

A Prayer We All Need

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[0:00] Well, this has been certainly a rollercoaster weekend from emotions.! Many of you heard the very sad news yesterday of Alyssa's passing.

! Some of you have taught her in children's church. And we are sobered by how uncertain life can be.

And when a young person passes, it reminds us even how much more uncertain it is for those of us who have lived much longer.

And so we want to continue to pray for the family. And then yesterday evening, we got the very good news that Maggie Liberus delivered a healthy baby girl.

And I thought not to put it in the chat because at that point, so many people were just responding and seeking to encourage Jennifer.

[1:07] But we're reminded that in the midst of life, we have to deal with death and life. We deal with sorrows and we deal with joys.

And the Lord tells us that we are to weep with those who weep. And we are to rejoice with those who rejoice. And in his providence, he causes both to come into our lives in the same season. He has caused death to come. He's also caused life to come. And I think it reminds us that we have to, by the grace of God, find a way to come alongside those who weep and weep with them and also come alongside those who have joys and rejoice with them, reminding us that we are not to be so overcome with grief that we aren't able to identify with those who are in grief.

For this morning, we continue our sermon series in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I'm going to ask you to turn in your Bibles to Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

And this morning, our attention will be directed to verses 15 to 23 of chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1, beginning in verse 15.

[2:36] Those of you who heard last Sunday's sermon will recall that we considered verses 13 to 14, and we considered how the Apostle Paul blessed God for blessing his people with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, and for electing them before the foundation of the world, and for redeeming them through Christ's death on the cross, and then by sealing them with the Holy Spirit for all eternity.

And these are wonderful and glorious blessings. But as wonderful and glorious as they are, in these verses that we have come to this morning, we find the Apostle Paul expressing a burning desire in prayer for God to grant to the Ephesians, and by extension to all believers, spiritual comprehension and insight into them.

As we consider Paul's prayer this morning, I pray that we will be able to see that this is a prayer that we all need. This prayer that Paul prays for the Ephesians is a prayer that we all need.

So please follow along as I read Ephesians 1, beginning in verse 15. For this reason, because I 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 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.

[5:38] Let's pray together. Father, we bow our hearts this morning asking that you would do for us what the Apostle Paul prayed in these verses, that you would give us comprehension, that you would grant us by the Spirit to have our eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may comprehend these wondrous truths and blessings and benefits that you have wrought for us through the great salvation that you have given to us.

Lord, we pray that you would come by your Spirit, that you would grant us illumination in your Word, that you would enlighten our hearts, that you would enable us to comprehend truth, that more than that, Lord, we ask that you would help us to live in light of this truth.

We ask not, Lord, that we would get knowledge to heap upon knowledge, but we ask that you would grant us insight that we might live in the light of it.

So come now by your Spirit, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. But Paul tells us in these verses that he is addressing to the Ephesians that because of hearing about their faith and hearing about their love for the saints, two evidences, love for the saints and faith in the Lord Jesus that they were converted.

He said he constantly gave thanks to God for them and he constantly prayed for them. And from the content of Paul's prayer, we who belong to Christ are able to see that we need the Spirit's help to understand the hope of God's calling, the glory of God's inheritance, and the greatness of God's power.

[8:02] of all the things that the Apostle Paul could have as an experienced minister latched upon, it is these three realities that he focuses on in prayer for the Ephesians and by extension for all believers.

Paul wanted them to comprehend these spiritual realities. realities. And so we can conclude from what he does that these realities are very important for God's people to comprehend.

And so this morning, I want us to consider these three spiritual realities for which we need the Spirit's help to comprehend. no amount of intelligence, no amount of experience will bring us into these realities.

We need the Spirit's help. The first reality for which Paul prays that God would give us the Spirit to know is the hope of his calling.

We see this in verses 15 to 17. Paul tells us he is constantly giving thanks for them. He is constantly praying for them.

[9:25] So he's interceding for them in an ongoing way. And his constant prayer is that God would give them the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

That as they know him, as they have come to know him, that God would do this for them, that God in an ongoing way would bring them into greater and deeper understanding and revelation.

And we know from verses 13 to 14 that we considered last week that when God saves us, he gives us the Spirit.

He seals us with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and so we are sealed by the Spirit. So we know that Paul's prayer when he prays that God would give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

We know that Paul is not asking God to give the Spirit again in some secondary way. And I don't have time to address it this morning, but there are those who believe that there's some second additional blessing of the Spirit after we have come to know Christ and his Spirit dwells in us.

