

Experiencing Christian Salvation

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[0 : 00] to know something is not the same as to experience something. To know something is not the same as to experience something. By my teenage years, I knew that there were great pyramids just outside the Egyptian city of Cairo. I had seen photographs and pictures. I had read about them and learned their dimensions, but nothing prepared me for when, as a 16-year-old, I visited Egypt, and I stood in front of these pyramids, and I experienced for myself that sense of awe you have in the presence of immensity. To know something is not the same as to experience something. There's a difference between being informed and being transformed. In Ephesians 1 verses 1 through 14, in his great exclamation of praise, the Apostle Paul has informed us about how richly blessed we are as those who have faith in

Jesus as the Christian church. He has spoken of the infinitely wise purposes of God in choosing us to be his new society by faith in the Christ to whom he has united us. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. We've been sealed by his Holy Spirit so that we might live to the praise of his glory.

Like a mighty waterfall last week, God's riches cascaded down from heaven upon us and washed us all. He's told us of these things that we might know them for ourselves.

In Ephesians 1 verses 15 to 23, today's passage, in his great exclamation of prayer, the Apostle Paul is now praying that we might move from knowledge to experience. That the truths summarized in verses 1 through 14 would change us, would transform us. This used to be called experimental religion. That is, when what we know affects how we feel, how we think, and what we do.

Paul wants us not just to see pictures of the pyramids and to learn about them from books. He wants us to stand in front of them and experience for ourselves that sense of awe and wonder.

[2 : 55] Not just to intellectually know the truth of the gospel, but to think through these truths, to feel them warmly and to change us completely.

And so, when we hear this word knowing today, we're to understand it as more than mere knowledge. We're to understand it as experience. It is not enough that we know the truths of the gospel.

God wants us to experience for ourselves its wholesome life and its wholesome beauty. That and only that is what shall bring us joy, assurance, peace, and hope as Christians.

The knowledge or experience for which Paul prays for the church as God's new society in our passage today is threefold.

Present knowing, future knowing, and past knowing. When for the first time we do not merely know the gospel, but experience it for ourselves, the awe and wonder we might feel when we're standing in front of the pyramids pales into insignificance compared to the life-transforming glory of all that God has for us in the gospel of His Son.

[4 : 28] Heavenly Father, we bow in Your presence. May Your Word be our rule, Your Spirit our teacher, and Your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ.

Amen. First of all then, present knowing. Present knowing. Having said all that I have about the superiority of experience over knowledge, we recognize that without the knowledge of God, we cannot experience God.

We can't experience what we don't know. But Paul's prayer goes beyond mere head knowledge. He prays that at this present time, God would drive deep into the Ephesians' hearts the truth of the knowledge He has already taught them so that they might be filled with joy and spiritual vitality.

And so He prays, we read these things in verse 17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, having had the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

His argument in these words passes through three stages. In the first instance, he prays to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

[6 : 06] The God we worship, the God we're here today to worship, is the Father of glory. This is the God Paul wants us to experience for ourselves.

You know, we're learning all the time, but we know so little about the universe in which we live. We're merely scratching the surface. We know more about the surface of the moon than we do about the floor of the great oceans of our planet.

But because the universe, even though it's so vast, is finite, conceivably as a human race, especially with artificial intelligence, there may come a time when we know everything about the universe.

Absolutely everything. But when it comes to God, the Father of glory, because He is infinite and unlimited, there are no limits to Him, there will never come a time when we know everything about Him.

When it comes to Him, we're not merely scratching the surface, we're scratching the surface of the surface. Yet the more we know Him, the more we discover Him to be the most glorious, the most majestic, and the most loving God.

[7 : 33] But where shall we begin? And how shall we know who He is? It shall be, as our text tells us, as we deepen in our knowledge of Him and our relationship to Him through Jesus Christ.

This is the God Paul wants us to know and experience for ourselves today, the God whose glory is infinitely greater than that of the pyramids of Giza or the countless galaxies of space.

But then you'll notice in the second instance that Paul refers to the beginning of our knowledge and experience of God. He writes in verse 18, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

Enlightened. He's referring here to something God did in the past. He enlightened the eyes of our hearts. This is how we came to know Him first and to experience His glory for ourselves.

