

Ephesians 1:15-19

November 22, 2009

Perhaps it would be good for us to review the prayers that we have studied thus far and a brief overview of the lessons we can learn from them

- The Model Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)
 - o A form or outline by which to pray
 - o Setting the tone that spiritual requests come before physical requests as being of greater primary importance

- 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
 - o Paul's passionate desire to go back to these young believers and help them grow in the faith
 - o Paul's prayer was that they might **"increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men"** (3:12)
 - o Their love should be all-embracing

- Philippians 1:9-11
 - o As he is sitting in a Roman prison cell, the apostle Paul pens the words to this precious church
 - o As you remember, Paul had a fruitful time in Philippi (Lydia and the jailer)
 - o Paul's prayer was **"that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment"** (1:9)
 - o Their love should be discerning

When I am praying, I want to ensure that my prayers are in alignment with God's Word

- Otherwise, I will not see my prayers being answered

Why go through the trouble of praying for something when you *know* that God will not honor it?

- Why pray for something when I know it is outside of God's will for me?

This morning, I want us to turn to the book of Ephesians

We know that as Paul writes this letter, he is in prison

- Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written around the same time in the same set of circumstances
- That is why they are called the "prison epistles"

As Paul begins the epistle of Ephesians, he bursts forth in praise to God (1:3-14)

- We will come back to this in a few minutes, discussing some of the highlights of this eulogy

It is with this praise to God in mind that Paul begins to pray

- Let's look at 1:15, **"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you, and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers"**

Paul commends these believers for their **"faith"** and **"love for all the saints"**

- There has been a frequent repetition of **"love"** throughout the Pauline epistles and prayers
- It is essential in the life of every believer and in every church

We can stop there for a moment and ask if “love” is a regular part of our prayers for others

- Is it important to you to pray for others to display this selfless, sacrificial commitment toward others?
- It was for Paul!

The apostle Paul realizes that the only way that he can recognize anything spiritual and meaningful in the lives of these believers is due to God’s sovereign grace in their lives

- In the words of Philippians 1:6, God has begun the work and He would see it through to the end
- We can’t take credit for anything good in our lives

These believers were demonstrating the fruit of a regenerate lifestyle

- Their faith and love showed that God was at work in their midst

Because the apostle recognized their “faith” and “love,” he did “not cease giving thanks” for them, “while making mention of you in my prayers” (1:15-16)

- This recognition of the spiritual character in their lives prompted Paul to thank God
- It also prompted Paul to pray for them on a regular basis

I think that it is important to mention this simple principle

- When we see the work of God being carried out in someone’s life, do we thank God for it?
- We should be dedicating time in our prayers for thanksgiving for His work in the lives of those that we know

Ephesians 1:3-14 is filled with specific actions that God has taken in the lives of Christians

- Let’s have someone read these verses

Now, let’s highlight some of these tremendous blessings that every Christian enjoys

- He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies (1:3)
- He chose us before the foundation of the world so that we would be holy and blameless (1:4)
- He predestined us as sons through Jesus Christ (1:5)
- He has bestowed grace upon us, for His own glory (1:6)
- He has redeemed believers, granting them forgiveness of sins (1:7)
- He has given wisdom and insight regarding His will (1:8-10)
- He has promised us a future inheritance (1:11-12)
- He has allowed us to have saving faith (1:13a)
- He has sealed us with the Holy Spirit (1:13b-14)

These are all tremendous blessings that are conveyed upon the lives of these believers

- Is it any wonder that Paul begins with this tribute to God’s grace and kindness?
- We would think it wrong for Paul not to pray after such an introduction, right?

Verses 15 & 16 are like a cause and effect

- Paul sees spiritual progress
 - o He prays for the believers
 - By praying for the believers, he sees more spiritual progress
 - He prays more...

But if we aren’t looking with a spiritual perspective, we may very well miss the incentive to pray

- Therefore, we will miss this cycle that Paul demonstrates

Paul's prayer continues in 1:17, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him"

- In a word, this is a prayer for **wisdom**

It is crucial that believers have wisdom

- Specifically, wisdom from the Word as opposed to the wisdom from the world

Wisdom is the *skill* to live our lives in a manner that pleases God

- That takes knowledge of God's Word
- But it also takes effort on our parts to apply that knowledge

The apostle James writes, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (1:5)

- The simple truth is that we need to ask for wisdom!
- God delights in giving wisdom to His children

Paul would affirm this principle and even add something

- We need to ask wisdom, and the manner in which we do that is through prayer

The One to whom we pray is "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory"

- He alone can grant this spiritual work of wisdom

This is "the Father" who Jesus Christ referenced at the beginning of His Model Prayer

- God is glorious
- God is awesome
- God is almighty

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know

Paul then asks that "the Father of glory" would enlighten the eyes of these believers

- This is a gradual process by which God helps us to see areas that we need growth, maturity, and change
- Progressive sanctification – never completed this side of glory

Unless we see where we need to change, we probably won't pray

- We become aware of our shortcomings as we read God's Word
- The Scriptures teach, reprove, correct, and train us (2 Tim 3:16)

Specifically, Paul wants God to enlighten the eyes of these believers in three specific areas

- "the hope of His calling"
- "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"
- "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe"

Notice in each of them, the emphasis on "His"

- the hope of His calling
- the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints
- the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe

Let's look at each of these...

what is the hope of His calling.

