

1 Introduction

Last time I spoke to you we made a start on looking at the second half of **Ephesians 1**, specifically **1:15-23**. That section of the chapter contains a prayer from Paul, a prayer which follows the pattern of thanksgiving followed by petition where Paul seeks specific things for the Ephesian believers. He gave thanks to God for their faith and love before asking God to give them the wisdom and revelation that they needed to know Him better. Today I want us to look at the points that Paul prays for in **1:18-19a**; that is, that the Ephesians may be enlightened and know the hope of their calling, the riches of the glorious inheritance that awaits them and finally God's incomparably great power.

2 Enlightenment

In the opening part of his prayer, Paul has been giving thanks to God for the faith and love possessed and displayed by the Ephesian believers. In Paul's eyes they truly fulfilled Jesus' command in **John 13:34** when He told His disciples "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Paul now moves on in his prayer to bring his requests for them to God. These prayers are sometimes referred to as prayers of supplication or intercession or petition. Whichever description we use these are prayers where Paul makes requests to God on behalf of the Ephesians. There are four things in particular that Paul wants for these followers of Christ. The first is that they may be enlightened so that they may know more about God. That word "enlightened" has various meanings although it could be understood it as meaning to be educated or to become more knowledgeable or more informed about something; in this instance God Himself. Last time I spoke to you I quoted John Stott who said: "*the essence of his prayer for them is that you may know (1:18)*"¹ Stott then added "*We must not overlook this emphasis. Growth in knowledge is indispensable to growth in holiness.*"² For our relationship with Christ to grow it is important that we get to know Him better. That may sound a bit of a daunting task until we remember that the Holy Spirit is there to help us in getting to know the Lord more and more as He opens up Scripture for us and helps us in our prayers.

It's interesting to note that Paul prays that our "*heart may be enlightened*" (**1:18**). When we talk about the heart we frequently think of it from an emotional point of view. One of the problems that Paul faced in the Corinthian church was that they relied too much on their feelings, their emotions which is possibly how we see the role of the heart in our faith. Paul told them that he couldn't take God's truth and plant it in their minds because their emotions constantly got in the way. The American Pastor John MacArthur suggests that "*Instead of their emotions being controlled by God's truth, their emotions distorted their understanding of His truth.*"³ That is why Paul prayed that the Ephesians may be enlightened. He had told the Colossian believers to "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*" (**Colossians 3:16a**) and that is exactly what he wanted for the Ephesian believers. Letting God's Word dwell in us helps us to grow in our faith and therefore draw nearer to Christ as each day passes. Now I

¹ Stott, John, *The Message of Ephesians*, Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, 1984, electronic version

² Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*

³ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Ephesians*, Moody Publishers, Chicago: 1986, page 45

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do realise that Scripture isn't always easy to understand and we may sometimes be a bit confused by what it has to say, but that is why we have the Holy Spirit with us to help us in our studies and to illuminate God's Word for us. Amazing things happen when we have the Scriptures opened up to us. You may recall that following the crucifixion the risen Lord joined two very sad disciples as they walked to Emmaus. As they walked the Lord opened up Scripture to them especially those passages concerning Him. It was only a while later when Jesus took bread and they saw His hands that they realised Who He was and "*Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'*" (Luke 24:31-32) That is the enlightenment we need and it is what Paul is praying for on behalf of the Ephesian believers. Thinking back to emotions for a moment, it's interesting that many of the more modern churches appeal to the emotions with their worship music and soft, socially based sermons. A recent survey by the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches showed that those churches that were growing were those that preached Jesus Christ and based their sermons on Scripture. That is the only way for churches to grow and for Christians to draw nearer to Christ; preach Christ crucified and not simply appeal to the emotions.

3 Hope of Calling

Paul wants the Ephesian believers to be enlightened so that they may understand and know three things: "*the hope to which he has called you*" (1:18), "*the riches of his glorious inheritance*" (1:18) and "*his incomparably great power*" (1:19).

