

Hope, Riches and Power

Ephesians 1:18-23

Turn with me this morning to Ephesians 1 we will be looking at verses 18-23. When we last left off we identified the difference between one who knows a lot about God, and one who experiences God first hand. It is the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge. Paul prayed for the Ephesian people and asked that their head knowledge would connect with the heart and asked that God would send them the Spirit of wisdom and understanding – the work of the Holy Spirit which we found in **Isaiah 11:2**:

And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.

The connection between the heart and the mind is not simply a matter of effort on our part – it is the work of the Holy Spirit. He takes the word of God and breathes life into it so that it becomes living and real and something that connects with our heart – our passions, our motivation. **1 John 2:27** tells us:

But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you all things, and what he teaches is true – it is not a lie. So continue in what he has taught you, and continue to live in Christ.

Each and every time we open the scriptures and study it, revelation is not dependent how many hours I put into studying it, or how many resources I have to dissect the text, but how open, how submissive and how hungry am I for God's Holy Spirit to show me more about the God that I serve. I am not saying that we neglect good studying habits, but without the input of the Holy Spirit to connect the head knowledge with the heart, the truth we learn is useless.

I have heard many state, but the Bible is so hard to understand or read. I say it is a matter of desire and openness to the Spirit of wisdom and understanding (The Holy Spirit). The reality is that on our own, we would never be able to understand anything. We wouldn't be able to understand Salvation if it wasn't for God drawing us unto himself and enlightening our minds with the Good News.

The church in Ephesus was a church that had experienced a conversion experience. They were once a pagan people who worshipped other gods and had now dedicated themselves to the work of Christ. They showed their genuine faith through their love for other Christians.

But how many of us remember that when we first became a Christian how exciting and fresh things were, but with the constant bombardment of life's circumstances that newness began to wear off? It happens, and Paul saw that even though the Ephesian

church was off to a good start, that there was the danger of apathy and a lack of motivation.

That is why he prays that God would grant them further insight through the Spirit of wisdom and understanding so that their faith doesn't remain cold and stagnant. He then goes on and prays for three specific areas of revelation for the church and that is what we will be looking at this morning. Read along with me **Ephesians 1:18-23**:

I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious future he has given to his people. I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. This the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader of anything else in this world or in the world to come. And God has put all things under the authority of Christ, and he gave him this authority for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence.

Paul prays for three areas of revelation – the future hope, the wealth and purpose of his people, and the incredible power given for the church. Just as Paul has stated in verse 3 “spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms”, things we can't see with the natural eye but do exist. First Paul prays for:

1. Revelation of hope

Have you ever been in a situation where everything felt hopeless. There was nothing to look forward to. Even though the church in Ephesus was living out their Christian faith in love, they had seemed to fall into a rut. Sometimes living a Christian life can be very methodical and monotonous and it can be lived without thinking about what is in store for us in the future.

For the Ephesians nothing seemed to be changing and they became discouraged and that is why Paul prays that they would be able to not only know about their future but experience the hope that comes with it right at that moment. **Paul defines hope for us in Romans 8:18-25**. He tells the church:

*Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later.
(verse 18)*

That no matter what we may feel right now, or what we may be going through, there will be a day that will be worth it all. There's a song written by Tommy Walker entitled “It will be worth it all.” In his lyrics he writes:

It will be worth it all some day. For all the glory for those who chose the narrow way. When they finally see his face and feel his warm embrace, it will be worth it

all that day. I can hear the angels celebrate as they call my name, I can hear the father say well done my good and faithful servant. Well done

Everything that we have gone through in this life pales in comparison to what God has in store for us. In **1 Corinthians 2:9** Paul quotes **Isaiah 64:4** and **65:17** and tells us:

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”

We can't even begin to imagine what he has in store for us. Then Paul goes on the Romans 8 and tells us in verses **19-21**:

For all of creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God's curse. All creation anticipates the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

Here we find an accurate description of what scientists call the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the law of entropy, that law that states that everything the universe is running down, that it was once wound up but now everything is declining and deteriorating. That one day that law will stop and you and I will no longer be deteriorating but a new level of wholeness. That is what Paul goes on the describe in verses **22-25**:

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit as a foretaste for future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering. We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us. Now that we are saved we eagerly look forward to this freedom. For if you already have something, you don't need to hope for it.