When the Bible speaks of the believer's "hope," it is speaking of the assurance of what we have in Christ

- It is the guarantee that God's promises are true

The book of Hebrews says this, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast" (6:19)

- Hope is like an anchor
 - o Not to weigh us down
 - o But to give us stability and security

The object of the hope here in this first petition is "the hope of His calling"

- The apostle is speaking of the precious promises about their conversion

He has just finished extolling God for His saving work in the lives of those who belong to Him

- In praying for these believers, Paul wanted to remind them that it was God's sovereign and providential initiative to save them
- It was God's will to choose some in eternity past (1:4), thus calling them at the appropriate time through the preaching of the Gospel (1:13)

There are tremendous blessings to consider in light of God's calling of us

- He began the good work – and He will complete it
- God initiated the work – not us
- God has given His precious promises – and He is always faithful

These believers were formerly described as "having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12)

- Now they have hope
- Not in themselves but in the Lord

what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

The second specific petition of Paul's prayer revolves around God's "inheritance"

- He refers to "the glory of His inheritance in the saints"

We have seen that this "glory" refers to the expression of who God is and what He has done

- It is too easy for us to become focused on earthly things

We are surrounded by marketing that appeals to our earthly senses

- We are tempted to buy more and more stuff that supposedly helps us
- But in the end, it just creates more of a temptation to buy more stuff
- It will create a greater sense of emptiness

It is very rare that our spiritual senses are appealed to in this manner

- Large companies don't spend lots of money on appealing to holiness, righteousness, wisdom, and heaven

But we find such motivation and incentive in God's Word, don't we?

- When we turn to the Scriptures, our focus is redirected toward heavenly, spiritual things

We know that the blessings in this life are only a foretaste of what we can expect in heaven

- We are very much in the engagement period, beloved
- The full realization of our relationship with Christ is far beyond any comparison or explanation

Can we even begin to imagine what heaven will be like?

- Eternal fellowship with God
- Resounding praise of the redeemed
- Removal of the presence and consequences of sin

Notice the wording here in Ephesians, “**the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints**”

- God isn't stingy!
- God is very generous

Paul wanted the believers at Ephesus to know

- **The hope of His calling**
- **The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints**
- **But thirdly**

19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

The third and final petition that Paul mentions here revolves around God's power

- He has spoken about God's calling and God's inheritance
- Now he speaks of God's power

God is the Almighty

- He can accomplish what He pleases

When we think of God's power, we oftentimes think of creation

- He spoke everything into being
- He created various life forms with precision that testifies to intelligent design

But Paul has a power in mind that is even greater than creation

- This power is “**surpassing**”
- Literally “exceeding” or “transcending”

As the rest of the chapter bears out, this power that dominates Paul's thinking is spiritual power

- Spiritual power that raised Jesus Christ from physical death
- Spiritual power that raised believers from spiritual death

This same power that raised Christ from physical death is the same power that is working in our lives

- Power to overcome sin and temptation
- Power to pursue godly desires
- Power to minister to others
- Power to endure suffering with a joyful heart

Whatever your greatest need is this morning, God can meet it!

Let's keep in mind the doxology that will close the third chapter of Ephesians, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." (3:20-21)

- God is able to do (exercise His ability and power) "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think"
- This almighty power "works within us"

This is an amazing thought, isn't it?

- God's power has changed us from spiritually dead and blind sinners to having spiritual life and sight
- God's power is changing us and conforming us more into the image of Christ
- God's power will change us into greater conformity to Christlikeness

We have recently preached through Romans

- Paul (the same author of Ephesians) noted that the Gospel is the "power of God" (1:16)

What an encouragement this must have been for the readers

- They were hearing from Paul, who was currently imprisoned for preaching the Gospel
- How was he enduring? How was he able to maintain his sanity?
- God's power was working in him

This same truth would be applicable to these readers

- No matter the situation or circumstances, they could also look to God to be their strength

As I have said before, prayer is an acknowledgement of need

- It is an admission of "I can't"
- It is a declaration of dependence

When was the last time that you made some time for praise?

- I am speaking of something more than thanking God for your food
- I am speaking of giving some serious consideration to what God has done in your life and the lives of those around you

Truly meditating on the spiritual blessings that God has given us

- The blessings of Ephesians 1

If I were to ask you right now, "What are some things that you see in your own life and the lives of others that could only be attributed to God?"

- What would you say?
- What could you say?

If you are having a hard time thinking of anything, then consider this question, "What is it that you want to see God accomplish in your life?"

- In your personal life
 - o Sins to overcome
 - o Habits to develop
 - o Strength to serve others
 - o Wisdom to make a decision
- In your family
- In this church

Please adopt the attitude of the apostle Paul

- Pray about these matters
- Ask God for help

Specifically, ask God to help you to understand

- “the hope of His calling”
- “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”
- “the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe”