

A New Year's Prayer for Our Church: Part 2

Ephesians 1:15-23

Review

Last week, we looked at the first part of Paul's prayer for the church in Ephesus. Paul opens his pray with thanksgiving. He thanks God for THEIR faith and THEIR love for one another. And I concluded from that, the reason why Paul would thank GOD for something THEY did is because God had something to do with it! God enables us to believe in Christ and God enables us to love one another.

Then Paul's prayer moves into a request that God might give the Ephesian church what it most needs, namely, a reawaken by the Spirit in the knowledge of God. We need to Spirit to continually awaken our hearts to the reality of who God is, particularly, God as the Father of glory.

And now, we are prepared to look at the third part of the prayer, and we can summarize it like this: "God, make us aware of what we already have." It is a pray that we might KNOW the greatness of what is already ours!

So let's catch the flow of his thought: [v16-17]

And now he states what needs to happen in order for us to grow in the knowledge of God. [v18a, "eyes of hearts"] Isn't that interesting language? The "eyes of our hearts" need to be enlightened. Since when do hearts have eyes? Paul is communicating something profound with this

imagery here. The heart refers to the center of who we are. It's the seed of all our affections and desires.

And so what do you think he's trying to communicate by saying that our hearts have eyes that need to be enlightened? He's saying that our affections/desires for the Lord can grow dim. And so, our affections need to be reawakened to see something glorious. What is it? [v18a, "That you may know..."]

Ok, the eyes of our hearts need to be enlightened to know...something. In the rest of the passage, Paul provides three theological truths that the eyes of our hearts need to be enlightened to. We can summarize them like this...he wants us to know...

- The hope of God's calling
- The riches of God's inheritance
- The greatness of God's power [vv18-19a]

Three Clarifying Observations

Now, let me give you *three clarifying observations* about these theological truths that Paul is praying we know. It is really easy to misunderstand what he's actually praying.

First observation: Paul does NOT pray that we will GET these things; rather, he prays that that we will be made aware to the fact that we already have them! Paul does NOT pray that we will BE *called* by God. He does NOT pray that we will BECOME *heirs* of God. And he does NOT pray that we will RECEIVE *power* from God.

He prays, NOT that we'll get these things, but that we will KNOW them. Isn't that interesting? What's the implication? They're already true for us, and the problem is NOT that we lack them...the problem (so often) is that we fail to realize we already HAVE them!

ILLUSTRATION: Antiques Roadshow

Some of you may have heard the show called "Antiques Roadshow" where people bring in their antiques to see how valuable they are. People will bring in stuff that they viewed as junk in their attic, only to find that it's worth thousands. The value was there--they just couldn't see, until someone showed them.

That's our problem. What is ours surpasses anything we can imagine, but the problem is: we don't see because our eyes are weak. We need someone else—namely, the third person of the Trinity—to awaken us to know what we already have.

Second observation: Paul does not merely pray that we will know these theological truths, but that we will know the *greatness* of them. Did you notice that? [vv.18-19, "hope," "riches," "immeasurable greatness."]

Many of us know these things with our heads, but our hearts are not tasting the (as he puts it in v.19) "immeasurable greatness" of these realities, which is why we become dull. The problem is not: "Can I articulate the truths I say I believe?" but rather "Do I really know the

massiveness and weight and wonder and beauty and greatness of the truths I say I believe?"

Which leads to the third observation: the knowledge Paul is talking about is not merely a head knowledge. It is an intimate knowledge...a "stirring-to-the-core-of-who-we-are" kind of knowledge. That's why he uses the language "the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened."

ILLUSTRATION: Spring Water

There's a difference between knowing that you're holding a bottle of Spring Water because you read it on the label vs. knowing you're holding a bottle of Spring Water because, you just came home from a 6 mile run in the dead heat of summer in Austin, TX, and you open the bottle, chug it, and feel it's refreshing goodness run down your scratchy throat and quench your cotton-dry mouth.

That's the kind of knowing Paul is getting at here. This is not "knowing" like reading a label, or some information on a page, merely. It's longing for it. It's cherishing it. It's finding satisfaction in it. He wants us to TRULY know the GREATNESS of these truths that are ALREADY ours.

So, as we work through each of these truths, my prayer is that they would overwhelm each of our hearts to such a degree that we are carried by them in 2020. Let's work through them one by one...

Truth #1: Our hearts need to be awakened by the Holy Spirit to know the hope of the calling of God. [v.18a-b]

Literally, it's the "hope of HIS calling." It's God's calling of us, and the emphasis is on GOD. We need to know this. "Calling," in the Bible, generally refers to God's act whereby he makes us his own—he effectually brings us to himself.

