—what he says in Ephesians, which is—"it's the believers in Jesus who are now the temple of God, and where God dwells."

They're totally ticked off. "And besides," they say, "he brought some Greeks—non-Jewish Greeks—right here into the temple. He's defiled this holy place." Now, Luke whispers in our ear here. He says, "Now, they had previously seen Trophimus—the what? The who? What's he say? "The Ephesian"—it's a guy from Ephesus. They had seen this guy, Trophimus from Ephesus, with Paul in the city earlier. And they assumed that Paul brought him into the temple.

"The whole city was aroused, and people came running from all directions. They seized Paul. They dragged him from the temple. Immediately the gates were shut."

Everybody's trying to kill him, and news reaches the commander of the Roman troops. The Roman soldiers come and then they arrest him, and *boom*, there you go, he's in prison. He's in prison for the whole rest of the book of Acts. And he gets moved around, into different prison cells, and so on. That's how, and that's from where, he's writing the letter to the Ephesians.

When Paul says, "I'm a prisoner for the sake of you Gentiles," he's just stating—he's reminding them of the story. "Remember Trophimus? Yeah, probably, I guess, he got a little too close to the temple, [Tim laughs] I guess, with me." And so, there you go. He's in prison because of this passionate conviction he has that God is the God of all nations, and wants to create a multi-ethnic family of his covenant people. And Paul went to prison for this vision.

Let's keep going, let's keep going. He says, "Surely you have heard about the

administration"—this verse, sorry. Back to Ephesians chapter 3—did I say that? Ephesians, chapter 3, 2, "Surely you've heard about the administration of God's grace. It was given to me for you, the Gentiles. That is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I've already written about briefly. And in reading this, you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery of the Messiah, the king."

And he's referring here, just, to Ephesians 1 and 2, that we just worked through over the last couple of weeks. "This was not made known to people in other generations as it's now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy people"—excuse me—"to God's holy apostles and prophets. And here is this mystery: that through the Gospel, the Good News, the non-Jewish people, the Gentiles, they are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, sharers together in the promise in King Jesus, in the Messiah, Jesus."

Now, what word did he just repeat three times there, for those of you paying attention? He repeated a word three times in there—this "mystery," did you see it there? The *mystery* made known by revelation, insight into the *mystery*—verse 6, the *mystery* through the Gospel.

Now here's what's interesting, and this is kind of an English thing. When we hear the word "mystery" in English, we think of something that's super obscure or incomprehensible, and can't really be understood. And actually, some of you—this is what I think. For me, the word "mystery" is completely linked to, like, Agatha Christie novels or something—you know, mystery novels, right? And so that's what we think of. It's like this puzzle, and nobody can figure it out. Maybe one person can. That's the idea.

And it's actually funny—it's super random. It has nothing to do with anything. But when I lived in Madison, Wisconsin, not far from where we lived, it was one of these—I don't know how these businesses survived—it was a mystery bookstore. And then every Friday night, they do these mystery-murder role-play dinners—you know what I mean? And you're like, how does that place survive? But there it was. It was right there in Madison, Wisconsin. I'm sure there are some in Portland. I'm sure they'd do great in Portland, actually [Tim laughs]—there's enough strange people like that. But in Madison, it kind of stuck out. Anyway, so that's what we think of mystery and—"incomprehensible."

That's not what "mystery" means in the Bible. "Mystery" means "something that was not known and now it's been made known." Nobody knew about it at all, and now it's public, open, out there for everybody to see. And so what he's saying is this idea that God's plan—you can read the Old Testament, and you can totally get the idea that what God's doing, his heart is for all nations. He said to Abraham, "I'll make you a great nation, I'll bless you, and in you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed."

You could read the prophet Isaiah, and he saw the day of the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and he saw all the nations flooding into Jerusalem, and obeying the Torah, and basically becoming Torah-observant—becoming Jewish. But the idea that God's covenant family would come, so that actually the circumcision, obeying the Torah, that *that* actually was fulfilled, came to its end, and is over now—that was a completely radical new idea that ticked a lot of Jewish people off.

