

Ephesians 1:15-23

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[0:01] Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning. In Christ's name, Amen. Please be seated. Good morning, everyone. Good morning, good morning, good morning.

It's really nice to see you. My name is Aaron. If you are new to the church, and a lot of people join sort of early September, let me tell you what the vision of our church is.

We desire to be a community of contrast, gripped by the gospel of grace, sharing Jesus with our city.

And one of the questions that will come out of that vision statement is how do we actually become gripped by the gospel? And I'm hoping this sermon will help answer that question. So we are in Ephesians.

We're doing a series in Ephesians. And what that means is that we're basically systematically going through the book section by section. Ephesians was a letter written by a guy called Paul, an early church leader, written to a church in a place called Ephesus.

[1:03] Now, let me give you 30 seconds on Ephesus. So Ephesus is in modern-day Turkey. It was a metropolis. It was a big place for back in the days.

Estimates, 100, maybe 200,000 people. It was wealthy. It was a city that was saturated by religion. One of their big claims to fame was they had the temple of Artemis there, which is a Greek goddess, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

And the population took this stuff very, very seriously. They were preoccupied by the supernatural, by the occult, by magic.

It played into their everyday life. Now, in Ephesus was a little church, a little Christian church. Paul had actually spent a couple of years in Ephesus, quite a while before writing this letter to them.

And he planted a church there, and you can read about that in Acts 19. And the church was seemingly doing pretty well. So now let me ask you a question. How would you, if you live far away from this church, how would you pray for them?

[2:12] What would you pray for? What would you ask the Lord for? I ask this because our reading today is a prayer. So let's get into it.

So we're jumping into chapter one, verses 15 to 23. And just a reminder, last week, verses one to 14, was a hymn. It was a hymn of praise.

So if this is chapter one, first half is a hymn of praise. The second half is a prayer. And Paul starts by saying this in verse 15.

He says, I've heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards the saints. And I don't cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. And then we get to the content of the prayer.

But we'll just pause here for a moment. As I said before, the church is apparently doing pretty good. They have a reputation. They have a strong faith. They love each other. They're living out what they believe.

[3:12] And Paul is grateful for them. And there's authenticity there, it seems. God's work is on track. And he wants to get behind this. He wants to get behind this work. And the way he gets behind that is through prayer.

So what does he actually pray though? Friends, the guts of it is probably verse 17 and 18. He says this, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation and in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know, that you may know something.

We'll get to that something in a second. But he prays that the Holy Spirit would open their eyes. That's the big request. I've preached hundreds of sermons at St. John's.

And I start every sermon with the same prayer. It's basically, Lord, open our heart to hear your word this morning.

So it's very similar to what Paul is saying here. And I pray that because I believe that we are naturally resistant to God. And the only way we know anything about the Lord is because the Holy Spirit has opened our hearts to hear it.

[4:32] So Paul prays that their eyes would be opened to know something. So what exactly does he want them to know? And the answer is in verses 18 to 23, but I'll summarize it for you now because it's quite dense.

But here's the summary. Here's the rest of it. Basically, it's this. He prays that their eyes would be opened to the hope, the riches, and the power they have in Christ.

The hope, the riches, and the power they have in Christ. Essentially, he's saying, what you have in Christ is extraordinary. And I want you to grow into it. I want you to realize more of what you have in Christ.

And what's really interesting, I think, about this is that Paul ignores their particular situation. He doesn't pray, mention any particular aspect of their ministry, which is the kind of thing we would pray for, which is fine.

But he ignores the particularities of their situation. And he says, you're rich in Christ, but you don't fully see it. Holy Spirit, help them to see it.

[5:35] My kids think I'm rich. And I know they think I'm rich because of what they ask me for.

So, at Christmas time, we ask our kids for a list. Give us a list of the things you want. And one of my kids last year, and I have permission to tell this story, by the way.

One of my kids last year sent me a list the approximate total was \$6,000. One of the big items on that list was a Gucci watch worth about 4K.

My kids think I'm rich. But here's the thing. I actually don't mind. I don't mind that. I actually kind of like the fact that they think that we can provide for them.

That they say to themselves, my dad can pull this off. You know? That they don't have a scarcity mindset when it comes to their parents.

[6:50] And part of me likes that. The issue, of course, is that my kids think I'm rich, and I'm not. Right? Friends, I wonder if sometimes we have the opposite attitude towards God.

That He is rich towards us, and we don't believe it, or we don't realize it. My kids think I'm rich. I'm not. God is rich towards us, and we don't believe it all the time.

So Paul says to the Ephesians, you're doing great, but there's more. You could be experiencing more power and more hope.

And I love this, because it's so easy for us to settle, isn't it? To settle, to cruise in our faith, to kind of like find your level, you know, find your lane. And sometimes even maybe sort of giving up on a particular sin or a particular anxiety.

And Paul prays, open their eyes, open their eyes, that they may experience more of the riches of faith that they have in Christ. Folks, I don't care how much of a super Christian you are and how involved you are.

[8:03] There is more. There are depths you haven't plumbed. There is power you have not tapped into. There is hope. There is hope that you haven't realized.

So pray that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to these riches, so you can experience more of what it is to be in Christ. Okay. Where are we in this sermon?

We're kind of around verse 18 here. So let's dig into some of the details, okay? So Paul prays, open their eyes.

To what? To hope, to riches, to power that they have in Christ. And that's verses 19 to 23. So I want to talk about those things. Hope, riches, power.

Let's start with hope. So the second half of verse 18. Have in their eyes of their hearts enlightened that they may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

[9:01] But they know what is the hope. What does that mean? What kind of hope are we talking about here? It's actually lots of things, I think. I'll tell you what it's not though.

He's not saying, I hope they become more positive people. You know, their temperament changes. It's not that. It's not, God, I hope you do something good for me, like find me a spouse or help me with my debt or whatever it is.

It's not that. I think there's a specific kind of Christian hope that Paul has in mind. And I think it has to include the hope of heaven. That God has a destination for you.

That's eternity with him. So it's not, you know, it's not, again, it's not optimism. It's not like give them a hope that they think, oh, everything will work out pretty good. No, it's like, it's really believing. God has promised heaven and Christ's death and resurrection has secured that for me and God is going to get me there and I can trust in that. Because if you, if that's in your bones, if the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to that, it shapes how you live now.

[10:05] See, Christian hope frees us from making this world ultimate. You know, you might never get to go to Paris. You know, that's okay. You might never be physically fulfilled in every way you want to be or ever financially really secure.

You don't have to win in this life because this is not all there is. There's so much more and God wants you to have that hope. I read something this morning I thought was really good.

It says this, it says, the more real heaven becomes to us, the more real heaven becomes to us, the less we need this present world to be heaven.

See, Paul prays, open your eyes, open their eyes that may live in that kind of hope that God has a specific destination for me and it is wonderful beyond our imagination.

Okay, so that's the first one. Okay, let's keep going now. We've talked about hope. So, verse 18, the full verse 18 now. Having their eyes, have their hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

[11:14] What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. So that's what we're talking about now. The riches part. What does that mean? Riches and inglorious inheritance.

What does that mean? Here's the big idea. The inheritance, and who's it for? It's God's inheritance. What's the inheritance? It's us. We are the inheritance.

We are God's inheritance. And that means you are of great value to your heavenly father. You are a treasure to him.

God chose you and he treasures you. And if you got that into your bones, I mean, how would that change the way you view yourself?

I mean, so much of our value is tied up into looks and career and usefulness. I think that's a big one. Usefulness. What others think of us. Imagine if the eyes of your hearts were opened to see the immeasurable value you have to God.

[12:18] Imagine if you really knew that, how much God delights in you. I mean, this is something we can all grow in, I think. We can all ask the Holy Spirit to help us with this.

Otherwise, your worth will be very unhealthily tethered to all these expectations. And that's going to suck all the life out of your life. We have a synod coming up in a couple of weeks, a month and a bit, I think.

Synod is like our big AGM. AGM. And when you go there, you get to meet all these other ministers from around the country. It's wonderful. Most of the other churches in Canada are staffed by just one person, just one minister and that's it.

So when you go there, like everyone you meet is a boss. They're all the boss of their churches.

Almost everyone's a rector. So I'd go there and I'm meeting people like, hey, how are you?

What's your name? My name's Larry. I'm the rector of whatever, St Anglicans and Calgary or something. And it's a great name, by the way. And somebody would say to me, oh, what do you do?

[13:30] I'm like, oh, I'm in like middle management, I guess. Technically, technically, technically, technically, I'm actually upper middle management, but it's an incredible story, my life.

Honestly, I should write a book. Anyway, so I, you know, every, I go to Synod and everyone I meet is a boss and for years, I did feel, you know what it was?

Is I'd meet people and they're, you know, running all these churches and the devil would whisper in my ear and he would say, gee, you're underperforming, aren't you, Aaron?

You know, look at all these guys. They're all bosses. Where are you on the hierarchy? You know, you're not as good. Here's the thing, and it's not rocket science, friends, do you know what I did?

Is I brought it to Jesus. I bring it to Jesus and he healed my heart and I know he delights in what I do and I know some of you carry insecurity around career and stuff like that.

[14:46] Folks, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see how the Lord sees you and delight in that. Okay, let's keep moving, all right?

Here's what we've done. We've talked about the hope that perhaps is unrealized. You want the Holy Spirit to help you with that. We've talked about the riches of his glorious inheritance and how God loves you, loves you, loves you, delights in you.

finally, verse 19, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe according to the working of his great might?

There's a lot of power language in this section here. The immeasurable greatness of his power towards us. Okay, what a line. But what does it mean? What does it mean? Okay, to help us understand that, what Paul does is after he says that, he gives us three or four examples of power. He goes, God directs his power towards you. Let me tell you how powerful that power is. And that's verses 20 to 23. It's the power possessed by God that is direct towards us is the power that raised Christ from the dead.

[15:57] It's the power that seated Christ at the right hand of God. It's the power that is above every rule, above every dominion, above every name.

Not only in this age, but the age to come. It's power that is everlasting. And in verse 21, it says, it's power that put all things under Christ's feet, which means Christ's jurisdiction over the whole universe.

God made that happen. That's the kind of power that is directed towards you that can transform your life. Do you know this power?

Not just in theory, but do you know it in practice? Or friends, do you suspect that your weakness, are you afraid that your weakness and your anxiety and your sin is beyond the transformative power of God?

Does that not sound ludicrous when I say it like that? And if you think it is beyond the transformative power of God, it's because you haven't grasped what happened on the cross.

[17:06] And you don't fully understand what it means that Christ reigns. Can I remind you today, we don't celebrate the memory of Christ. We're not just doing that.

We're celebrating what He's doing right now, reigning over all of us. Okay, I'm going to wrap this up. So remember I told you about this watch.

This Gucci watch that my daughter wanted for Christmas last year. Folks, I bought it for her. Now, I didn't spend \$4,000, but I did spend hours and hours and hours scouring the grey market trying to find a really used one, super cheap, and I did in Japan.

Found it in Japan, had it shipped over. A fraction of the cost. She wears it every day. Folks, I did that. Sorry, this is such a stupid thing to get emotional about.

I wanted her to know that her dad can pull off something miraculous. And I know it's a really silly example, but folks, I want you to know your heavenly father can pull off miraculous things in your life and he wants to.

[18:32] It's his desire to do that. He can transform your life. He has immeasurable riches and immeasurable power and he loves you more than you can know. And the more you understand that, the more your life will change and the more peace you'll have, the more courage you'll have.

But remember that understanding, it is a gift from the Holy Spirit. You cannot think your way into this. I just have one action point for you. I'm just going to finish with this. Folks, as you pray and you pray about all the things you need to pray about in your life, which is wonderful, would you pray that the Holy Spirit would open your eyes to all that God has for you.

Amen.