Paul just laid out how God did this in vv.3-14—the passage immediately prior to the one we're studying. There he says...

- We have been chosen by God in Christ before the world was even created
- We have been predestined to be adopted into his family
- We have been redeemed and forgiven of our sins because of Christ's shed blood for us
- We have been given an inheritance and sealed with the Holy Spirit who guarantees we will acquire that inheritance some day

God called us to be his own.

But this implies that we were once not his own, doesn't it? We were once not in a right relationship with him. Listen to how Ephesians 2:1-3 describes our spiritual state before God intervened. [2:1-3]

Not a pretty picture, but certainly an accurate picture of our prior spiritual state. And what happened? [2:4-5]

That's the calling that Paul is praying we would know. God made us alive in Christ. Similar to what Jesus said to

Lazarus when Lazarus had been dead in the tomb for four days, “Lazarus, come out!” And the dead man was made alive!

And that’s what God, by his Spirit, has said to everyone of us who are Christians. “Josh Hayward, LIVE!” And the eyes of my hearts were awakened to the the gospel.

But remember, Paul is not praying that we simply know the calling of God by which he makes us his own; he wants us to know the HOPE of that calling. Which means, he wants us to know and cherish and long for the future ramifications of that calling.

Hope is always future oriented. And so, when we reflect upon the truth that God called us to himself, that should give us real hope...and that is exactly what some of us REALLY need right now. Some of you feel totally stuck in life and you’re losing hope.

But it’s important to ask: What are you losing hope IN? We all place our hope in SOMETHING. The question is: What? And the reason why we lose hope is because we’re hoping in the wrong thing! We might be hoping in...

- A job promotion and when it doesn’t come, we feel hopeless.
- A change of circumstance, and when nothing changes, we feel hopeless.
- A spouse...that God would either give you one or change the one you have.

- Better health...and when your body still aches, you might feel hopeless.

Listen, everyone is always hoping in something. Our problem is that we often hope in that which cannot give us true and lasting hope.

Paul is praying that we might know the HOPE of our calling. Why? In what way is God's calling of us to himself hope-giving? Here's what Paul is getting at: The reason why you God's calling of you should give you hope is because his calling of you unto himself SECURED your future.

Because you have been called by God to be in Christ, you have, awaiting you, something so sure/certain/secure and something far greater than you can fathom, namely, the glory of God in the face of Christ. That's our hope! There's coming a day when we will be forever in the presence of Jesus, free of...pain/ strained relationships/ insecurities/ difficult circumstances/ loss in death / SIN. It's coming, and it is secure for you...WHY? Because God CALLED you to himself already.

May the Holy Spirit enlighten the eyes of our hearts to know the hope of the calling of God.

Truth #2: Our hearts need to be awakened by the Holy Spirit to know the riches of the inheritance of God. [v.18]

Now, I want us to look very closely at what this says. If we just brush over these words, we will miss the beauty of

what Paul is getting at. So let's ask: WHOSE inheritance does Paul have in mind? So often, when we hear that word "inheritance," we immediately assume it's referring to OUR inheritance—what CHRISTIANS will someday GET...namely, heaven.

And so, when we read the words, "the riches of this glorious inheritance," we assumed it's referring to something WE get. But look closer. WHOSE inheritance is it? [v18, "HIS inheritance"]

Who's that? That's God. Paul wants US to know the riches of GOD'S glorious inheritance. He wants us to know how great and rich and glorious what he gets is. Now, why would he want us to know that? Why do the eyes of our hearts need to be enlightened to the greatness of something GOD gets?

It would make sense if he wanted us to be awakened to something WE get. But that's not what he wants us to see. He wants us to see something GOD gets. Why?

I think we get an idea when we figure out what GOD's inheritance is. [v.18, "in the saints"]

See it? The eyes of our hearts need to be awakened to see the beauty and richness and glory of what GOD's inheritance because God's inheritance is US! The saints! Christians!

Does that boggle your mind? You are a treasured possession of God. You are not, in his mind, someone he

puts up with or tolerates or wishes he could go back on his decision to save you.

God didn't make a mistake when he saved you. You don't have to prove your worth to him as a Christian...as if you have to prove to God that he made the right choice in saving you.

God delights in his people. This is a theme all throughout Scripture...