And Paul staked everything on this claim that what happened in Jesus was for

everybody. It's for every tribe, every tongue, every language, and it's only faith in Jesus that unites us as a covenant family together—which he's going to get into.
So let me just—[referring to visuals] I'm going to draw this out, because I don't know, that's just how I think—visually. And I'm just going to force it on you. So there you go. I'm going to draw this out to remind you. This is the drawing about Ephesians that I did the other week, but this will kind of help explain, I think, where he's going with this, here. And I think it's in the—is this in the light enough, over here [addressing audience]? This is a story that Paul has in his mind that he's telling throughout the whole letter to the Ephesians.
He has a story—begins with God making humans. And humans, at the beginning of the story of the Bible—happy face or sad face? So happy—really, it's really great. Humans made in the image of God. They're meant to reflect the goodness and love of the creator back out into the world, and so on—really great story.
How long do the good times last? So two pages, or something, in your Bible, right? So two pages, and then comes the comic book *kapow*, right? And the *kapow* is when humans decide to seize their autonomy from God, and to define "good" and "evil" and their identity, independently of the creator's wisdom and love for them. And it ruins everything.
And in Paul's mind, as he says—and uses the word in chapter 1 to describe what Jesus came to do: to *unite* all things back together—in Paul's mind, this act of sin fragmented and divided human beings in a million different, self-centered directions. And so Paul's basic vision here—excuse me—Paul's vision is, as he's reading the story of the Bible, in the story of the Bible is about God choosing one of these broken, fragmented families, out of all the nations, *through whom* he's going to bring salvation, and redemption, and healing to human history.
And what's the name of that family? So Israel, in the Old Testament—the family of *Abraham.* And he gives them the Torah, the commands of the Torah. And these commands, like I was just saying, he rescued them out of Egypt and slavery, brought them to Mount Sinai, and he commissioned them to be a witness to the nations through how they lived, through being a nation of generosity and love for neighbor, and justice, and so on—and also to be different from the nations.
And so they had these, kind of, "cultural markers"—of the Sabbath, and circumcision, and all these dietary laws, and so on. And so how did Israel do at fulfilling their end of the covenant relationship? Yeah—really, really bad, because, does Israel—is, somehow, Israel morally superior to all the rest of the nations on the earth? No, of course not. They're just as screwed up as we are.
And so here's what happens is: that Israel does not fulfill the call to be just and generous and have love for neighbor. They fail that. You just read the story of the Old Testament. But what they also do—and you can just read this throughout the story—they take these cultural boundary-markers—of Sabbath and circumcision and dietary laws—and these become matters of cultural pride. And every culture has this. It's its unique ways of, like—music or food or dress. And it's a way of, kind of, asserting our identity, "Here's who *we* are. Here are the boundary-markers. If you do these things, you're part of us, and this is why we know everybody else sucks, because they don't do it our way." You know? I mean, that's—I mean, come on, that's just how human cultures

work. It's cultural pride.

And so not only did they not fulfill their calling, they became prideful in the cultural symbols in the Torah. And so here's Paul's—I mean, this was both Jesus's and Paul's basic point, was that: Israel, as a nation, forfeited its role to be a light to the nations. And in fact, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, came to do and be for Israel what it could never do and be for itself.

And Jesus, in his life of complete obedience to the Torah, and utter self-giving love to every person he came into contact with—and he was not just being, like, the ultimate Jew, he was being, like, *the* ultimate human. He was being a human in the way God designed us to be, but because of our selfish, self-focused mess going on inside of us, we just aren't—because we're just apathetic, and care about ourselves more than other people. And so Jesus *lives* for us and he *dies* for us as well. And this is where Paul sees all the threads coming together.

In Paul's vision, what happens in Jesus is that the brokenness of every tribe, of every people group, of every family, all of the pride—the cultural pride, the corporate, communal pride and arrogance, the individual selfishness and self-focus and apathy to the needs of others—all of that gets focused in on Jesus, *the* ultimate human on the cross. And he bears into himself the collective results of humanity. He shoulders the train wreck of human history and of human individual sin and human cultural pride.

And he bears it spiritually, but also literally. What kind of cross is he hanging on? Who put him up on the cross? Romans. By the accusations of whom? The Jewish leaders, who were compelling and were manipulating the Romans. I mean, the reason Jesus is on the cross is because of the hostility between the Jews and the Romans, and they're wrangling the system. He's up there precisely because of the conflict between all of these tribes and families.

