

Meant for More Than Just This (Eph. 4:1)

Chris Altrock – January 24, 2010

“Kung Fu Panda” is an animated movie about a panda named Po who longs to be a Kung Fu hero.¹ But several obstacles come between Po and his dream. Perhaps the most significant is the fact that Po’s father longs for Po to take over the family’s noodle restaurant. The movie opens with Po dreaming about being a Kung Fu master. He wakes up and comes downstairs to the restaurant’s kitchen where his father is preparing noodles. His father asks Po what he was dreaming about. Knowing his father would disapprove of the Kung Fu dream, Po lies and says, “*I was dreaming about—uh—noodles.*” “*Noodles?*” his father asks. “*You were really dreaming about noodles?*” Po’s father cries out, “*Oh, happy day! My son, finally having the Noodle Dream! You don’t know how long I have been waiting for this moment! This is a sign, Po! You are almost ready to be entrusted with the secret ingredient to my Secret Ingredient Soup! And then you will fulfill your destiny and take over the restaurant—just as I took it over from my father, who took it over from his father...*” “*But, Dad,*” Po asks, “*didn’t you ever want to do something else? Something besides noodles?*” “*Actually,*” his father admits, “*when I was young and crazy, I thought about running away and learning how to make tofu.*” “*So why didn’t you?*” Po asks. “*Because it was a stupid dream,*” his father replies. “*Can you imagine me making tofu? No, we all have our place in this world. Mine is here, and yours is—.*” “*I know,*” Po interrupts. “*Mine is here.*” And Po mopes off, dissatisfied with his calling in life, his destiny.

The movie points to a truism: *When we are forced to live with a confined calling, it can lead to dissatisfaction.* We want to believe there’s more to life than selling noodles. We want to trust that our destiny is greater than attending classes, than going to the office, than changing diapers, than cooking suppers, than nursing our fragile health day after day. But when our sense of calling or purpose is confined to what seem to be small things or routine things, we wind up with a large dose of dissatisfaction. We want to believe we are destined for more. And when that destiny is frustrated, so are we.

John Beukema writes of attending a prayer breakfast.² While conversing with some of the others at the breakfast, the subject of retirement came up. The man sitting next to Beukema was quite excited about retiring. He expressed how much he was looking forward to the end of his career and related a conversation he had with his wife. “*My wife asked, ‘What are you going to do when you retire?’ I told her, ‘I’m going to sit on the couch and watch TV all day every day.’*” Beukema replied, “*If you do that, you’ll be dead in a year.*” The man looked at Beukema and asked why. Beukema answered, “*If the lack of purpose in your life doesn’t kill you first, your wife will.*” Tongue-in-cheek, Beukema was pointing out this principle: when we live with a confined calling or purpose, we will wind up dissatisfied. If our life is suddenly boiled down to just watching TV all day every day, eventually we’ll die.

Author Craig Larson writes about his habit of displaying large photo books on his desk.³ Recently he displayed a book filled with photos taken in America’s national parks. For several days he had the page open to a photo of the Grand Teton Mountains. It was an extra-wide photo that filled not only the left page, but crossed the fold and took half of the page on the

right. It was a majestic display of deep blue sky; rugged, gray, snow-capped mountains; and a calm lake. One morning Larson decided to turn the page to display the next photo for awhile. When he turned the page, he discovered that the right page of the Grand Tetons photo was an extra-long page folded over. He unfolded it and it added another 16 inches to the photo. Suddenly the Grand Tetons become even grander. Larson writes: *The Christian life has unfolding moments like that, when we discover there is much more to God and his kingdom than we knew, much more to his purpose for us than we imagined...Again and again in the Bible, when God met people, he opened a glorious page for them that had previously been folded.* I think that may be one of our deepest longings. I think many of us, deep down, long for someone to unfold the page of our lives and to reveal that we've been made for a grander purpose; to know that our calling is greater than we could have imagined, that there's far more to our lives than we originally thought.

Ephesians is one of those unfolding moments. We go to it with our confined sense of calling and suddenly find that life in Christ is far greater than we could have ever imagined. And as this New Year begins, this is an important experience to have. What *is* your calling in 2010? What's the *more* you've been created for? And as our relocation draws nearer, this is a critical question to answer as a congregation. For some of us, life at Highland has been primarily about getting that building finished. For years we've been consumed with "When is the building going to be finished?" But what happens once we move in? Have we then achieved our calling? Have we then fulfilled our purpose? If so, we may experience dissatisfaction. This morning we launch a series entitled "Meant for More." We'll be studying Paul's words in Eph. 4:1-16 and finding in them the real "more" we are meant for, both as individuals and as a church.

We start the series with Eph. 4:1: *1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (Eph. 4:1 TNIV).* This verse is a turning point in Ephesians. In chapters 1-3, Paul's focus has been on God, Jesus and the Spirit. In chapters 4-6, Paul's focus turns to us. In chapters 1-3, Paul explores what God, Jesus and the Spirit have done. In chapters 4-6, Paul explores what we do in response to what they've done. Eph. 4:1 is the introduction to those last three chapters.