We'll begin with that thought of hope. The word hope is very interesting since as a verb it can mean to believe or to look forward to. As a noun it can mean a belief or an expectation or a longing. Many of us tend to have hopes that are for various reasons forlorn. We hope to win the lottery; we hope to live in a mansion in the country; we hope to own a Ferrari one day! Those are expectations that will almost certainly never be realised. The hope that Paul is talking about here is an expectation that will be delivered. This hope may seem mind-blowing to us but Paul is reminding us that we have been called by God from before time began and as a result we have the expectation of spending all eternity with the Lord in paradise. If we have any doubts surely that thought of spending eternity in paradise should give us a clue as to how much God really values us! Paul prayed that they would truly understand the magnificent truths of our election, predestination, adoption, redemption, forgiveness and sealing by the Holy Spirit. It is all that that makes this hope very special and it is made special by God. Paul told the Romans: "*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*" (Romans 15:13) This hope is so special that Jeremiah was able to say: "... *blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence.*" (Jeremiah 17:7 - NLT). The hope that we have comes to us as a result of Jesus dying on the cross of Calvary to pay for our sins. When we repent of our sins and come to faith in Jesus as Saviour amongst many other things, we receive this hope and we know that it isn't a forlorn hope but a guaranteed expectation for our future. Remember that the Apostle tells us that we have been called to this hope by God Himself; what could be better.

4 Riches of Inheritance

The second thing Paul prays for is that we may know the “*riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*” (1:18b). I spoke about these riches in an earlier sermon in this series so today I will only expand a little on what I said then. I suspect that many of us would like to be rich with money in the bank so that we don't have to worry about the cost of living crisis or paying our energy bills. And it is the thought of being financially rich that many associate with being wealthy. However, there are other ways in which we can be rich; in fact as Christians we are very wealthy because of the inheritance that awaits us in the fullness of time.

As we live our daily lives following Christ we endeavour to draw nearer to Him through reading Scripture and coming before Him in prayer. However, we frequently spend our time thinking of the problems that surround us and occupy our mind each day which means that we rarely give thought to heaven and the glories to come when we receive our spiritual inheritance. I suspect that many of us probably don't think too often about heaven and what is to come when we eventually receive that inheritance. Right now many of us are facing problems with regard to the cost of living crisis, energy costs, housing problems and health issues. Despite great success in some areas the NHS is facing increasing waiting lists and A&E waiting times. Illegal immigration is causing major problems socially, logistically and financially. Consequently there are times when these concerns threaten to overwhelm us. Living in the modern world with all that is happening can be dispiriting and can drag us down. Despite all that it is important to our spiritual lives and our relationship with Christ that we spend time contemplating heaven and our future life there with Him. Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, who I've quoted before and will quote again, says this: “*When men forget the next world and concentrate only on this present life, this world becomes a kind of living hell, with confusion and lawlessness and immorality and vice rampant.*”⁴ Does that sound like the world in which we live? The good Doctor made that comment in a sermon in the autumn of 1954 and he could well have spoken those words yesterday since the truths he stated then still apply today.

It may seem to be easier said than done but we can overcome these worries not only by walking closer with Christ each day but also by looking ahead and contemplating the glories that await us. When writing to the Corinthians Paul hinted at what was to come when he quoted **Isaiah 64:4** and told them, “*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him*” (**1 Corinthians 2:9**) In this passage in **Ephesians 1** Paul also looks ahead when he talks in **1:18b** of “*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*” that we will receive when the appropriate day comes. In doing so Paul is offering us a brief glimpse of heaven and the riches that are waiting us there. At such times we as Christians should try to focus on Jesus Christ and the faith that we have in Him as we draw nearer to Him and seek His daily help. Whilst that is commendable it does mean that many of us don't always focus on heaven and what is to come. We frequently sing a well-known hymn with the first line that says “*Blessed assurance Jesus is mine*”, the second line then continues “*O what a foretaste of glory*

⁴ Lloyd Jones, Martyn, *God's Ultimate Purpose - Exposition of Ephesians One*, Banner of Truth : Edinburgh, 1978, page 383

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divine". We happily sing that opening line but then tend to forget the second line and what it means. Knowing Jesus does give us a foretaste of what is to come since He gives us peace beyond understanding, assurance of forgiveness and an eternal future plus a growing love for one another along with many other gifts. In knowing Jesus in that way we are able to get just a brief glimpse of the riches that await us. Not only do we get this wonderful foretaste but the inheritance that awaits us is guaranteed by the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

In the same sermon that I quoted from earlier, Dr Lloyd Jones went on to add, "*The world is too much with us, and we tend to think of salvation too much in terms of present experience rather than in the light of the glory which waits us. This contemplation of the glory is the high road to holiness.*"⁵ That is why in knowing Jesus and being sealed by the Holy Spirit we have this foretaste; of the glories to come, of heaven and all that awaits us. Paul knew about the problems that people face and the suffering that occurs which is why he wrote to the Romans and told them, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18) When we think about suffering there can be no greater suffering than to be stoned to death. Shortly before he suffered that fate Stephen fell to his knees and, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven "*and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'*" (Acts 7:55-56) That glory is what awaits us when we receive our rich inheritance on that glorious day.