And so go back, look at chapter 2. This is what Josh did last week, but I just want to reread this because this is Paul's—the core vision of the Gospel, and of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. Go back to chapter 2—this is really dense, isn't it? But it's Paul. So what are you going to do? Go argue with Paul.

Chapter 2, verse 14, he says, "Jesus himself is our peace. He made the two groups one." In other words, he takes all the different tribes of humanity, and—here are the two groups: Jew and non-Jew—and he reduces it all down to one, to one thing. "He destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the Torah, the law, with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

Now this is—this may seem very natural to you, or may seem, like, very strange to you. But this is the story of the Gospel. It's that Paul sees Jesus as the ultimate human—the one who lived as a human the way all of us are called to be, but can never be because we're so compromised by sin. And so all of the mess of human history, and of our sin and pride, gets focused in on Jesus, on the cross.

And so when people grab onto Jesus, in faith and trust, what happens is that Jesus's life is now attributed to me. His death becomes my death. Just, the crap that I release out into the world through my own selfishness, the horrible things that our cultural pride releases out into the world, he absorbs it into himself on the cross and it kills him.

But because God's—I mean, he said in chapter 2—God's love and his mercy are so much stronger than even our own sin, and the death that it causes, in Jesus's resurrection from the dead—[refers to whiteboard] we'll signal that by this, resurrection from the dead—his purpose then is to—his life is for us, his death is for us—his purpose was always to create one new humanity, a new human family.

And this is a human family in whom every nation and everyone on earth is welcome on one term, and that is just to confess out loud, "I am a selfish SOB"—that's what I am, right? And the entry card is to humble myself before Jesus's grace and, just, to recognize I'm so screwed up. I'm so prideful. I belong to a culture—we think we're better than everybody else, and it's just released havoc into this world.

And the entry card in this family is just to say, "The Son of God loved me, he gave his life for me, and his resurrection life has invited me to experience forgiveness and grace and to become a part of this new family that he's making—what Paul calls "a new humanity." And this is the story that Paul's telling in Ephesians. And this thing is called "the new humanity," or as we're going to see, it's called "the church." And in this new humanity, in the church, every tribe and language and culture is welcome, based off of the entry card, which is simply faith in Jesus. That's it. That's it.

And so that's the great—it's "the great mystery," he calls it. Through the Good News, people from every background were—look at verse 6 again—"heirs, together with Israel," because Jesus is—he never stopped being Jewish. This is still the Jewish hope for all nations, who are members together of one body, sharers together in the promise in Jesus. How you guys doing?

Okay, let's keep going. He's going to begin to cash this out, here. Verse 7, he says, "I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace given to me through the working of his power. Listen, I am less than the least of all the Lord's people." This is really key, what he's saying. He's saying: if anybody should be barred entry into this new family, it's him. He says, "I was a murderer of followers of Jesus. I conspired in the murder of followers of Jesus," Paul says, "and by his sheer grace, he's included me in this family and given me the burden of this message."

And so look at verse 8. He says, "I'm the less, the least of all the Lord's people. This grace was given to me, to preach to the non-Jewish world the boundless riches of the king, of the Jewish Messiah, and to make plain to everybody the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 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, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in King Jesus, our Lord."

Everything clear on that one there? Okay, so he's a herald of this message that all nations find common ground at the cross, and that the entry card into the new humanity is just confession of faith and trust in King Jesus, who loved me and died and was raised for me.

And here's what he says, here. He says, "The existence of this family, here"—which, by the way, doesn't, like, erase all of our cultural differences. Of course, this is all: you walk into the Church of the Annunciation and you see, like, "Whoa, this is new humanity, it's made-up of people from all kinds of very, very different cultures." But the idea is that all of the broken, sinful, prideful, distorted ways that those cultures assert themselves in

the world, that all dies at the cross, and what happens here is just the beautiful expression of what is good, and beautiful in the diverse cultures of humanity—that's, at least, the idea.

And so what he's saying here is the existence of this thing—look at verse 10. This has struck me for so long. I think I understand what he means. He says, "God's purpose in doing this was to announce his wisdom through the existence of the church"—to whom? What does he say, right here—to whom? *To the powers*—"to the powers and rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms."

