



We've been looking at the opening chapters of the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus which he himself planted on his third missionary journey. It was a church much like our own in that it was placed in a very strategic location. Ephesus was a busy port city; a great commercial center attracting people from all over the Roman empire. It was also the center of the worship of Diana and her magnificent temple.

Paul wrote to them and the surprising thing is he didn't start out by telling them what to do. Instead he started by telling them who they are. He reminded them when they put their faith in Christ, they were united with Christ; they were placed "in Christ" and thus have a new identity. He wants them to get ahold of that, or he wants that to get a hold of them, before they do anything. This new identity is rooted in six things Paul says are true about us:

- » He chose us
- » He adopted us
- » He redeemed us
- » He revealed the mystery to us
- » He made us his inheritance
- » He sealed us with the Spirit

These are powerful statements. If we really let these things get ahold of us, we'd be different people. We'd live lives that are different. We'd no longer try to find our identity in our career or our clothes or who we know or how well we can do this or that. But to be honest, I see many believers who really don't let these ideas penetrate their hearts and change how they live. It's possible to hear all these wonderful things about our new identity in Christ and agree with all of it and yet somehow never really have it sink in and change the way we think about ourselves.

Why is that? Some of us have been damaged from the past. We've heard negative, shaming messages about our looks, our intelligence or our abilities. Some of us have experienced rejection from the people we should have been able to count on and that's scarred us. Some have had the message drilled into us from a young age that love and significance must be earned. Your self worth is all about your performance. You have to get better grades, hit more home runs or play the violin better than

anyone else in your school. It's very difficult to unlearn those messages when it's been drilled into you since childhood.

Paul understood that, because at the end of 1:14 he stops and asks the question, how is all this stuff going to really sink in for you? You've been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He's lavished his grace on you. But how can we get that to move from your head to your heart? How can that reality sink so deeply in your heart that it begins to change how you live your life?

Paul Prays for Spiritual Enlightenment.

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe (Ephesians 1:15–19a).

The answer is found in Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. That's what he does. Before we look in detail at this prayer, notice a few things about it. Notice how important prayer was to Paul. Over and over again he stresses how he's not stopped praying for them. He says, *"Ever since I heard about your faith... I have not stopped giving thanks for you... I keep asking..."* Prayer wasn't some kind of perfunctory duty for Paul; it was the ongoing work of his life.

The question arises in my mind, what motivates a person to pray like that? Paul tell us. He starts out and says, *"For this reason..."* Whatever that reason was that's what motivated him to pray. He's pointing back to what he just got done talking about. As he thought about all God had done in their lives, all the blessings they had in Christ, he was motivated to pray. It's like these things were fuel for his prayers. Sometimes our prayers for others barely flicker and we need to pour some fuel on them. The way we do that is to consider all God has done in their lives.

That's also why he starts **not** by asking God for anything, but rather by recognizing who he is and all he's already accomplished in their lives. He calls him *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father..."* Then he gives thanks for their *"faith in the*

Lord Jesus Christ” and their *“love for all God’s people.”* God has already begun a work in their lives and he acknowledges that.

This is the bread and butter of being a Christian. Vertically, we put our faith in the Lord Jesus as our Savior. That’s how we begin a relationship with him. When we do that he makes us a part of his family. And so, horizontally, that results in a love for God’s people. Notice it’s love toward *“all God’s people,”* not just some of them. Some are easy to love. They’re beautiful, joyful, intelligent people; everybody likes to be around them. But for Paul their love isn’t based on personality, friendliness, or anything they have to offer. It’s based on the fact that together they belong to the Lord Jesus.

These two things—faith in Jesus and love for God’s people—are basic, but they’re just the beginning. Paul wants more for them and so he goes on and prays for them. But when he does that he doesn’t ask for the kinds of things we normally ask for. I find in my own prayers I focus far too much on the circumstances of life and on asking God to give us things we don’t have. I pray John would get that job he’s applying for. I pray Alice’s doctor appointment would go well. I pray my son gets a good report card.

My daughter teaches in one of our Sunday School classes here at CPC. She asked her class last week what they needed prayer for. One of the little boys in her class raised his hand and said, “My mom needs prayer to stay on her diet. I caught her cheating. She really needs prayer!” Needless to say, I won’t reveal his name!

It’s not wrong to pray for those kinds of things. But we need to learn from Paul to go deeper in our prayer life. What’s he asking for in this prayer? He doesn’t ask that God would give them what they **didn’t** have, but rather that God would reveal to them what they **already** have. He just finished listing all the blessings we have in Christ. But now he prays they’d be enlightened to grasp it all.

