

# Ephesians 1:15–23

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 February 2022

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[ 0 : 00 ] Again, the scripture text is Ephesians chapter 1, 15 through 23. Please remain standing for the reading of God's word. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give my thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might, that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning.

It's a joy to gather as God's people. Let's just pray as we turn to his word. Father, we come to your word.

[ 2 : 12 ] Lord, our desire is that we would not turn to the right or to the left, that we would do all that you've commanded us to do, that we would have success wherever we go, that what is contained in this book would not depart from our mouth, but on it we would meditate day and night, that we would be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

And if we do so, by your spirit, we ask that you would prosper our way. And so for these next 30 minutes, we come to your word expectant, anticipating that through your word, through a servant, you speak.

And so do so, we ask. We pray these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. The Bible contains many accounts of Jesus performing the miraculous or supernatural works, feeding thousands with five loaves or two fish, walking across the surface of the water, stilling a raging storm with his voice, restoring paralytics to full health, and even commanding the dead to rise.

They're certainly unique in their own ways, establishing his ministry and affirming his divinity. But there is one miracle that sets itself apart from all the others.

This miracle required two steps, two stages. The account is found in Mark's gospel, chapter 8, and there a blind man is brought to Jesus with the hopes that Jesus would touch him to restore his sight.

[ 4 : 12 ] Jesus leads him outside the city, rubs, spits, or according to Mark, spits in his eyes. And there, Jesus restores his sight, but only partially.

The man replies, I see something. I see people. But they're like trees, kind of like Groot, walking. And humorously, you may think, Jesus must not have done his devotionals that morning.

He probably wasn't prayed up. Or, he must have not powered up that morning. But that wasn't the case, because Jesus lays his hands on him again, and the man's sight is restored.

And the Bible tells us, he saw everything clearly. The point of the story is fascinating, because in the context of Mark, it is that even when God works in a life of an individual, and he heals and rescues and restores them, one sight could somehow remain limited, or blurry, or impaired.

It's as if someone could understand in part and not get the whole. In the story, certainly the eyes are a window into the heart of an individual.

[ 5 : 34 ] It seems possible to have the work of God unfold in your life, to be chosen, predestined, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, lavished with grace, come to hear the word of truth and believe, sealed with the Spirit, blessed with every spiritual blessing, and live as if you're impoverished,

lacking, deprived, and bankrupt.

It is possible to receive the promises of God and live without its power. Now, I've got to make this argument.

I'm talking about the Gospel of Mark. We're sitting here in the book of Ephesians, you might be saying. But here we are. As Christians, you and I can have a vision problem.

It was part the challenge of Ephesus, because the prayer that Paul gives is, the eyes of their hearts need to be enlightened. Their vision was somehow dim and clouded.

It's possible to have the immeasurable riches of His grace deposited into your account and live as Christians who refuse to make withdrawals.

[ 6 : 51 ] Imagine that. You have blank checks signed already by the Lord. And here you are, jingling the pennies in your pocket, trying to figure out how to operate in this life.

It's a bankrupt Christianity. It's a broken Christianity, a hopeless Christianity, a powerless one. The impoverished Christian life can be imagined this way.

It's as if we all reside in an all-inclusive, six-star resort. I know there aren't six stars in resorts, but just imagine if there was. Everything's provided.

Endless meals. Luxuriant bedding. You know, like, I don't know, a thousand thread count, two thousand thread count. Lavish amenities. And there we are, sleeping on mats, drinking water, eating bread, oblivious, living in objection to the fact that everything around us is for our consumption and at our disposal.

It's the most absurd thought. Imagine you're helping a loved one or a friend pack for this all-inclusive vacation. And there they are, unopening their suitcase, and they pack a sleeping bag, they pack a loaf of bread, some salami, some granola bars, shampoo and conditioner, and you would look at them and say, I thought this was all-inclusive.

[ 8 : 23 ] I thought everything's provided. I thought you got everything. You would persuade them to pack differently, to plan differently, to act differently, to act and to take into account that everything is included.

And this is where we end up in Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus. It's all there. Every spiritual blessing is yours. All included.

And yet, something was lacking in the church. It's an action that maybe we think that God has withheld blessings from us.

He's some stingy father reluctant to bestow any good upon us. He has infinite wealth and has given us a meager allowance. But that's not the case.

But it's not the case. And I open this way because as we come to the second half of the first chapter, we get a sense of the shortcomings and deficiencies of the Ephesian Christians.

[ 9 : 35 ] Now, I don't want to read into this too much, but we've emerged out of this long sentence of erupted praise. And now we're given the exclusive access to the prayer of the apostle.

Interestingly, he's not praying for himself. He's praying for the saints. And as Paul considered the treasury of God's blessings or his riches in Christ, he now moves to prayer.