So this is not the first time we've heard about these powers, is it? If you've been following through us, with the series here. We talked about them in chapter 1. We talked about them in chapter 2. And so this is—and I won't rehash it—both Josh Garrells, Josh White, and myself—we've all worked through it. Paul has a deep conviction that evil in our world can't only be explained just by human decisions. He believes that there's a real realm, or dimension, where there exist spiritual beings—he calls them different names, calls them "spirits" or "demons"—who influence and speak lies to human beings to destroy us.

And so when Paul talks about, as an individual, you "giving in to evil," giving in to these dark spiritual powers, he'll use the word "Satan" or "the devil." When Paul wants to talk about the ways that whole cultures or tribes or societies get distorted and led into evil, Paul uses this language of "the powers," the powers. And this is intentional. And this is so profound, what he's saying.

He's saying, essentially: the existence of this redeemed humanity where, all of a sudden, our cultural differences—they make us different, but the most important common denominator in this family is not your skin color, it's not what music you like, it's not the size of your genes—it's, just, purely faith and trust in Jesus, who loved me and gave himself for me. The existence of this, he says, announces God's wisdom and challenges the powers.

So the "powers" is Paul's way of talking about how evil is distorted, distorts and reflects whole human societies—and here, in the matter of cultural pride, cultural pride. And so think about a modern example here that I think Paul would absolutely resonate with and exactly the kind of thing he's talking about. So within our lifetimes, if you're nineteen years old or above, actually the bloodiest ninety-days in recent human history has taken place in our lifetimes—did you know that? The most murderous three months of recent human history. The only thing that rivals it would be the Holocaust. And it happened in our lifetimes.

It happened in the summer of 1994—what happened then? Rwanda—the Rwandan genocide happened. And I remember I was in high school, and I was just at that age where I was starting to realize, like, "Oh, there are people in the world outside of myself," and—because I remember the headlines, and it really, like, "Whoa, what's going on in the world?"

And so you have ninety days where somewhere—but the count is actually, it's really disputable what the number is—somewhere between half-a-million, to three-quarters-of-a-million human lives were ended by machetes and machine guns. And what was the source of that conflict? It was tribal hatred and fear and pride. And you had this conflict brewing over decades between two tribes, the Tutsis and the Hutus. One of them gains

leverage and military power over the other, a million different moments come together, and then the greatest overflow of evil that recent human history has known—just the annihilation of three-quarters-of-a-million human lives, in ninety days. It's absolutely horrifying.

Who's to blame for that? How do you explain that? Is that, just, simply the collective result of a bunch of bad human decisions that—Paul would say, "Dude, wake up. Wake up. There are forces at work here that, over a long history, exploited the sinful selfishness of cultural pride in that part of the world, and it just broke through the gates in the summer of 1994."

And it's cultural pride—what happened there is what happens in many places, and it happens in every culture. It happens in every subculture. It's just—it's human beings who are so—whatever—either arrogant or insecure, that we just find something to grab onto in the world that gives us meaning and identity and purpose.

And so for some people, it's tribe and ethnicity, and—it's our music and it's our heritage and our history, and it's *us*—and this is how I know who I am in the world, and *they* are not that. In fact, they're the enemies of that. And so we scapegoat them, and direct our fear and our hatred towards them, and you get Rwanda.

Or you just get something much more subtle than that. And so it's funny to think about, like, when Josh was talking about the half-hearted *woos*—when we, something like that. And that's part of it, is just, we're here in, kind of, inner East Portland. And I mean, the air is just thick with so much *coolness*. You choke here, in inner Portland, you know what I mean?

It's like no one gets too excited by anything here, because that's "not cool," to be excited about something, you know? And it's just very subtle in terms of, just, kind of, whatever it is, in Portland here—there's just a million different little—I make fun of them all the time—just, the "niche subcultures," of *this* or *that*—clothing or music or food preference. And that's how I know who I am, that's how I ground my identity and value, and assert my identity over against someone else.

And Paul says, "Dude, when we give in, when we allow tribal-identity of *any* kind, to define who we are, the powers will be right on that—to exploit, to divide human beings through superiority complexes, through pride, through arrogance." And it may be serious or it may be silly, but it's the world that we live in. Paul would say: "the powers are all over that."