I like those last words, “If you already have something, you don't need to hope for it.” The hope that Paul is talking about here isn't simply wishful thinking, it is simply a waiting. It is absolutely guaranteed that one day we will live in a whole new creation and will be men and women who will mount up with wings as eagles and whose souls will run and not grow weary, and will not faint.

But we think that this hope is something that will happen in the future, but church it is something that is happening in us right now. Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 4:16-17**:

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!

God is doing something new in you right now and making you into his new creation. When I look at Paul's words in this verse where he talks about his present troubles that won't last long, I realize that Paul was a man who was beaten with rods three times, he had received thirty nine lashes five times, he had been shipwrecked three times, he had been stoned once and left for dead, he spent many sleepless nights and many days without food or drink, and also was persecuted by false teachers.

To him this list was a troubles that won't last long, would seem awfully long to you and I. He didn't get stuck in the trouble but focused on the immeasurable great glory that awaits him. All of it was a teachable moment. A lesson in patience, a lesson in love, a lesson in trust, a lesson how to handle pressure. It is an opportunity for God, by his power, to make us new – people who learn to do things differently for the sake of eternal character and growth. **Life is no longer a series of haphazard events with no meaning, but an opportunity for God to make us a new creation, preparing us for the immeasurable great glory in heaven.**

So Paul prays for the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding to help the Ephesians understand the wonderful future that is ours. Paul goes on and prays that they realize what a rich and glorious inheritance that they have and that they are.

2. Revelation of wealth and purpose.

What Paul is wanting the church to understand here is not only that God is our inheritance but that we are God's inheritance as well. We talked about this before, about the fact that when God sees us he sees us as the apple of his eye, his prized possession. But his desire is to see us open ourselves to be used by him, for us to experienced fulfillment in life beyond our wildest dreams. But if we are afraid to let God uses us, we will fall into a rut, and that our Christian walk becomes mundane and boring.

That is why Paul challenges the church in **Romans 12:1**:

And so, dear Christian friends, I plead with you to give your bodies to God. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will accept. When you think of what he has done for you, is this too much to ask?

You see when we talk about wealth in this world, people automatically think of material things. But I find that experiences are also a mark of wealth. Especially those experiences when God did incredible things, and from time to time I can reflect back and see how fortunate I have been. Seeing and experiencing God using me to make a mark on this world is truly a wealthy experience. God longs for us to step out and let him use us.

You may say, "But I am waiting for him to tell me to do something." And the reality is that God has already given you permission to reach out to those around you, to do good things to people in actions of love, to leave his mark on this world through your life.

Finally, this morning in our text, Paul prays for understanding of the incredible power of God.

3. Revelation of Power

Verse 19 tells us “to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. Not only did Paul want them to understand their future and their wealth but also the power that makes it all possible. Paul saw the possibility that the church in Ephesus was starting to allow fear to come bring insecurity and unsettledness in the church. They were afraid of their neighbors, afraid of failure and afraid of ridicule and persecution. **The answer to fear is power.** The minute you feel a sense of adequate power, you lose fear.

This describes us as well. A friend makes a statement and our faith turns to fear. Things aren't turning out the way we want them to and faith turns to fear. And the reality of heaven tells us that not only do we have power made available to us, but specifically the same power that raise Christ from the dead. Resurrection power. Paul clarifies that for us in verse 19-20.

It isn't the strength of another person, it isn't the power of an educated mind, but power that is able to take death and turn it into life. **Resurrection power works best in a cemetery.** It is a power that is not limited by natural laws. It is a power that takes the impossible and makes all things possible. In the areas of our lives where we have become dead and lifeless, that is where we need God's power to rejuvenate and breath life into us once again.

All things now become possible, not because we are able, but because God is able to do exceedingly more than we could ever ask. And church, God is the only one who is capable of breathing life into his church. Our part is to be willing and open vessels through whom God can use. Church success is not about a well planned out program, but it's about allow Christ's power to come into contact with a world that needs life.

Paul wanted the Ephesian Church to understand the incredible hope that they have, he wanted them to understand the riches in Christ and the wealth of what he is doing in each of our lives, and he wants us to understand that the power made available to us is not one limited by natural laws but is capable of doing the impossible – taking something dead and bringing it back to life. In our spirits we are experiencing the reversal of decay only because of Jesus Christ. That is the first installment of more that God has in store for us in the future.

My prayer for all of us is that the Spirit of wisdom and understanding will enlighten these same facts, so that as we find ourselves becoming stagnant and fearful and discouraged, that we may remember the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms. Let's Pray!