Paul does not say here, you'll notice, minds, as if the enlightenment of God is something merely intellectual. He says hearts.

[8 : 54] God did something so dramatic that it changed everything about us. He enlightened our hearts. He switched on the light of knowledge and experience within us.

The New Age movement is filled with people who are searching for enlightenment and think that by their own actions, be it meditation or some kind of psychedelic fix or by something else, they can enlighten themselves.

But when it comes to experiencing the true and living God, enlightenment isn't something we do, it's something He does. As John Newton famously said in that wonderful hymn, Amazing Grace, once I was blind, now I see.

Many of us, as Christians, can look back to a point in our lives where God opened our hearts to the truth of the gospel. One minute before, we knew an awful lot about Christ and the gospel, but we didn't know Christ.

But all of a sudden, God switched on the light and we came to know. Have you come to experience this enlightenment from God without which we cannot know or experience Him for ourselves?

[10 : 20] This is what we pray for in our worship services, that those who do not yet know Christ, for them, God would switch on the light of their understanding.

And for this, we urge those of us who are not yet Christians here to pray. Lord, open my spiritual eyes and enlighten the eyes of my heart because I want to know Christ for myself.

And then it is also in verse 17 that Paul's praying for something remarkable. Nothing less than that mortal, finite, weakened sinners would know and experience for themselves the glory of God and the God of glory.

The thought that any mere human being could attain to such knowledge is entirely unreasonable. That sinful flesh should experience pure spirit. God must do something in us and continue to do something in us so that we may know and experience Him for ourselves.

And this is what He does by giving us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. salvation. Here's another reference to the Holy Spirit whose role it is to progressively reveal God to us and to bring God close to us.

[11 : 50] The Holy Spirit is working in the mind and heart of anyone in whom that light has been switched on. Anyone who is coming or has come to know Christ for themselves.

And what they're knowing and experiencing for themselves look at the text with me isn't just a system of truth or a set of doctrines they're coming to know a person God Himself in the knowledge of Him not about Him but of Him.

It is one thing to know about it's another thing it's an altogether greater thing to know of to live in a vital growing relationship to God but it's nothing less than this for which Paul is praying.

Not just that we would know about Christ for after all there are many for whom such knowledge puffs them up with pride but that we would know Christ ourselves whom to know leads to humility worship and service.

This is what God has for us today. the present reality of the Holy Spirit's work in us enlightening our hearts so that we may experience for ourselves the beauty and vitality of a wholesome relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

[13:16] It is as if God said to us as we walked through the doors of our church this morning I have something for you today. I have an invitation for you today.

I want you to know me better today and experience me more today. That's what I've got for you here today. This is vibrant spirituality when we all of us not just one or two are growing in our relationship to God the Father through Jesus Christ by his Spirit.

Present knowing. Second, future knowing. Future knowing. for all that we say life is tough for Christians today.

It is as nothing compared to how tough it was for Christians in first century Ephesus. They faced persecution on every side. Life was difficult for the early church.

Very difficult. This was one reason why a future perspective was important for them. That they should know that better days lay ahead for them. To know such is important.

[14:35] But again, Paul's praying for more than mere knowledge. He's praying that God would drive these future truths deep into their hearts to fill them with present hope and strength so that they might not merely survive as Christians but thrive as Christians.

Now, we as Western Christians have largely lost our focus on future glory because we're so content with the wealth and ease of our lives here and now.

And yet, compared to what God has for us, our wealth is as a penny to a pound and as rubbish to gold. And so again, in verses 18 and 19, Paul talks of the three features of our future he wants us to know.

In the first instance, he prays that we would know the hope of our calling, the hope of our calling. Hope has to do with our future, not our past. And so the hope of our calling is that to which God has called us to experience in the future.

You know, we live in a world without hope. They say that a man can live for 40 days without food, for four days without water, for four minutes without oxygen, but they also say that a man can't live for four seconds without hope.

[16:09] But God has given us as Christians hope, the hope of eternal life with him filled to capacity with joy, peace, and love, purpose, meaning, and happiness.

someone might say, well, my calling in life is to be a mechanic. Another person might say my calling in life is to be a student. But when people say that, they're not talking about God and they're not talking about the future.