And what Paul is saying is, the existence of a community of human beings—who no longer let the distorted tribal prejudices and prides that work, and that have destroyed and wreaked so much havoc in human beings—the existence of this family of people who, just, humble themselves before the cross and say, "You know what, I'm a sinner saved by God's grace. And I belong to a community of people who are also sinners saved by God's grace. "And I hate the music they listen to, and I don't understand why they eat that food, and the way they talk makes me feel uncomfortable sometimes, but you know what, I probably—that's how I come off to others too. And I'm really glad Jesus saved us." The existence of this, right here, Paul says, is a direct challenge to the powers. He says this is God's way of canceling out the influences. The powers don't get to define what happens here in this family.

And so you get a statement, like what Paul says in Galatians, chapter 3. He says, "In

this family in Christ," he says, "there's no Jew or Gentile"—ethnic boundary lines don't matter anymore. "There's no slave or free"—socio-economic boundary lines. "There's no male or female"—the way that gender has turned into a dividing line and a distorted, abusive, or power thing—all of the things *out* here that divide and break human beings and fragment them, they don't get a say *in here*. All they get to say here is God's love and grace, *that's* saving and renewing human beings—amen? Amen.

This is a vision of the church. And so, look what he says here. We'll finish it out and I'll land the plane. Verse 12, he says, "In him, in Jesus, and through faith in him"—that's it—"we all may approach God together with freedom, with confidence. Therefore, I ask you, don't be discouraged because I'm in prison, because I'm suffering for you. No, this is your glory. The fact that I'm in prison because you Ephesians—the Greek Ephesians—are included in the covenant family of God," Paul says, "it's my privilege. And I'm giving you something to be proud of—that your leader and church planter is now in prison because I went to bat for you, and said *you* belong in the covenant people of God." It's very, very powerful.

And so, how does this cash out for us? I think there's two ways that this can speak a word to us here, at Door of Hope, in Portland. And the first one is the same thing that happens when you walk into the Church of the Annunciation. It's that great humbling of, just, your own personal story, and who you are, and of your own identity. And what this does is it, just, humbles any one of us from thinking that we're better than other people. I don't know how else to say it. It humbles our "tribal pride."

And whatever—you know, my wife and I, sometimes we get into arguments or fights or something, and we're just—one of the ways we have learned to defuse an argument with each other is to just name the core of what's really happening. And I'll just say, "Dang it. I'm better than you, don't you know that?" [Tim laughs] You know? And she'll say, "No, I'm better, clearly—I'm better than you." And it's, just—humor can defuse difficult moments, you know? But that's clearly what's going on in half of our disagreements, is: I just think she's wrong and that I'm right and I'm better than her. I mean, come on—you know what I'm saying?

And that's just one human being. You times that by 1,000 human beings who all, like, wear the same size jeans or something, and then they think that about the people who don't wear that size jeans. And then you have *that* going on—this cultural, tribal pride and arrogance.

And so what the Gospel does is, it absolutely—what membership in this new family, it challenges and humbles every way that we think we're better than other people. And there's no better way to do that by getting around people who are very different from you. And it's like Josh says a million times. He says this all the time: if we're a new family, you don't get to pick the members of your family, right?

If you just pick the members of your family, then you just pick people who are like you, and make you feel comfortable with yourself. And that's fine, but don't expect to ever *grow* as a human being, if you just hang out with people who are like you all of the time. It's precisely because of the tension and the mess, and the conflict that's generated, when we're all trying to do this together, and joining in a community together—that's where we grow together.

And so, you're in community group, or you're here in the Sunday gathering, whatever.

And, you know, it's like that person, whatever—and you're like, "Oh, her. . . *her*." You're like, "Man, look how she dresses," or "why does she talk like that," or whatever. And what's going on there? That's pride, and it's your own. The tribe of "you" is very prideful in that, over something—there's some way you think you're better than that person. And so you ignore them, you don't talk to them, you don't extend any kindness to them, whatever. And I'm guessing that's never happened here at Door of Hope before. [Tim laughs] You know what I'm saying? It's like, *of course*. We're human beings.