[10:42] That's not what Paul is praying for in this particular instance. These are God's people. They already have the Spirit. And so Paul is not asking God to give them the Spirit in the same way.

But instead, he's praying for the Spirit's revealing work to be active in the lives of the Ephesian believers and by extension all believers.

And we would remember that Jesus said to his disciples that it was to their benefit that he should go away because when he goes, the Spirit will come and the Spirit will lead into all truth.

And so Paul is praying for the Spirit to give spiritual wisdom and spiritual revelation that God's people may understand spiritual realities.

In particular, these spiritual realities that the Apostle Paul brings into view. The first one being to know the hope to which God had called them. Paul didn't assume that when he came to Christ that we would automatically know this.

[11:49] He says, no, you need the Spirit to know this. You need the Spirit to know the hope to which God has called you. And so in verse 18, Paul is alerting God's people to the fact that God has called them to a particular hope.

He says, and I pray that the Spirit will come to help you to know it. He's telling us we need the Spirit's help. Now Paul uses this expression, the eyes of your heart, which is an Old Testament concept, and refers to having spiritual insight.

It is another way to talk about illumination. It is another way to talk about divine light being shone for us that we might see what we otherwise would not see. Later on, in chapter 4, in verse 18, we'll see the Apostle Paul reminding believers that they no longer live with their understanding darkened as those in the world do.

And I think we all know what that is. We know what it is to have lived in the world and living in darkness and seeing lies as the truth and then we come to Christ when light comes to us and we're able to see how dark was that?

How blind was I? That's the work of the Spirit that comes into the heart and the life of the believer so that we can see spiritual realities that we otherwise would not see.

[13:29] So Paul prays that God's people will be given the light of the Holy Spirit in their hearts that they might see spiritual realities as they should.

Now it's easy to miss or to read over quickly a very important truth that the Apostle Paul touches on in this aspect of his prayer and that truth is the call of God.

In last week's sermon in verse 3 we considered the first step in the salvation process which is election. That before the foundation of the world God sovereignly determined to save particular people by his grace.

And here in this first part of the Apostle Paul's prayer in verse 18 we come face to face with the second step in the salvation process which is calling. And Brother Shambi foreshadowed this week's Bible study as we continue to study through the statement of faith and he mentioned effectual calling because that's what it also is referred to because it is a calling that produces a result.

It is not like when you call your child and the child hears you and runs in the opposite direction. No. This is a calling that when God's people hear it they respond to it.

[14:54] They come to him. And so Paul is touching on this second aspect of the salvation process. The call of God.

God's people hear his voice in the gospel and they come to him. And friends that's what happened to all of us. It doesn't matter what your circumstances were at the time.

It doesn't matter what was going through your mind or what you thought you were doing in the moment. You may have fully thought that you were making a decision to come to Christ and no doubt you did. But what you were doing ultimately is you were responding to the call of God that was upon your heart.

But notice also in verse 18 that the Apostle Paul is alerting us to the fact that God called us to a particular hope. I think you'd agree with me that hope is one of those elusive words in our vocabulary.

It's hard to define but it's much easier for us to describe it. We know how we feel when we have hope and we know what it's like to not have hope.

[16:10] Hope is being optimistic or positively expectant about the future. And we know what it is so I think we've all lived long enough to experience it to find out that hopes that we have about the future are sometimes false hopes and sometimes they are dashed.

Some of us we have had our hopes in the most severe ways dashed so much so that we even find it hard to hope because we've had this experience of having hope wonderful hopes and finding

them dashed before us so even when we are hoping there's almost this reserve that we have underneath it that this may not work out.

This may be dashed like the other time that it was dashed and so we interact with hope in this tentative kind of way because we know too well the pain of dashed hopes and we try to protect ourselves from it.

The hope that the Apostle Paul is referring to in this passage and asking God to give us a spirit that we would come to know is a different kind of hope.

It's not a false hope. It's not a hope that can be dashed. It is divine hope. It is a hope that endures in this life.

[17:45] When the hopes of this life are dashed, and it's a hope that endures beyond this life even when death comes and takes our life away.

God has called us to a hope that cannot be broken, that cannot be shaken and we need the spirit's help to comprehend it. We need the spirit's help to see it.

We need the spirit's help to lay a hold of it. Now think about that. The hope that God gives us in this fallen and broken world is a hope that cannot be broken and cannot be shaken.

Listen how the apostle Peter describes this hope before he goes on to encourage his hearers who were being grieved by all kinds of trials and temptations that had beset them.