Notice a couple of things about this. Notice this enlightenment comes from the Holy Spirit. He’s talked about God the Father. He’s talked about the Lord Jesus. Now he talks about *“the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.”* That’s the Holy Spirit who Paul said earlier has *“marked you with a seal.”* It’s also the Holy Spirit’s job to help you understand the things of God. He’s our teacher. In 1 Cor 2:12 Paul writes, *“What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”* It’s the Spirit’s job to reveal to you all the riches you have in Christ.

Notice also how he does this. He opens *“the eyes of your heart.”* The heart is the control center of your life. It includes your mind, will and emotions. Did you know your heart has eyes? Not physical eyes, but spiritual eyes. We’ve all experienced this to some degree. We’ve had one of the ah-hah moments in which we understand something we didn’t grasp before. Something fuzzy becomes crystal clear to us.

We have a great example of that in the gospel of Luke. Remember the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus? Jesus had been crucified three days earlier and they were crushed by what happened. The risen Lord joins them, but they don’t know who he is. He walks along with them and unfolds to them all the Old Testament Scriptures about the promised Messiah, including his sufferings and his resurrection. It wasn’t until later when he broke bread that it says *“their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”* And then he was gone and they asked themselves, *“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us along the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?”* (Lk 24:32).

You see, not only were their physical eyes opened, but the eyes of their heart were opened also. And when this happened not only did they recognize Jesus but the Scriptures came alive. It’s possible for us to read the Bible and learn all the facts but still not really see the Lord there, not really let it cause your heart to burn within, and not really have it impact the choices we make every day. This is why Paul prays and why we should pray. But let’s get more specific about what he wants us to be able to see and why that’s so important.

That We May Know God.

The first thing he says is he wants them *“to know him better.”* He’s talking about knowing God. We come to know God when we first put our faith in Christ. But just like in any relationship it doesn’t stop there. We all meet people we know we’ll probably never see again, but when we meet God in a personal way that begins a lifelong relationship. As we spend time with him and learn to walk with him in all of life we get to know him better. Again, this is more than just learning information about God.

I can tell you all kinds of things about President Obama. I know he exists. I what he looks like. I know about his background and his family. I know some of the things he believes in that are important to him. But I don’t know him in any kind of personal way. Ironically, I have a friend from this church who recently attended a Presidential prayer breakfast in Washington DC. He got to shake the President’s hand and believe it or not the President asked him where he went to church. My friend told him he went to Central Peninsula Church and the President said, “Say hi to the folks at CPC for me.”

But even with that, we don’t really know him in a personal way. It’s the same way with God. We may believe he exists. We may study theology books and learn about some of his attributes. But that’s just knowing about God. He wants us to know him personally. The Hebrew word for *know* often expressed sexual intimacy. When Genesis says “Adam knew his wife” we know what that means. They weren’t playing Monopoly! And there has to be mutuality in this. To know someone intimately, they must be willing to reveal themselves to us. That’s the great thing—God

wants us to know him intimately. He longs to reveal more of himself to you. He's not hiding.

Our culture tends to be preoccupied with the knowledge of self rather than the knowledge of God. But can we ever truly know ourselves apart from knowing God? Why is that? It's because God knows us better than anyone. God said to Jeremiah, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you"* (Jer 1:4). Jesus said, *"My sheep listen to my voice and I know them"* (Jn 10:27). So when we look outside of ourselves to him who knows us so well, we'll come to know ourselves better as well.

That We May Know the Hope of His Calling.

The second thing he says is he wants them to know the hope of his calling. The Bible talks a lot about our calling. The word *church* is a combination of two Greek words that mean "to call." The church is made up of people God has called. It's not something we earn. In Galatians, Paul says God *"called him by his grace"* (Gal 1:15). But it changes everything about us. Peter wrote *"we've been called out of darkness into his marvelous light"* (1 Pt 5:10). If you're a follower of Christ, you've been called.

Paul says this calling is the source of our hope. We all know how crucial hope is. In chapter 2:12 Paul says apart from Christ we were *"without hope and without God."* I'm not sure you can really live without hope. You can exist, but you can't really live. We go through life and sometimes it feels like things will never change or if they do, they'll change for the worse. The here and now overwhelms us. Our jobs, our schoolwork, our problems; all drain us of hope.

I recently went and saw the movie *The Hunger Games*. I don't recommend it for young kids but it had some valuable things in it. It centers around a lethal contest in which 24 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 are selected and then thrown into a plot of land and told to fight to the finish—literally. Only one survives. In one of the scenes President Snow talks to Seneca Crane and asks, "Why do you think we have a winner?" Crane responds, "What do you mean?" The President appears annoyed and repeats himself, "I mean, why do we have winner?" He then answers his own question: "Hope," he says. "It's the only thing stronger than fear." And then he adds, "A little hope is effective. A lot of hope is dangerous."