And so the first thing this does is, just, it challenges our own personal and tribal pride, based off of the silly—because what happens in that moment, what I'm forgetting is that we have a common identity in Christ, and I'm placing something as the core of who I am over Jesus, and then judging other people based on that standard. And Paul would just say, "Dude, in that moment, you're letting the powers begin to introduce divisions and rifts into the family. Yeah, don't do that, dude. That's not right. Don't you get the whole story? The whole point is that this stuff doesn't get a say anymore in how this new family operates." So in tribal pride and arrogance, personal pride and arrogance, against each other, Ephesians 3 speaks.

Turn to Ephesians 4 with me, and we'll conclude with this little piece. I think the second way in which this passage challenges us—and we'll come into this later—is that the powers will try to introduce divisions to us because of anger and resentment that's a result of that pride, and those collusions of tribal pride in our midst. Look at chapter 4, verse 26. Paul says, "In your anger, when you get angry, don't sin. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry and don't give the devil a foothold."

Now there's a few things going on here. One is: so, does he say, *don't get angry* and don't sin—is that what he says? No, he doesn't. Sin—so he knows that if you try and get a bunch of people together, who are very different from each other, like, you're going to tick each other off—like, you're going to, somebody's going to say something that they didn't think through beforehand, and it's going to offend somebody, right?

And I'm sure that's already happened tonight even—I don't know. [Tim laughs] And I'm already sorry for what I've said, or for what somebody else has said to you—like, that's going to happen. You don't pick the members of your family. So it's going to happen. You're at Door of Hope, that someone's going to do something and they didn't think it through—intentionally, unintentionally—and they're going to, like, wrong you, or say something that's totally unkind. It's going to happen.

And in Paul's mind, the question of the sign of a healthy, growing church, who's victorious over the powers, is not that we never get angry at each other—what does he say? He says, "*When* you get angry—*in your anger*, don't sin against each other." And how do you sin against each other? By stewing on it, right? By "letting the sun go down"—are you letting time go by, and you don't move towards it and resolve it?

And what happens—what do the powers do? When we begin to harbor bitterness towards another people, the powers are right there, dude. The powers are right there whispering the lies about—you know, it's the thousandth time you play the story through in your mind, you know, and you're like, "What were their motives? What did she really mean by that? Why did she say that? I bet she meant *this* by *that"*—you know, and you've done this before.

And he's just saying, "Dude, you're opening yourself up to the influence of the powers.

You—don't let the sun go down." The sign of a healthy church is not the absence of anger and conflict, it's the presence of a commitment to work it out, to move towards the person, forgive, and to reconcile. And if this is going to work, you *have* to have a lot of that going on all of the time.

And so there might be somebody here in the church community that you've got an issue with. And there might be an issue of pride of where it started, there might be an issue of carelessness. And Paul would challenge us deeply: if we really believe this is what Jesus is calling us to, the first thing you need to do is go talk to that person. And you might have very different views of the world. You might have very different ways of—whatever—thinking, talking, living, behaving, whatever. But there's common ground before the cross. And if the Gospel means anything, it means you have to find reconciliation in that relationship, because that's how we do it in this family, amen?

So I don't know where you're at. I don't know. I would just, as we move into the time of worship, I would just encourage you to just focus in on these two things. Just ask the Lord to show you if there's an area of personal pride, or maybe of just subcultural pride, where, just, you, straight up, you think you're better than other people. And it's affecting your relationships here. And it's potentially even introducing rifts into the community. And Paul would say, "Dude, you're losing to the powers. Wake up. Turn from that, recognize it, and go back to the cross again."

And I would just encourage you to get—if you have a conflict here within the community with somebody, and you've been letting the sun go down and the powers are, like, seeding that bitterness into you—I just encourage you, man, to make it right, and just ask God to give you grace and courage to go make it right.

And this is what we're committed to. It's kind of a punch in the gut, yeah? But this is Ephesians 3. And so I'm going to close in prayer and just ask that the Spirit would bring to mind the things and the people that he needs to.

[EMSB theme fades in]

You guys, thank you for listening to the "Strange Bible" podcast. Man, Ephesians, chapter 3 packs a punch. And so will the second-half of Ephesians, chapter 3, which is what we'll explore in the next episode. So we'll see you next time.

[EMSB theme fades out]