Here's what he writes in 1 Peter 1 verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[19:03] Notice that what Peter does is he connects this living hope to this most victorious and glorious event, the event of Jesus rising from the dead because the worst thing that happens to us in this life is death.

And Jesus Christ arose from the dead and in his rising he gives us hope in the worst thing that this life can bring to us. We have a living hope.

We have a hope that cannot die. It is a resurrected kind of hope. That's the hope that God has called us to and it comes to us because Jesus Christ has been raised victoriously from the dead.

It's more than a happy feeling that is subject to change. The hope to which we have been called to is a confident expectation about the future that is rooted in Christ and belongs to us.

as his people. Later in chapter 2 the apostle Paul is going to talk about how we were before we came to Christ and he describes us as living in this world without hope and without God.

[20:28] hope and part of the reason that we need to understand the hope to which we have been called is so that we may be spared disappointments in the Christian life.

and that's because many people take the hope of this world and they bring it into the Christian life and they end up being disappointed.

And so when they suffer through sickness or financial hardship or relational breakdown or perhaps a dead-end career or the death of a loved one, their hope is dashed.

And rather than question their beliefs or question that hope that they have laid a hold of, they question everything else, including God and his word.

As I prepared and I thought about how so many people have this wrong understanding of hope, this worldly view of hope that they impart into the Christian life, Father Lord brought the hymn, It Is Well With My Soul to Mine.

[21:51] And I think this hymn captures so well what biblical hope looks like. The first verse, which I'm sure we all know, but I want us to hear it again and hear it afresh this morning.

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot that was taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

Brothers and sisters, that's the hope that God has called us to. This is biblical hope. It is a hope that enables us, no matter the state of our soul and circumstances, promises to say it is well.

We can say it is well when our lives are like a peaceful river, because we have hope. We can have the same hope when life is like one sea billow after another.

Whatever our lot. God has taught us to say it's well with our soul because we have a lasting and a living hope that's rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ who raised from the dead.

[23:16] The hymn gets to the ground and the reason that we have this hope. It says, though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul.

Brothers and sisters, we who are called to have this hope, we have it because Christ has regarded our helpless estate and has shed his blood for our souls.

love. And so if you belong to Christ this morning, I want to ask you, how well do you know in an experiential way this hope to which you've been called?

God is God and I ask you knowing that I believe every single one of us this morning, every one of us is experiencing in one way or another to one degree or another the effects of living in a broken and a fallen world.

There are aspects of our lives that we would rather not be and if we could change it, we would. And yet in the midst of that, God offers his people a true and lasting and a living hope, a hope to which he has called us, that is above the circumstances of this life, a hope that cannot be dashed by the whims of this life, but a hope that holds steadfast in the midst of it, a hope that holds even when our eyes are filled with tears and our hearts with grief, we can know a hope that tears through it all.

[25:18] That's a hope that we've been called to. And Paul prays that God would give us the spirit that we would come to comprehend and understand this is the hope that belongs to the people of God.

I believe one of the reasons that we hold more on to worldly hope than this biblical hope is that sadly we have made more of this world than we should.

Sadly, we have not seen this world for what it truly is. If we do, we wouldn't latch on to it. We would not hitch our hopes to it. And the reason that we don't see the biblical hope as the hope to hold on to and the hope to pursue is sadly we don't esteem and value enough this new life that Christ has saved us into.

That is an eternal life that reminds us that this life is not it. We have eternal life that will live on into eternity beyond this life.

We need to make more of it and less of this one. And we need the Spirit's help to do that. And so with the Apostle Paul, I pray for you and I pray for myself that God would help us to know by his Spirit this hope that we have been called to.

[26:53] The second reality that Paul prays to God to give us by his Spirit is that we would know the glory of his inheritance.

Paul expresses this in verse 18. He says he wants God to give us the spirit of revelation and wisdom to know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance inheritance in the saints.

Now it's easy to misread what Paul is actually praying that God would do for us. Praying that God would help us to come to know. Last week we considered verses 13 and verses 3 to 14 and we saw that God has given us an inheritance.

we saw in verse 14 that he gives us the spirit as the guarantee of this inheritance that he has given to us until we come to acquire it.

But here in this verse in verse 18 Paul is not praying for us to understand or know our inheritance. inheritance. It's important to see that because it's so easy to continue to read from chapter 1 and think that what he's talking about is that God would help us to comprehend our inheritance.

[28:27] No, what he wants us to comprehend is the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints. Paul is referring to God's people as his inheritance.

Here's how the apostle Peter describes it. Same truth in a different way. 1 Peter 2 and 9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Here the apostle Peter uses the same language to refer to God's people in the new covenant that was used to refer to God's people in the old covenant. He's telling us that God's new covenant people are his own prized possession.

We are his inheritance. And we need the spirit's help to comprehend it. One of the ways I pray that we comprehend this is to see that as God's inheritance, our salvation is secure.

When God saves us, he takes possession of us. And indeed, he elected to do so before the foundation of the world, and through the death of Christ, he has redeemed us.

[30:02] And so, when we consider this truth, if we ever truly belong to Christ, we will always belong to Christ. He loses no inheritance. We don't slip through his fingers.

His inheritance will always belong to him. And this is a glorious truth. It is a rich truth that we are God's inheritance.

We are God's possession. And if we think about this properly, it doesn't make us puffed up with pride.

It doesn't make us think that we are special in and of ourselves, especially if we remember who we once were, and we remember who we in many ways still are.

Rather than be puffed up with pride, we hang our heads and we beat our chests. And we glory in the fact that the God of the universe has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to make us his glorious inheritance.

[31:22] Deceased British theologian Frederick Bruce, normally referred to as F.F. Bruce, explains it in a wonderful way.

Here's what he says, that God should set such a high value on a community of sinners, rescued from perdition, and still bearing too many traces of their former state, might well seem incredible were it not made clear that he sees them in Christ.

as from the beginning he chose them in Christ. Brothers and sisters, that is why we are this prized and glorious inheritance of God because he sees us in and through his son.

And all that he determined to do towards us is rooted in his son, the second person of the Trinity.

And so if we remember this we would be further humbled, we would be called to remember who we once were and who we still are.

And yet this God holds on to us. Yet this God is not ashamed to put in his word they are my glorious inheritance with all of our warts, with all of our imperfections, with all of our craziness, with all of our sin.

[32:58] He says you are my glorious inheritance. Brothers and sisters, this is a precious truth. And we know not to look to ourselves to feel proud.

We look to Christ to feel grateful and to be ever grateful that the God of the universe would set his love upon us.

And he would say you are my glorious inheritance. May the spirit help us to comprehend this marvelous truth that we are God's great and glorious inheritance in Christ.

Christ. For the third and final reality that the apostle Paul prays to God to give us the spirit to know is the greatness of his power.

And I think we should be alerted right away that Paul spends most of his time talking about this aspect of what he wants us to know by the spirit. it covers it in verses 19 to 23.

[34:20] And notice that Paul's prayer is not that we would know the greatness of God's power. That's really not what he prays.

His prayer is that we who believe would know the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us. See, there's a difference between having an academic knowledge, an academic understanding of God's power.

Paul wants us to know something other than that. He wants those of us who believe to comprehend, to be able to see this great power, his immeasurable power towards us who believe. Paul is telling us that God's power is infinite. It cannot be measured. He's telling us there's no limit to God's power. And then he goes on to point to God's power, which was displayed in several ways. He's like stacking up language to communicate this amazing truth that we need the Spirit's help to comprehend. He tells us that God's power was displayed when he raised Christ from the dead, reminding us that God has power to raise the dead.

[35:52] God's God's power to! God's 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 in the age to come.

And what Paul is doing here is he is referencing spiritual language. This is the language of spiritual warfare. And we'll look at this more in Ephesians chapter 6. But he's telling us that God's power did something in the cosmos, in the spiritual hierarchy that is in this world.

And he says that God did something by his power by causing Christ to be above all of those authorities and rules and power that is in the heavenly realm.

God is reminding us that Christ has no equal, not in this age, nor in the age to come. And this is no dead heat finish.

This is no close call. It is exceedingly set apart. He is exceedingly set apart above all these other powers in this world.

[37:14] And he also demonstrated his power when he put all things under Christ's feet and gave him to be head over all things pertaining to the church.

So why does Paul intercede that we who believe will know the greatness of God's power? But one obvious reason is that it should inform how we live in this world where power is everything.

Power in this world is created more than anything else. I think we could agree that hardly a day goes by when we don't see some display of power plates.

Whether we see it in our workplaces, whether we see it in the country with politicians, possessions, whether we see it in our homes with parents, fathers, and mothers, and older siblings, we see this power play around us all the time.

when God's people see the greatness of God's power, the greatness of God's power that he has displayed in these particular ways, no flaunting of earthly power moves us.

[38:49] No flaunting of earthly power troubles us when we see it. When we bear in mind God's great power to the charades we see around us, we will be like Mordecai as Haman flaunted his power around and Mordecai disregarded him, had no time for him, because he knew that there was one far greater than him.

When we recognize that Christ has ultimate power power, we relate to power differently in this world.

We recognize that everyone who has power in this world, legitimate or illegitimate, is delegated power, it is permitted power. It's not ultimate power.

Christ has ultimate power. power. One of the most moving scenes I have seen, I've not seen the scene, but I saw a picture of a particular scene that came to mind as I was preparing this sermon.

And some of you may have seen it. It is a picture of Ukrainian Christians kneeling on the snow as a tyrant threatened their country to invade them at any moment, and they were in the snow kneeling down and praying to God.

[40:29] I thought, what a picture. What a picture of recognizing that God is the one who has ultimate power. And we can call on him in the face of certain threats, knowing that he alone holds a future in his hand.

Not a strand of here falls to the ground, except he knows it and orders it. When we know the greatness of God's power, we don't flinch in the face of displays of earthly power.

But there's an even greater reason that Paul wants us to know this power that God has, this power that God displayed. He wants us to know it because it gives us an assurance that he who began a good work in us has the power to complete it to the day of Jesus Christ.

Christ. It gives us the assurance to know that from election to glorification, God can and will bring it to pass.

I like the way P.T. O'Brien writes this to explain why God wants us to know the greatness of his power.

[42:03] He writes, Paul has piled up equivalents because he wants to convince his readers that God's power working on behalf of believers is incomparable and able to bring them to final salvation.

Brothers and sisters, anyone who ever belonged to God through Jesus Christ who is lost is an indictment on his power.

But he loses none of his. And he displays his power to tell us no one can broke my power. No one can contest my power.

What he starts, he will finish. God will be able to do it. He will be to him. He will ever separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

That is our assurance. And when we think of these Ephesian believers living in this wealthy city, they were the scum of the earth.

[43:24] They were the rejects. They were the ones who were looked down upon. And God tells them, not only are you my prized possession, but he says, I have all power.

The power displays that you see around you, they are illusions. I have all power. And ultimately, I have the power to finish what I've started.

Brothers and sisters, this is what God wants us to see and to grasp. about his power. Not to show off, not to draw attention to ourselves, but to assure us that he who started it will finish it.

He will present us faultless before his presence with great joy. And nothing can hinder him. Nothing can stop him.

Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. I'm grateful to Peter O'Brien for his insights into verses 22 to 23.

[44:40] It is a very, it is something that I would left to myself, easily read over. But in verses 22 to 23, Paul tells us that as a display of God's power, he has set all things under Christ's feet, and then he tells us that the church is Christ's body, over which Christ is the head.

it's easy to miss that as the body of Christ, and the feet would be on the body, that he's saying that in his powerful rearrangement of things, he has placed all things under the feet of Christ, and he says that we are the body of Christ, and Christ is the head of the church, which is his body.

just think about that for a moment. Allow that to settle in, and think about God's power, not our position, because the body is nothing without the head.

The head is essential and directs and orders the body in so many ways. As the body, we're nothing without Christ.

He is the source and the supply of the vital life that we need. And this fullness that is being referred to here is not fullness in and of ourselves.

[46:20] It's not an active fullness. It is a passive fullness. And the sense that Christ fills all in all speaks to his complete sovereignty, his universal sovereignty, his reign over all things, meaning that there is no part of God's creation over which Christ's reign does not have sway.

Paul prays that God will give us the spirit to see this. And friends, we all know that when we see differently, we walk differently.

Well, the Apostle Paul has now concluded his explanation of our great salvation coming to the end of chapter 1, which focuses on God and how he brought it about.

God. He told us that God started it in election before the foundation of the world, and he assures us that God will complete it.

He has sealed us with the power of the Holy Spirit, and he has the power to bring it to ultimate and final completion. In chapter 2, the Apostle Paul turns his attention to us.

[47:51] He turns his attention to us and to the condition in which God found us when God, in a time-space world, decided to save us.

When God decided to bring to pass what he determined before the foundation of the world, Paul helps us to see the condition that God found us in in chapter 2.

We'll pick up with chapter 2 next week, and I pray that you will join us for that. Let's pray together. Amen. Father, we bow our hearts before you this morning, and Lord, we join with the Apostle Paul, and we say, send your spirit.

Send your spirit of revelation and wisdom, and open the eyes of our hearts that we might see and understand the hope to which you have called us.

Help us to see and understand how we are the riches of your inheritance in Christ, and help us to understand the greatness of your power towards those who believe.

[49:07] But even this morning, in this moment, work in our hearts, open our eyes, and may we live in the light of what we see by your spirit.

Lord, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.