If God has called you, you have a lot of hope! This isn't wishful thinking, like, "I hope it's sunny out tomorrow." It's not a delusion to buoy our spirits. The biblical idea of hope is a confident, eager expectation of what God has promised. What is our hope? Romans 5:2 says we *"boast in hope of the glory of God."* This isn't just a hope we'll see God's glory but that we'll be glorified with him! We'll share in his glory! John wrote, *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is"* (1 Jn 3:2). That's a lot of hope

and that kind of hope is dangerous. It rearranges your values. It's threatening to a world view that says, "This is all there is. It's winner take all."

That We May Know the Riches of His Inheritance.

The next thing Paul wants us to see is *"the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people."* Last week we learned not only do we **have** an inheritance in heaven, but we also **are** an inheritance. We're God's inheritance. This is a concept rooted in the Old Testament. For example in Deuteronomy. Moses is praying for Israel and he says to God, *"But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm"* (Dt 9:29).

Paul says, I pray you'd know the glorious riches of his inheritance in you, his people. You're his treasure! Again this has nothing to do with what you've done. The reason God delights in you as his inheritance is because he created you in his image. Among all the things and creatures he created, he only created human beings in his image. If we're wrecks, we're wrecks of something very noble. But he also redeemed us. He bought us at a steep price. He sent his Son to rescue us and restore his image in us. That's why we're his inheritance. God cares about trees and animals and stars and oceans, but he doesn't treasure them like he does people.

Do you feel that way about yourself? Do you see yourself as God's glorious inheritance? Remember, it's not about asking God to give you what you don't have, but asking him to reveal what you already do have, in this case, what you already are. If the eyes of your heart were open to see this, it would change how you feel about yourself. You'd be humbled, but also hold your head a bit higher. You'd find it easier to enter God's presence. You'd be more grateful. And out of that gratitude you'd make choices more honoring of him who made you the apple of his eye.

That We Might Know the Greatness of His Power.

Finally he wants them to see the greatness of his power. He says, I pray that you'd be able to see *"his incomparable great power for us who believe."* We all know God is powerful. But here he says his power is for us; it's a power that's at work in us and through us. He goes and he describes that power in detail.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (verses 19b–23).

Notice he says this is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated him in the heavenlies. This is pointing to the

resurrection and the ascension/enthronement of Jesus. These were the decisive demonstrations of God's power. They point to the two things we feel most powerless over—death and evil. We're mortal; we can't avoid death. We're also fallen; we can't avoid evil. We so often walk through life with a kind of low grade fear that one of those two things are going to get us sooner or later. But here we see we don't have to fear. We don't have to fear death because through the resurrection Jesus conquered death. He said, *"He who believes in me will live even though he dies."*

But we don't have to fear evil either. We don't have to fear evil powers. That's why he says Jesus has been seated *"above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is invoked..."* God has placed all things under his feet. The Ephesians came out of a religious background of fear; fear of hostile spiritual powers. Most of us come out of a background of denial that such powers even exist. But they do, and whether we knew it or not, they ruled us. Paul wants us to know God's power is greater and we no longer need to live in fear!

And neither do we. He also says this power fills not only the universe but it fills the church. Jesus has been made head over everything for the church because the church is his body and we're an expression of his fullness. It strikes me that the fullness of the power of Christ is experienced in the church, in the community of God's people. It's not just an individual thing, but it's communal; we experience it together as God's people.

There's a power at work in you. It's not your own power. As a matter of fact, to really experience this power you have to be emptied of your own power. It just gets in the way. But in him you have power. This isn't something to ask God for; you already have it. So ask him to reveal more of it to you. Ask him to help you get out of the way. Ask him to show you what you're still afraid of and then ask him to reveal how his power can overcome that.

Do you remember a few weeks ago I mentioned the story of Elisha and his servant? I wonder if in this great prayer Paul had that story in mind. The two of them were in a small city one day, surrounded by the armies of Syria. The servant looked out at this vast enemy army with their armed chariots. He was frightened and turned to Elisha and said, "Everything's hopeless! We're surrounded, what can we do?" Elisha said, "Don't be afraid! Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then he prayed, *"Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see"* (2 Kings 6:15-17). And the Lord opened his eyes and he saw the hills full of fiery chariots of God, manned by thousands of angels, and he realized the true situation. This is what we all need. Lord, open our eyes. We're not asking for anything we don't have, rather we're asking that you open our eyes to what we **do** have.

We're visually disabled. Our perspective is distorted. We're bombarded on all sides by false values. We live in a world where the goals are prosperity, security, pleasure, and prestige. Unless we immerse ourselves in God's word, unless the Spirit of God opens the eyes of our heart, we'll be like people watching a 3-D movie without the glasses—we'll miss out on the depth of what God has given us.

So pray! Pray he opens the eyes of our hearts. Pray that the scales are swept from our eyes. Pray that distorted mirrors are smashed and replaced with straight ones.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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