As Christians, whatever vocation God calls us to in life, we have a higher calling altogether. And our higher calling is to a higher place.

Our ultimate calling is heavenly. The prospect of heaven cannot but fill us with joy and hope in believing. And so, in our moments of despair, and we all have them, let's pray.

Lord, give me a heavenly perspective. In the second instance here, Paul prays that we would know the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

[17:27] The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. There's that word glory again. One New Testament commentator titles his book on Paul, Paul Apostle of the glory of God.

Ephesians is filled with the glory and weightiness of God. But what's remarkable here is that according to Paul, the glory of God is seen in his inheritance in the saints.

That word inheritance is taken from the Old Testament where the inheritance of the people of God was the land of Israel, the land filled with hills and with mountains and with cities and with temples. But a far more glory to God than a land is the church. church, the church which he purposed before the ages and redeemed with the blood of his son.

Of far more glory to God than a place is a people, the people of his grace, the people of his presence, the people of his salvation, the people of his love, his new society, the church.

[18 : 36] There is much about his church here we struggle with. Our personalities can be contrary, our intemperate words, our impure motives, our desires for selfish control, our apathy, our laziness, our I can't be bothered, our anger, our greed.

But a day is coming when this church shall be perfected and our fellowship with one another shall be holy and shall be complete. And on that day Satan shall be tortured even as he says, I did everything in my power to pollute these people, but Christ perfected them.

I did everything I could to corrupt them, but look, Christ has completed them. Do not lose hope in the church, because even though now it may be difficult at times, it shall in that day be pure delight. God will be God in the third instance, that we would know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us.

The question will always remain, how can any of these things be? I can neither imagine the glory or perfection of heaven, nor can I imagine myself there, because between now and then is the rest of my life.

[20 : 11] A life in which I sin, a life in which I doubt, a life in which I struggle. The Puritan Matthew Henry writes these words, he said, it's a difficult thing to bring a soul to believe in Christ, and to venture all upon his righteousness, and upon the hope of eternal life.

It's a difficult thing. It's nothing less than an almighty power that will work this in us. Paul says that power is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us.

We're so worried, aren't we, that we won't endure and persevere in hope, that the troubles of this life will overwhelm us, so that between now and the time we enter into the promise of our inheritance in heaven, we'll get lost in the way, we'll stumble, we'll fall, we'll give up.

But Paul's prayer for us is that we may know and experience the immeasurable greatness of God's power to keep and provide for us.

to hold our heads above water when the storms of life threaten to drown us. When I fear my faith may fail, he will hold me fast.

[21 : 35] When the tempter would prevail, he will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path, love. For my love is often cold, he must hold me fast.

Keith and Kirsten Getty have perfectly captured Paul's teaching here in Ephesians 1. The immeasurable greatness of the power of God will hold me fast until the riches of God's glory in our heavenly calling which he has kept for us.

Now, Paul is praying that these would be future truths we may not merely know but experience because hope is holistic.

Hope affects your mind and your heart. For those of us here who are not yet professing Christians, we need to realize that none of these wonderful promises from God or future blessings are earned by our efforts or our actions.

Rather, we read in verse 19, at the end of verse 19, they belong to those who believe.

[22 : 59] They belong to those who believe and have faith, not those who have earned it but those who believe. Everything else in today's passage describes what God has done, is doing, and will do.

Only this refers to us. God has done it all. Only this refers to us. God has done it all and we believe in Him.

In Christ Jesus, God has done it all and we trust and have faith in Him. God has done it for us. God has done it for us. Where is the hope for which we cannot live for more than four seconds unless it's here in God?

God is calling every one of us from the youngest to the oldest to believe in Him. And then lastly, past knowing, past knowing.

you'll know that the pyramids in Giza stand tall over the sprawling city of Cairo beneath. Their sure size and their great antiquity fill you with wonder.

[24 : 12] But there's a fly in the ointment. When I stood below the central pyramid, I became aware of an unpleasant smell.

You see, thousands of camels, over the course of thousands of years, have used the stony sand on which the pyramids are built as a litter tree.

To put it mildly, they stink of camel pee. Because even the most awesome of human wonders is tainted.

But not Christ. And not these promises for the present or the future. Not these. They're not tainted. There's nothing to spoil them, pollute them.

They stand sure. They are forever certain. We know Christ now, albeit imperfectly, and He shall hold us fast until we know Him perfectly in heaven.

[25 : 13] And we read our story in His. The mighty power of God, as we read in verse 20, raised Christ from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in heaven, far above all human authority, the mighty power of God gave Christ a name that's above every name, and has put all things under His feet.

This is the story of Christ. Resurrection and exaltation. Having shed His blood for us on the cross, having redeemed us by His death, God has lifted Him and exalted Him to the highest place, and there ain't any camel pea in heaven.

Now, this is a great and glorious thing, and we rejoice in it, but how does it affect us today? It is, as I said, because we read our story in the story of Christ.

In verse 22, we read that God has given Christ as head of all things to or for the church, that church which Paul describes in verse 23 as being Christ's body, the fullness of Him who fills all and all. Our head, our leader, our captain, our Lord, our chief, to whom we are united and connected by faith.

[26 : 52] He has been raised and exalted. We read our story in His story. Our strength for the present and our hope for the future is based on something that happened in the past.

Christ has been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God. Christ has been given the highest name and all things have been put under His feet. We are connected to Him just as surely as a head is connected to a body.

We can be sure that God has strength for us in the present and hope for us in the future because certain things have already taken place in the life of our head.

Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. His resurrection and His exaltation is the certainty of our strength and hope as Christians.

All our present strength and future hope is founded just outside a garden tomb near Jerusalem where 2,000 years ago the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the grave to new life and was exalted to the highest heaven.

[28 : 11] And from there He, Jesus, as our head is connected to us and we are united to Him. Great Princeton theologian Charles Hodge writes, the sense in which Christ is head of the church is that He is the source of its life.

He is its supreme ruler. He is ever present with His church. He sympathizes with His church and He loves the church even as He loves Himself.

Intimate union, dependence, and community of life are the main ideas expressed by this figure He writes. Christ is our heavenly head and He gives life to the church.

He directs our steps as a church. He protects His church. He is our head. He sympathizes with us. He loves us. He fills us with joy and peace and strength and assurance and love and above all things He fills us with hope.

And as I said, all because just outside a garden tomb near the city of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, the Lord Jesus Christ rose to new life and was exalted to the highest heavens.

[29 : 39] There is nothing which can taint, pollute, or spoil this greatest of all truths. It towers over the totality of universal history.

Like thirsty men in the desert, let's drink deeply of this truth. The past resurrection and exaltation of Christ assures us of strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Let's know the truth, but more than that, let's experience it for ourselves. Today, we can experience for ourselves the life, sympathy, presence, protection, and love of Christ for us.

Let it be more than the knowledge of our minds, although let it be no less. Let it become the settled and persuaded knowledge of our hearts, which lifts all despair and shatters all our gloom.

And as we close, let's do everything we can to encourage each other with these great truths about Christ and His gospel, to tell other thirsty men in the desert where they can find water, they can find it in Jesus.

[31 : 03] Perhaps, perhaps we can start doing it after the service today when we're having coffee just to speak to one another about what Christ means to us.

Perhaps, perhaps we can arrange to meet with another Christian from this church during the week and have a coffee with them and tell them and listen to their experiences of Christ. Perhaps even we can tell these things in a small group setting like our city groups, but let's not keep it to ourselves.

Because if good news is worth experiencing, then it's God worth shading also. We finish with the words of the psalmist.

Come here, my children, gather round and listen to my word, and I will help you understand how you may fear the Lord. Let us pray.

Lord, we recognize that to know something is not the same as to experience something.

[32 : 17] That the devil knows more than any of us about how glorious you are, and yet he hates you for it. By contrast, Lord, we want to experience today something the world can't give us.

Genuine hope. The world can talk much about the hope it has for tomorrow, but it's got no hope for what happens after we die.

Only the Christian gospel gives us hope like this. We thank you that our hope for the future is founded not on a set of doctrines as such, not on a system of truths as such, but on a historic event that happened 2,000 years ago just outside the city of Jerusalem, where your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, rose from the dead.

When you exerted your mighty power and exalted him to the highest place, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to your glory.

May we join with that choir and that throng who say Jesus Christ is Lord. In his name we pray.

[33 : 37] Amen.