And in summary, these last three chapters are about living "*a life worthy of the calling you have received.*" Paul wants to explore what it would mean to live a life that is consistent with the calling we've been given. Paul gives us a hint at the nature of this life when he describes himself here as a "*prisoner for the Lord.*" Paul's been living out the calling. And it's gotten him in jail. The calling Paul has in mind in 4:1 is one that's so radical and outrageous that it can get you into real trouble. But for many of us, that's exactly what we want. We're tired of these confined callings that are safe and comfortable and boring. We're ready for something radical and outrageous. We're ready for a calling and a purpose that might get us into some trouble.

But what is this calling? When Paul urges us to "*live a life worthy of the calling*" we have received, what does *he* mean with the word "calling?" Chapters 4-6 describe the "*life worthy of the calling.*" But it is chapters 1-3 which tell us what that "calling" actually is. If we wanted to

fully understand this calling, we'd need to drill down and study all three of these first three chapters in-depth.

Thankfully, Paul provides a summary within those three chapters. In three verses, Paul summarizes what he means by "calling." The summary statement is found in Eph. 1:8-10: *In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.* (Eph. 1:8-10 NASB) Paul writes that God has revealed to us something that has been a mystery. What is this mystery? It has to do with "*the administration suitable to the fullness of the times.*" That is, the mystery has to do with a plan God is administering over time. The point is that history is not meaningless or purposeless. History is moving toward a goal.⁴ God is administering "the times" so that they achieve this goal. The word "mystery" occurs almost 30 times in the New Testament, often referring to God's plan for humanity as he reveals it over time.⁵ The word occurs six times in Ephesians, more than in any other New Testament book.⁶ Ephesians is about the mystery of God's cosmic plan. God has a plan for history, a purpose for the times, and he is administering and managing that plan over time. What good news that is! Life doesn't just happen. Events aren't just random. There *is* a larger purpose. There *is* a grand scheme, a plan, a goal—and God is working to make it happen just as he wishes.

This plan, Paul writes, will reach its fulfillment or climax at "*the fullness of the times*". This is a reference to the final period of history. In other words, God's plan is not yet complete. It's still in process. We're living in the "hour glass" period of history. Have you ever seen a small hour glass come up on your computer? The hour glass appears when the computer is in the middle of a process. The process has started but it hasn't yet ended. Similarly, we're living in an hour glass time period. God has a plan and a purpose for all humanity and for all history. That plan has started. But it's not yet completed. It will reach completion at the "fullness of the times"—at the end of human history.

What will this look like? What is the plan and what will it look like when it is finally achieved? Paul provides that answer in the last part of verse 10: *the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.* Here, the phrase "summing up" seems to carry the sense of "restoring the harmony which things once had in Christ."⁷ That is, right now, things do not "add up." Right now, things seem broken. The earthquake and devastation in Haiti are proof of this. So many things, so many people, so many relationships in life right now just don't add up. But one day, everything will add up, in Christ.⁸ One day, everything will be restored to its original harmony. This "summing up" is to involve not just humans, but all things in heaven and on earth: *the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.*

The phrase "summing up," can also mean "to gather up." God's plan is to gather up the fragmented cosmos in Christ.⁹ God's in the business of picking up the broken pieces of our lives, and the lives of others, and of the entire cosmos and putting them back together again, in Christ. Paul gives one example of this in Eph. 3:6ff. There, Paul uses this word "mystery" again.

And he describes how the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in that day was fragmented, divided, and full of hostility. Jews and Gentiles looked down on one another. They didn't get along. They didn't value one another. Their relationship was fragmented. But, Paul states, through Christ, God picked up the pieces of that fragmented relationship and put them back together. God restored that relationship to its original harmony. And now, in Christ, Jews and Gentiles are one—they experience intimacy and community with one another. And that example is just one slice of the grand purpose of God—the plan to return all things in the cosmos to their harmony and original intention.

All of this is wrapped up in the word “calling” in Eph. 4:1: *1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. (Eph. 4:1 TNIV)*. What calling have we received? It is nothing less than this: to join God's cosmic purpose of restoring all things in heaven and on earth to their original beauty and intention.

There is a scene in the movie “Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince” in which Harry Potter and the wizard Dumbledore visit a home.¹⁰ It is the home of Horace Slughorn. The living room has been torn to pieces by wicked forces. Shattered furniture, broken glass, slivers of lights, and other fragments lay everywhere. Dumbledore waves his wand and magically puts everything as it once was. The shattered furniture comes back together. Light fixtures shine brightly once again. Broken glass becomes whole. Every little piece finds its original place. This is the kind of image included in Paul's words “*the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.*” Paul is saying that God's goal, God's purpose toward which he is working, is to return everything to the place it once had in Christ. Everything broken will be restored. Everything shattered will be made whole. And our “calling” is to join God in this cosmic adventure.