What would he pray about? What does a pastor pray for his people? What ought we to pray for one another? Well, Paul prays this, that God's people may live in possession of God's blessings.

That God's people may live in possession of God's blessings. He's pretty much saying, may we make regular withdrawals from the bank of God's blessings.

These are the blessings obtained for our use. The conclusion of the book will present the blessings like an armory. That you can go into this armory and array yourself in splendid armor.

[ 10 : 46 ] Why? Because it's all there for your use. It's all there for your well-being. It's all there to be put on, actualized, and applied. For Paul, the Christian life is not a request for more spiritual blessing.

People have criticized Paul. Paul, why don't you pray pray for more prosperity, safeguard, well-being, promotion, deliverance from jail, or maybe advancement professionally, or deliverance from hardship and suffering.

Paul's saying, I don't really need all that. Because what is needed is that we realize, recognize, and apply the fact that it's already all there.

He's not asking God for something new as if God forgot something that we need to get through life. No, Paul is interceding and asking God to open their eyes to see that they have all that is necessary for life.

this kind of hit me because my prayers are all about, hey God, I'm a little deficient.

[12:03] I'm a little empty over here. I think you forgot this to help me get through this. And I'm not saying those are not worthwhile prayers because he hears the need for bread and water as well as the need for, maybe here's a need for Ferraris and mansions, I don't know.

But he hears all needs. But here, I was confronted because the text says God has actually not left anything out that is necessary for my well-being.

These verses move from appreciation to intercession and I need to accelerate because I need to accelerate. But Paul has heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for one another according to verse 15.

And now it propels him into prayer. He's encouraged by the state of their congregation. He's encouraged that they continue to center upon the Lord Jesus Christ in faith and they demonstrate love toward one another.

It leads to this kind of unceasing thanksgiving. I'm not going to stop. I can't stop because I'm so thankful. To be honest, this ought to be the cause for any pastor to give endless thanksgiving to God, a congregation that has faith in the Lord Jesus and love for one another.

[13:30] Paul's intercession begins probably formally in verse 17. And 17 to 23 is where we'll spend the bulk of our time. And it's rooted in two requests and I'm just going to point them out here.

It is here that I'll give my signposts. It seems like I'm giving a lot of two-point sermons these days but two points. Paul asks that God would give his spirit to see and secondly God's spirit would help God's people know.

The prayer in other words the request is twofold for sight and knowledge. Sight and knowledge the spirit to see. Verse 17 opens up with this request that God may give the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened.

The request is for a sight that is brought by the spirit. It's important to note that he's not praying that they receive the spirit for the first time.

It's already happened in verse 13. when they came to believe they were sealed and the spirit was given and imparted. The spirit was already endowed upon them.

[14:48] But verse 17 asks for a particular operation of the spirit. Theologians call it illumination. It is to make plain and understandable what God has revealed in our day primarily in the scriptures.

scriptures. This is not something new or revelatory as in visions or signs. But it is the operation of the spirit to unveil our eyes to grasp, to seize the meaning of what God has already said.

See, we acknowledge that there is something distorted about us. Our sin kind of corrupts our mental and moral, not kind of, but it does corrupt our mental and moral system.

And it clouds our minds and our wills that we miss and we even resist what God has said. The spirit, however, opens and unveils our minds and tunes our hearts so that we understand.

It's by this inspiration that, or illumination, that God applies his truth to our hearts so that we grasp it as a reality.

[16:03] See, Paul affirms this in one of his letters, his first one to the church at Corinth. His preaching of the gospel was not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the spirit.

Paul's request for the Ephesians was that the spirit would instruct and show them because the truths expounded in chapter one are spiritually discerned.

See, when you and I come to the Bible, it's ultimately a spiritual act. we pause and pray because we acknowledge we need the spirit to undertake the task faithfully and effectually.

Certainly, some will read the Bible academically. Some will apply literary theories to it. Others will approach it as an ethical book or a manual to discern right from wrong.

And it's not to say that we can't read the Bible in these ways, but we glean the content of its pages primarily, actually exclusively through illumination of the spirit.

[17:13] We cannot grasp the truth and internalize it in ways that are transformative. We can read the pages and actually never confess the truth of the Lord Jesus.

I remember early on in my undergraduate experience at a large California public school. There I was majoring in engineering, but I needed easier classes to help my GPA.

And there it was, a religious studies class, introduction to the New Testament and early Christianity. I'm like, ah, I grew up in church.

This can't be that difficult. It's probably like reading the Bible. And so I enrolled, and my professor, still teaches there, well, well accomplished, endowed chair now, who had gone through the gauntlet

of a rigorous secular education and was now placed at this public institution.

And in the back of my mind, I was excited that I would meet I shouldn't say it sounds weird, a smart Christian. Or accomplished Christian.