- Psalm 149:4: "The Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with salvation."
- Isaiah 62:3-5 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken,...but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,...for the LORD delights in you,...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."
- Zephaniah 3:16-17: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

Do you know this? Do you know (REALLY know) the richness of God's delight in you? Do you really know how wonderful the truth is that God actually wants you/loves you/values you/cherishes you? That he says, "You're mine! And therefore, you are my glorious inheritance."

What do you think knowing that truth will do for you who struggle with feelings of worthlessness? Take God at his Word here. And may the eyes of your heart be enlightened, that you may know what are the riches of HIS glorious inheritance of us!

Truth #3: Our hearts need to be awakened by the Holy Spirit to know the immeasurable greatness of the power of God. [v.19-23]

All of that is a description of the kind of power that is at work towards us right now! Remember, Paul is not praying that we will GET this empowerment; he's praying that we will know we *already have it!* AND he's not just praying we will know we already have such power; he's praying we'll know how GREAT the power is.

Don't you appreciate the language he uses to describe it? The "immeasurable greatness of his power." The power that is at work towards you is so great it cannot be measured. Listen, you can know God's power is at work within you, but if you don't know how great that power is, then it's worthless for you.

ILLUSTRATION: BATTERY OR SUN

If you think God's power is equivalent to the energy produced by a AAA battery, that's not much not much help. Parents, you know that the power of a AAA battery isn't much--you just put four into the toy you bought your kid for Christmas and they need to be changed a few days later!

But if you believe God's power is more accurately analogous to the energy produced by the sun, that changes things a bit.

I've read that the sun produces "enough energy to melt a bridge of ice 2 miles wide, 1 mile thick, and extending the entire way from the Earth to the Sun [which is 92 million 960 thousand miles]...the sun can melt an ice bridge like that, in one second."

http://helios.gsfc.nasa.gov/qa_sun.html#power

Do you know...do you really know the immeasurable greatness of God's power that is at work towards you right at this moment? Paul wants you to know, so he tries to help you to see what this same power has accomplished already in other ways. [20a"raised him from the dead"]

The power that's at work towards you is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. He goes on. [v.20b]

The power that is at work towards you right now, is the same power that not only raised Jesus from the dead, but seated him at the right hand of God to reign as King. He goes on. [v.21a "rule, authority, power, dominion"]

Now, what's that referring to? This is not just any rule or authority or power or dominion that Jesus is above and supreme over by the power of God. This is the authority and rule and power and dominion of Satan and his demonic hosts. Where do I get that from? [6:12]

Same language! By the mighty power of God, Jesus has been given authority over Satan and his legions of angels who are making every effort to destroy you and your faith in Christ. That power which gave Jesus such authority is the same power at work within you right now. And Paul's still not finished! [v.21b, "and above every name"]

The power that worked in Christ to give him authority over the demonic realm also gave him authority over every name that has ever been named. And this rule extends throughout all eternity. [v.21c, "not only this age..."]

And in v.22, he comes full circle, reminding us that this power is for us. [vv.22-23]

This is the power that is working towards us for our good. It's the same power that raise Jesus from the dead, seated him at God's right hand, strengthens him to rule over the demonic realm and over every name that's been named, from now and into all eternity! THAT power is at work towards you, if you're a Christian.

Which means, if we are Christians, we should NEVER say things like, "I just can't help myself when it comes to giving into certain sins." OR "I don't think I can do what God is calling me to do."

What's going on in your life right now? What's tempting you towards despair or discouragement or just plain exhaustion? Know this: God's power at work towards you

is more than what you need to endure in faith. But you gotta know it! It's no good if you don't know you have it!

Conclusion

And listen, you're not going to know the immeasurable greatness of this power at work towards you or the riches of his glorious inheritance of you or the hope of his calling you...unless you know the immeasurable greatness of your NEED for them. One person put it like this, "If you are feeling healthy, you will be thrilled with the [power] of your medicine, ONLY IF you know the [power] of the disease it is holding back." (Piper, desiringgod.org, "The Immeasurable Greatness of His Power Toward Us")

Similarly...

- We cannot know how hopeful our calling is until we know how hopeless we are apart from this calling.
- We cannot know how rich it is that God has inherited us, unless we know how poor and empty our life is without him.
- And we cannot know how great is the power that is at work towards us for our good and for our continued faith unless we know how great is the power that is working against us to destroy our faith. 24/7 Satan and his demonic hosts are seeking to take you down and destroy your faith. And so, ANY measure of victory over even the smallest sin, is a demonstration: Divine power is at work towards you!

Oh Kinney, may our hearts be awakened to what is already ours. May we know these things in 2020.

I want to take a moment to pray this prayer for us as we look forward to the new year together as a church.