

Untitled (52)

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Date: 28 May 2017

[0:00] When I began thinking about this sermon, I was overwhelmed by the sermon possibilities in the topic of the Ascension.

Initially, I thought about preaching on the wonderful promises of Jesus found in John's gospel before he died that depended for their fulfillment upon his leaving his disciples and returning to his father in heaven.

Those promises were that he would come again and that he would send his Holy Spirit. And then he reaffirmed the promises before he ascended, the promise of the Holy Spirit, and the angels reaffirmed the promise of his return, as we just read in Acts.

I also considered the aspects of his ascension, his charge to his disciples that they be witnesses to him from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, his rising into a heaven in a cloud of glory, the stupefaction of his disciples as they watched him go, the assurance by the angels of his coming again, and his being seated on the right hand of God.

And then there are the marvels in the psalm that we prayed this morning, Psalm 110, which may be the most quoted and most referred to psalm in all of the New Testament.

[1:35] For an excellent series on that psalm, you might want to listen to Christ, our reigning priest and king, which is available on YouTube and well worth your time and attention.

So I think you can understand now what I said about the riches available, among which I had to choose. But a really wonderful thing about our Lord is that he knows what his people need to hear. When we ask him what he wants us to say, he shows us. What he wants us to hear this morning, and I say us, because any time I give a sermon, it's to myself as much as it is to any of you.

What he wants us to hear is found in what Mark read in Ephesians 1, 15 to 23. Now, if you have a Bible with you, please open to that passage, because it's incredibly dense, and I think you'll benefit by reading as well as hearing.

This passage is one of Paul's great Bible prayers. We would all do well to regularly pray his Bible prayers for ourselves and for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

[2:57] They never get old. And so let me read this prayer again. 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 thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a 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 his head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Now there is so much in this prayer that I cannot possibly cover at all. But I want to, before I move on to my main points, I want to point out something that I think is quite important.

This entire prayer is based upon the reality of the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ. If these were not firm facts, not admitting of argument or equivocation, Paul could not have prayed this prayer.

Half of the content of the prayer concerns the surpassing power of God, shown in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. So, with these great truths firmly in mind, Paul prays five things for the Ephesians.

[5:17] First, he prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

The Ephesians have faith in Jesus. Their love for the saints is talked of in such a way that Paul has heard about it. They already know Jesus, but they need more.

They need a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. They need to know him truly. And that can only happen with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, revealing to them more and more of who Jesus is.

Knowing Jesus is not a static state. It is something that not only allows for growth, it demands it. We are to grow in wisdom and in ever-increasing understanding of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished.

We take for granted that we grow in our relationships with other people. Our knowledge of those closest to us is far from exhaustive.

[6:35] Even when we've been married for 50 or 60 years, we could discover something surprising about our spouse that we never knew. If this is true of people, how much more is it true of the one who created the universe and all that is in it?

As we spend time with him in prayer and meditation and Bible study, as we talk to him throughout our days, we get to know him better. He shows more of himself to us because we are seeking to know him better.

And our knowledge of him is true insofar as it is characterized by wisdom and revelation, both of which come directly from God.

Second, Paul prays that the eyes of your hearts are enlightened. Just as light goes into our physical eyes, enabling us to see the world around us, so do our hearts need to be enlightened.

By heart, Paul means our inner selves, our spirit and personality and intellect. Instead of leaving us to rely on our own insights and perceptions, he would have everything we are brightened, enlightened by God, the Father of lights, and his Son, the light of the world.

[8:00] Our minds need enlightening to apprehend truth and falsehood. Our personalities need enlightening to break the bonds of bad habits and childhood trauma and generational sin so that we can become the people that God created us to be.

And our spirits need enlightening from the sin that without the cleansing blood of Christ traps us in the bonds of death.

Having prayed that the Ephesians will increase in their knowledge of Jesus and know his light in their innermost parts, Paul then prays for three specific things that their increasing knowledge and enlightened hearts will enable them to know.

The first of these is the hope to which he has called you. Notice how specific Paul is. This is not a generalized hope.

This is not the sort of hope that we usually talk about. We hope for a lot of things, from good outcomes for our children to good weather for a picnic. Some of us may even hope that we win the lottery.

[9:17] But the hope Paul speaks of is the hope God has called us to. It does not originate in us. It's not natural at all.

It's a spiritual hope. The hope of salvation. The hope of glory. The hope of eternal life. The hope that God has set before us. It is a living hope and the anchor of the soul.

It is a hope that we are to grasp, to cling to, to await in patience. It is a hope that enables us to endure and that will keep us pure.

This hope does not arise from us or come from our own hearts and desires. It's what God has called us to. He is the initiator. He places this hope in the hearts of those who love and follow him. But because we are sinners, we can set our hearts on hopes other than what God has called us to. If we are to be faithful to God's calling, we need to dwell on our hope of salvation, of seeing our beloved Savior, and of being able to stand in the presence of the almighty, holy God and enjoy him forever.

[10:33] This should be the bright thing that we look forward to. Clinging to the hope God has called us to is essential to being true followers of Jesus Christ.

The second thing Paul prays that we will know is, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints? Think about this for a moment.

There's a lot packed into that. According to those who know Greek, there are two possible interpretations. It could mean that we would come to know all the spiritual blessings that God has given us.

Or, it could refer to the inheritance God has in his people. That is, we are God's possession, purchased by the blood of Christ, shed on the cross.

We are his portion. In the Old Testament, numerous references speak of Israel as God's portion, or inheritance, such as in Deuteronomy 32.

[11 : 44] For the Lord's portion is his people. Jacob is the allotment of his inheritance. So, in this second interpretation, God wants us to know that, just as his chosen people, Israel, were his inheritance, now we who believe in Jesus are joined with believing Jews and have become his inheritance.

The amazing thing is, that we, God's chosen inheritance, are considered by God to be glorious and rich.

God places an extraordinarily high value on his people. Why are we so valuable? Because of what it cost his son to purchase us.

The third thing Paul prays that the Ephesians will understand is the immeasurable greatness of his power to us who believe.

This is the 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 where nothing on earth and no incorporeal being can touch him.

[13 : 10] His name is above every name that can be named, whether in this age, this present evil age, the age that we live in, or in the age to come.

That is the age in which God will bring judgment to the world and the devil, will make all things new, and will reign with his son in power forever and ever.

In that age, too, there will be no name greater than, equal to, or even approaching the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has put all things, even now, under the feet of Jesus who crushed the head of the serpent when he died on the cross. And God the Father set Jesus' head over the church, which is his body and is filled to the brim with the life of Christ.

Can there be any power greater than this? Everything in our lives fades into insignificance before the mighty power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[14 : 21] And this is the power that Paul prays we will know. Not imagine, not guess at, but know.

How do we know this power? We know God's power by yielding ourselves, body, soul, and spirit, every bit of us, to Jesus Christ.

Any holding back from utter yielding blocks the flow of his amazing power in our lives. Jesus, the Son of God, our Creator, the Creator of the universe, will never compel us to yield.

We might cry, as John Donne did, batter my heart, three-person God, for you as yet but not, breathe, shine, and seek to mend. But he won't do that.

Instead, we have to pray that the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives will bring us to the point of utter yielding, and along the way we say yes to whatever difficulties or heartbreaks come in our path.

[15 : 39] There is no, not this Jesus, if we want to know his power in our lives. What is your trial right now?

Is it pain? Is it sorrow? Is it loneliness? Or sickness?

Or humiliation? God wants us to know that in the midst of our trials, when they are at their very worst, he is able to give us steadfastness, patience, thanksgiving, and joy.

This is the evidence of his power in our lives. The power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at God's right hand. This is what it means to be a Christian.

In our time, many have turned Christianity into a lifestyle we choose instead of the very life of Christ in us, sufficient in every circumstance we can imagine.

[16 : 49] Jesus is sufficient for the martyrs as they are butchered and hung and crucified. He is sufficient for the woman who is violated.

He is sufficient when we have to watch our children suffer and die. If he is not sufficient in these circumstances, he is not sufficient at all.

but he is sufficient. He is the almighty son of God who rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is seated on the right hand of the father.

Won't you let him be all sufficient for you? and I'm not fining to do. So, I'm not going to be in the right hand and I'm not going to be in the right hand of the woman in the right hand. I'm not going to be in the right hand. I'm not going to be in the right hand. I'm not going to be in the right hand. The

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