[18:25] There are many smart Christians in here, and there's a dull one standing up here. But I was excited. And so in my enthusiasm, after week one, we were at quarter system, after week one, I rushed to her office hours, and there I was, and I had all these theological questions that I needed answered, and I was excited that she would help me unpack these things.

I was hoping she would provide some guidance, and as our conversation got going, we had a few exchanges, and we came, and then I heard the line that has been etched in my mind since 1999. I am a Christian, but I do not believe Jesus is the only way. My 18-year-old mind, all of a sudden, the emoji didn't exist yet.

Okay? So, but you know the emoji. The face, top of the head is severed, it's exploding. Because my mind was blown.

I could not fathom such a thing. An individual giving themselves to the study of the word, ancient Christianity, New Testament, reading the Bible that I was raised up with, creating a category that I had never considered.

[19:54] I became aware in that moment that it is possible to be learned, trained, educated, employed, and tasked to teach the Bible, and yet not believe it.

That day, I learned the necessity of illumination. Christian. Charles Spurgeon comments on these verses, everything depends really upon the opened eye.

The scene may be fair. The light may be bright. But if the sight is gone, all is vain.

Paul's request was that their vision would not be impaired. Instead, that the Spirit of God, the Spirit that imparts wisdom and revelation would grant knowledge of God and the reality and the certainty of the work, of His work in the life of the believer.

The request for the Spirit to help them see. Secondly, the Spirit to help them to know. To help them to know.

[21:15] The illumination would then enable the Ephesians to know. You see it. It's the knowledge of Him in the end of verse 17. And then in verse 18, the eyes of their hearts enlightened that you may know.

You may know. The Spirit would be like a tutor or a TA with a problem set or a review session. The Spirit would lead the believer into understanding and apprehension of spiritual knowledge.

Specifically, there are three things that flow out of this request to help know. And they're helpfully indicated by our Bible translations by the phrase what is, what is.

So you see it right there. What is, firstly, the hope to which we are called. Secondly, what is or what are the riches of His glorious inheritance.

And thirdly, what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe. The prayer is three things.

[22:15] To know what? Hope to which you are called. The value or the worth you are to God. And the power at your disposal.

And allow me to make a brief comment on all these requests because, brief. Our hope. To know the hope to which they were called.

Hope is this firm conviction that what is promised in the future is certain. My former mentor would say, it is the reality that is absolutely assured but not yet fully experienced.

It goes beyond a mere mental conviction that the future will be better or brighter. It's actually a conviction about the future that affects the present.

It's something so certain, so guaranteed, so assured that it changes and impacts life now in the present moment. One of my seminary professors put it this way.

[23:19] In your pocket, you hold the winning lottery ticket. I don't know how much it is, but it's a lot. It's redeemable in a few days. It would certainly change things in these next few days, wouldn't it?

You may be giddy because there's some people you're going to tell and there's some people there's no way you're going to tell. You would speak differently. You would, I would eat differently.

I would act differently. I would be different. I would write out a list of what I'm going to buy, where to vacation, and who to include, why. Because this is the certainty that this ticket is somehow valid.

It's a reality that's assured but not fully experienced. That's the Christian hope. That what happens later on will affect what happens now on, from now on.

This is such the Christian hope. It's the guarantee of our inheritance. No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind, the heart has not imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

[ 24 : 34 ] That all my present actions are influenced by a future guarantee. Why are my hopes not set in riches? Because I hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why do I not put my hope in merit, or accomplishment, or obtainment, or the scale of good works tipping in my favor? Why? Because my hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why do I endure hardship, and suffering, and even persecution, and not embrace escapism? Why? Because my hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why do I forgive when I'm maligned or love my enemies?

Because I hope in the Lord Jesus Christ, that this hope changes you, now.

The Bible that you hold, let me tell you, in case you don't know, is your lottery ticket. The numbers match up. The sum is undisclosed, not because it's a measly amount, but according to our text, it's innumerable, immeasurable.

[ 25 : 40 ] You know, if you win a lottery ticket, the sum is good for your lifetime, maybe the lifetime of a few loved ones, generations after you, but eventually it will run out.

But here, the sum of your divine inheritance, do you want to know what that is? It's good for your life. The life of all your children. The life of all who would come to him.

It will never run out. It will never be outspent. Only in heaven does economics not work. Demand will never exceed the supply.

I can assure you that. It's endless. And it flows onward. This is hope. This is the hope that has called us.

This is their hope in Ephesus. This is our hope in Chicago. Hope. Secondly, worth. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints?

[ 26 : 45 ] Some have found it bizarre that Paul makes a little shift here. And he's talking about Christians, talking to Christians about being God's inheritance. Instead of praying that the readers would know how valuable Christ is, this is staggering.