In 2006, Nick Flynn was visiting the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.¹¹ As he strolled the exhibits, Flynn accidentally tripped on his untied shoelace. In the ensuing fall, Flynn knocked down three priceless vases. One of the vases Flynn broke was a 17th century Chinese porcelain vase. It smashed into 113 pieces. The vase was worth \$1 million. The museum initially considered just displaying all of the fragments of the vases. Then, however, it decided to put the vases back together. The first one restored was the 17th century Chinese porcelain vase. A specialist pieced all 113 fragments back into place. The job took three months. But in the end, she re-created the beauty of the original piece. That's the image Paul provides in Ephesians. The entire cosmos is like that priceless vase. The entire cosmos was created as an amazing and beautiful artifact. But sin and evil came along and smashed it to pieces. We see the carnage when we drive through backstreets in Downtown Memphis, when we listen to the latest news of scandal, when we watch families disintegrate, and when we listen to a friend weep about a problem. But we've been called to join God's restoration project. God's called us to partner with him in gathering up those pieces and delicately and patiently putting them back in place, so that eventually, the entire cosmos will be restored to its original beauty and intention.

And living with that cosmic calling can lead to great fulfillment. Can you imagine how fulfilled that porcelain specialist was when, after three months of labor, she put the last sliver in place

and before her stood a completely restored and beautiful Chinese vase in all its original glory? That's the same fulfillment we can feel when we take up this call, this invitation to God's cosmic restoration.

In 1890, the Grand Opera House was built in Memphis on the corner of Main and Beale Streets.¹² The Grand was billed as the classiest theatre outside of New York City. Vaudeville was the main source of entertainment at the time. The Grand became part of the Orpheum Circuit of vaudeville shows, thus the theatre became known as the Orpheum. Then in 1923 a fire broke out during a show and burned the Orpheum to the ground. In 1928, at a cost of \$1.6 million, a new Orpheum was built on the original site. The new Orpheum was twice as large as her predecessor and opulently decorated. Lavish tasseled draperies, enormous crystal chandeliers, gilded moldings, and the Mighty Wurlitzer pipe organ were just a few of its new amenities. As vaudeville's popularity waned, the Orpheum was purchased by the Malco movie theater chain in 1940. Malco presented first run movies in the Orpheum until 1976. Then there was talk of demolishing what was now a very old and run down theater. Decades had taken their toll on the Orpheum. Thankfully, the building was purchased and a \$5 million renovation effort was launched to restore it to its 1928 opulence. A grand reopening celebration was held in January of 1984. People were able to witness what that building must have looked like when it first opened in the late 1920's. That's similar to the image Paul has in mind. At one time, everything, every creature, and every person in heaven and on earth was glorious and grand and lavish. But over time sin and evil brought decay and destruction. God, however, launched a massive restoration effort. He determined to return every living and non-living thing in heaven and on earth to its original glory and luster. And he's called us to the same. He's urged us to live a life worthy of that cosmic calling.

And living with that kind of cosmic calling can lead to great fulfillment. Can you imagine how the owners felt when, after two years of intense labor and \$5 million spent, the Orpheum reopened to its original 1928 opulence? There must have been smiles all around. That's the same feeling we can have if we'll live into this calling. Our lives are not simply about punching clocks, and changing diapers, and getting through class, and opening a new church building, and finding a spouse, and nursing our health. Our lives are about participating with God in a cosmic restoration project. And every time we provide resources to someone in need, every time we teach a child, every time we listen to a friend who's troubled, every time we make time for someone we don't have time for, every time we decide to be faithful to our spouse, every time we give someone an "atta boy" or "way to go," every time we lift someone up in prayer, every time we nudge someone closer to God, every time we nurture beauty in the world through art or conservation, we play a part in that cosmic restoration effort. Every morning we wake up we have the chance to be part of this calling. We have the choice to choose to live in a way that's worthy of a cosmic calling. That's the more we live for.

I've handed you a puzzle piece. It's a reminder that God's called you to join him in putting this cosmos back together. And you have a piece of that cosmos no one else has. You have a contribution to make to re-completing the puzzle that is unique. Take that puzzle piece home. And let it remind you of the cosmic calling and your unique role in it.

¹ Kung Fu Panda (DreamWorks Animation, 2008).

² www.preachingtoday.com.

³ www.preachingtoday.com.

⁴ John R. W. Stott, The Message of Ephesians The Bible Speaks Today (IVP, 1979): 41.

⁵ Walter L. Liefeld, Ephesians The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (IVP, 1997): 42.

⁶ Liefeld, 42.

⁷ Andrew T. Lincoln, Ephesians Word Biblical Commentary (Word, 1990): 33.

⁸ Liefeld, 43.

⁹ F. F. Bruce, The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Eerdmans, 1984): 261; Stott, 41-42.

¹⁰ Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, PG, Warner Brothers, 2009, 8:02-8:45.

¹¹ "Priceless vase smashed by hapless museum visitor back on display," August 2006,

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-399456/Priceless-vase-smashed-hapless-museum-visitor-display.html#ixzz0aSBq09ML>

¹² <http://www.orpheum-memphis.com/index.cfm?section=theatreinfo>.