It's important for us to understand that this inheritance is available to all who believe. In 1:18 Paul prays that we may know about the "*riches of his glorious inheritance*" but adds the words "*in the saints*". The NLT translates this as "*his holy people*" whilst the ESV and the KJV join with the NIV in talking of "*in the saints*". It may seem a strange phrase but the meaning is quite simple. The inheritance that Paul is praying about isn't for just a few but for all those who believe in Christ as Lord and Saviour. No one is left out and we all have that glorious inheritance to look forward to. Paul makes reference to this in his second letter to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 4:8 Paul is obviously looking forward to receiving his inheritance and writes, "*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*" That is all part of the same inheritance that we as believers will also receive.

5 God's Power

The third part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians focuses on God's great and incredible power. He prays that they may begin to understand the great power of God so that they may be able to both know it and experience it in their daily lives. As with thinking about heaven and the glories to come, I suspect that many of us don't really give too much thought to God's great power. We think of His mercy, His forgiveness, His unconditional love and His amazing grace but tend to forget His almighty power. However, this is God we are talking about; He created the Universe, He created mankind and best of all He raised Jesus from the grave.

⁵ Lloyd Jones, page 385

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It is important for us to understand that we need to know of God's power since it is vital to ensuring that both the hope and the inheritance that Paul has also prayed about may come to fruition. Without God's power neither of those things would happen. In **1:19-20** Paul describes this power as being "... *like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms*". When Peter preached that great sermon on the Day of Pentecost he quoted **Joel 2:28-32** before telling the crowd: "*Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **But God** raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*" (**Acts 2:22-24**). Those "men" hung Christ on a cross and probably thought they'd got rid of Him once and for all; after all who had ever heard of a dead man coming back to life and Jesus was definitely dead when He was taken down from the cross. However, they failed to consider God's reaction and that is why we should note those two words "*but God*". It was mankind who had Jesus nailed to the cross thinking they could get rid of Him once and for all. But God used His great power to do something unprecedented and amazing by raising Jesus from the grave. Only God with His great power could achieve such a thing.

When we experience problems in life do we think of God first, last or at all? If we turn to Him and remember that we have His power to help us then all sorts of wonderful things happen. God's power is so enormous and beyond our comprehension that we struggle to visualise or understand just what He is able to do for us. Paul wanted the Ephesian believers to both know and experience that great power in their daily lives and that great power is available to us when we come to faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Now I'm not saying that we will be able to raise people from the dead or move mountains but I do believe that God's power will help us to deal with life's daily problems. For those with families He will help with raising them especially given that right now the traditional family is under attack from any number of quarters. The various LGBT+ pressure groups do not like the Biblical family as it doesn't reflect their views on sexuality. Alongside them we see the transgender community pushing and pushing for their ethos and philosophy to be taught in schools to children as young as 5. The so-called "woke" movement are also working to change the English language and how we use it. We can't defeat these groups on our own but we can with the power of God behind us. Just remember those powerful words "*but God*"; He is the One in control and it is through His great power that we can overcome these and many other difficulties.

Notice that at the end of the sentence in **1:19** Paul reminds us that this power is only available "*for us who believe*". John MacArthur suggests that "*Not only that, but it is all the power we are ever offered or could ever have. There could be no more, and it is foolish and presumptuous to ask for more.*"⁶ MacArthur goes on to add "*When we are saved we receive*

⁶ MacArthur, page 46

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*all of God's grace and all of His power, and that assures us of the realisation of our eternal hope."*⁷

Paul continues with his thoughts on God's power in **1:20b-23** and I intend to look at those verses more closely next time. For now I want us to just think anew about God's great power and the effect it can have in our spiritual lives.

6 Conclusion

Paul's prayer for his friends in Ephesus is both deep and heartfelt. He very obviously loves the believers in Ephesus and wants them to grow in their faith and draw nearer to Christ. To achieve that he wants them to be enlightened to know more about God which leads him to pray that they may know and understand more about the hope of their calling, the riches of the inheritance that awaits them and God's great power that is available to them as followers of Christ.

This prayer applies to us just as much as it did to the Ephesians. We too need to be enlightened to know more about God. We all need to read and re-read these verses to enable us to be enlightened just as Paul wants us to be.

⁷ MacArthur, page 46