He's praying that they would know how valuable they are to Christ. He does not pray that we would know how much God is worth, though he's worth far exceedingly greater than we can imagine.

Rather, he prays that we would know how much we are worth. The inheritance language has been applied to us. We see it in verses 14.

We inherit something. But now it's applied to God himself. The saints are God's riches. The saints are God's glorious inheritance.

It's not a new concept. You remember this. When Israel, the nation was brought out of the Exodus, the people are described as God's inheritance. For God, the people are the prize, not the plunder, not the gold or the silver.

[ 27 : 59 ] You know, an earthly king or empire or regime fills its treasuries of gold and silver. Not so with the Lord Jesus.

He fills his house with people. It's the most precious thing to the king of heaven is you. It's you.

It's me. Christ the groom has pledged himself to a bride, a married church, us. His love is upon you. His divine actions are for you.

His affection is toward you. His self-sacrifice is to secure you. In the language of the Bible, you are his treasured possession.

If moments of life plummet you in despair, you might wonder if you have value to anyone. If self-doubt depletes your self-worth, if you find that your value is insignificant, the Bible calls your attention this morning and says, you are God's inheritance.

[ 29 : 20 ] You are God's treasure. You are Jesus' prize. may you know that you are the riches of his glorious inheritance.

Power. What is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us? It's immeasurably great is how it's described. It's surpassing, outstripping, excelling, exceeding all bounds type of power.

We get this sense of the enormity, the size of God's power and this power, I gotta cut this short-term off, but this power is demonstrated in three ways and I'm just gonna list them real quick. This power is demonstrated in three distinct ways and I'll point them out to you. Firstly, in verse 20, that God raised Jesus from the dead.

Secondly, it's demonstrated and God exalted Jesus and seated him at his right hand and thirdly, God subjugated all things to him, to Jesus.

[ 30 : 26 ] So God flexes in these three ways. Power is a theme that will surface later on in the book and I don't wanna unpack it all, I can't unpack it all here, but for the sake of time, I wanna know one thing in particular.

Note this. Note how expansive his power is. Death, the lowest of lows, resurrected, exalted and seated at the right hand of God, the highest of highs.

And he's far above, not just above, not barely above, not marginally above, he is far above all power, all principalities.

Certainly in reference to physical and spiritual realms, earthly and heavenly spaces, both now and forevermore, God's power covers, just so you're clear, God's power covers all spatial references and all temporal references.

There is no place or time whereby God does not have supreme power. But get this. The astonishment of the passage is found in verse 22.

[ 31 : 51 ] The supreme power, King, Lord Jesus Christ, victorious, given to the church.

Given to the church. If you're making a football team or you're making a basketball team or you're making a math competition team or whatever team, if you're making a team, this is the one you need to be captain.

And here it is. God Almighty gifting us with our captain, the Lord Jesus Christ. His power, we find, is at work on our behalf.

The power that raised him, exalted him, subjugated all things to him, is now the head of the church. And he exercises his power for you and for me.

And we'll find this out next week. Because he will raise, once again, raise dead people. And he will seat peasants in the heavens with his power.

[ 33 : 21 ] With his power. Paul in the first chapter has taken us to God's bank of blessings and has given us the debit card. And we know how to make withdrawals.

Do you know how? Paul actually models it here for us in conclusion. Prayer is the principal and primary means of accessing the funds that are available. That's how you get this stuff.

Paul didn't go say, go climb a mountain, cross the Mediterranean, go to Athens. He said, buckle your knees. Ask for it.

For the Ephesians, he's made the first withdrawal that they may be given the spirit to see and help to know the hope to which they've been called, the value and their worth before the Lord Jesus and the measurable greatness of God's power at work for them.

Ask for it. Pray for it. God, you told me I have this. Give it to me.

[ 34 : 38 ] God, you've assured me of this hope. I need it. And whether you be in the corner office of a shiny glass building, or on the precipice of a cliff, the hope is yours.

And when despair plummets, your soul and life may not be worth living, ask, Lord, how valuable am I?

and he will tell you, you're mine. You're my wealth. And when the day comes and they close that coffin lid over your head, that power Lord, when what's death do lies cold on my brow, the day will come and the power will show up and a dead being will emerge.

And whether honey, you incinerate me or bury me, the Lord will reconstitute me. And there I will stand with you before the Lord.

I want to pray like this. I want to pray more like Paul. Do you? Father, we, I'm so excited.

[ 36 : 16 ] But as a church, we recognize that we are a people that have all the blessings of heaven. And yet, may we not be those who know the promises but fail to live in its power.

may we be those that not only see partially, but we see fully what's available to us. And so incline our hearts to pray.

Give ourselves to ask. May you enlighten the eyes of our hearts that we may know the hope, that we may know our worth, that we may experience your power all for your glory and to your praise. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen.