

EPHESIANS 1:17-23

INTRODUCTION

Last time we looked at how Paul knew that these Ephesians were true believers in the Lord Jesus because they displayed two clear marks of saving grace. They had faith in the Lord Jesus and they loved all the saints. It was these marks that led Paul to give thanks to God for them and to pray for them. But tonight we want to look at his prayer and ask what exactly did he pray for. But before we do that look how Paul addresses God.

1. HOW GOD IS ADDRESSED (V 17)

Paul describes God as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the glorious father or Father of glory. Paul is simply reminding us whom we are addressing when we come to him in prayer whether to thank him or to petition him. He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now when Jesus came into our world and took upon himself human flesh he addressed God as his father because he approached God as a man and so in a unique way God became his God.

This is why he was able to speak of my God and my father (John 20:17). What Paul is saying is that the God that I am praying to is the same God that Jesus prayed too. The Lord Jesus depended on his Father for everything so Paul is praying to the same God who sustained Jesus the same God who never forsook him except for those few moments on the cross when Jesus gave his cry of dereliction but even then God raised him from the dead. Paul is praying to Jesus' God the God who allows us to address him as Father because of Jesus and his work for us.

Did God the Father ever let his Son down, did he ever ignore the prayers of his Son, was there ever a time that Jesus could point to and say look my Father failed me there. No there was not and the God and Father that Jesus prayed to is the same God that we pray too and therefore we can have complete confidence in knowing who this God is. What he is like and how he will treat our requests. The fact that we are united to Christ because of our salvation in Christ means that Jesus' God has become our God.

But Paul also addressed God as the father of Glory or glorious Father. This means that the God that we come to in prayer is in essence all glorious therefore all that God does is a manifestation of his glory. The heavens we are told declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1) his work of creation is a manifestation of his own glorious nature. God's glory is manifested in his Son the Lord Jesus and his death so that when we look at the cross what do we see? Do we see the pain and distress of the Son of God or do we see beyond that and see the glory of God displayed with majesty in the death of his Son for sinners. All that God does has one purpose behind it to display the glory of God, which in turn brings praise to his wonderful and glorious name.

We must never come to God thoughtlessly, but we must come to him with awe and fear and reverence yet at the same time come boldly because not only is he the God of glory but he is the God of our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore we are invited to come to him in prayer just as Jesus came to him in prayer. We have a relationship with God because Jesus has a relationship with him and we are united to Christ through the salvation that we have been granted through faith in Jesus Christ.

So every time we come to God we need to remind ourselves just who it is we are addressing, he is the glorious Father, therefore we come with respect and reverence and he is the God of our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ therefore we come boldly, looking to him to answer our prayers in order that His glory might be seen by others and praise brought to his glorious name.

2. WHAT DOES PAUL PRAY FOR? (Vs. 17-23)

Paul asks specifically for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they might know God better. He prays that their spiritual eyes may be enlightened so that they might know the hope for which God has called them and their glorious inheritance that awaits them. Paul is praying that every Christian in Ephesus may come to understand, grasp and know certain things.

Paul knows that if the faith of these Ephesians is to grow and mature then they must increase in their understanding of spiritual things they must be able to see clearly certain truths, and this understanding and knowledge must not be a head knowledge only but it must be a heart knowledge not just something that they believe but something that they feel something that is central to their life, something that is part and parcel of their being.

These believers at Ephesus must come to an understanding that truth is not just something that they rejoice in but something from which they are prepared to die for. But how will such an understanding come about, Paul tells us that only God can do this and He will do it in response to our prayers. Now immediately we have an application here. Every Christian in this church needs to be given understanding by God, we all need God to enlighten us so that we can understand his truth more fully so that the great doctrines of the Scriptures become the guiding principles of our lives and the end result of all this is that we will know God better (v 17). So what do we pray for when we pray for one another? Perhaps someone is poorly so we pray for improved health or at least grace to cope. Someone needs a job so we pray for that person that they might be successful in finding a job.

Someone has exams coming up so we pray for God to help them remember all that they have learnt. Now there is nothing wrong with praying for all these things, but I suspect our problem is that our prayers are often **only** taken up with those sorts of things and we do not pray frequently enough that those same people may also be given understanding and wisdom so that they might know God better etc.

We must pray for one another, I established that point last time but we must pray for Christian growth for one another and perhaps we are not as consistent at that as we should be. Knowing God better involves a clearer understanding of his truth, we do not know God better through some sort of spiritual experience we know him better as our understanding of him grows as our knowledge of him develops and only God can do that.

Now Paul is not asking that the believers should be given the Holy Spirit (**Holy Spirit rather than spirit**) as if they did not already possess him for they could not be Christians without possessing the Holy Spirit but Paul is asking that the Spirit that they already have will continue to grant them wisdom and will continue to reveal to them truths about God so that they will know him better.

Paul wants the Holy Spirit to enlighten them in order that they might know certain truths. So what truths does Paul pray that these Christians at Ephesus might know?

a) **That they might know where they are going (v 18)** - I am indebted to Stuart Olyott in the Welwyn commentary series for help in understanding these verses. The headings that I have used here to describe what specifically Paul prayed for are his headings, I just couldn't better it so I am using his and giving him the credit. Paul is praying that the Ephesians will know the hope to which God has called them.

Everyone who is a Christian is a Christian because God has called him or her to salvation through Jesus Christ. Such a person heard the gospel with his ears but God through the Holy Spirit enabled that person to take that gospel message and apply it specifically to himself. He or she becomes convinced that they are sinners, that they deserve hell and that their only hope is to trust in Jesus Christ seeking his forgiveness and mercy. They are enabled by God through the work of

the Holy Spirit to believe in Christ for salvation and to start out on the Christian pathway. That experience that we have all had if we are Christians is termed 'calling.'

It is what makes someone into a true believer and that conversion experience leads ultimately to heaven where we receive in full our inheritance in Christ. What Paul is praying for is that the Ephesian Christians may come to understand exactly what is the hope into which God's call has brought them. I am sure I don't have to say this but let me just make sure we are clear by what the bible means by hope.

Hope in the bible is not something that we long for but are not certain of receiving it; it is a word full of certainties that we do not yet possess. We do not possess heaven and all that goes along with it yet, but we are absolutely certain that one day heaven and all the blessings that is implied in that term will be ours. God has called us to salvation in and through Jesus Christ but this relationship with Jesus ultimately leads us home to heaven.

Paul describes it as the riches of his glorious inheritance, because heaven is full of true riches and it is glorious because it is where God is and he is totally rich and totally glorious. Now you see Paul simply wants these Ephesian Christians to know where they are going, which direction they are heading in, he wants God's Spirit to reveal to them his glorious truths concerning their future so that they understand better where they are going too and what it will be like but also the result of this knowledge will be that they will know God better now.

Every Christian needs to have a clear understanding and knowledge concerning the future; we need to know that the view of this world is not the correct view of life. Our world lives for the **now**, it lives for pleasures in this world as if this is it, there is nothing else therefore go out and enjoy yourself. Live for self for this is all there is and you might as well make the most of it.

But every Christian needs to understand that there is more to just this life, enjoyable though this life is with God there is more to come, a heavenly and eternal home with God where righteousness dwells and reigns. Yes there will be days of pain and sadness in this world for this world is sin ridden and under God's curse but every Christian needs to understand that there are better days ahead. Paul prays that the church in Ephesus will understand this and we too need to pray for our church in our world that God will give us wisdom and understanding to see where we are heading. It is so easy to become very disheartened as Christian people, we can often wonder how we will be able to keep going, we can become so disillusioned that we begin to believe the lie of the world that this is all there is you might as well make the most of it.

Sadly this is why there are Christians probably far too many who seem to live as if this life is all there is. They are taken over by their work or their children or their interests to the extent that those things and people are what really become important to them. They give their time and energy and money to things of this world to things that really matter to them and as a result the church of Jesus Christ suffers through their none commitment to the things of God.

We need to pray like Paul that every one of us and every Christian that we know might be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that their eyes might be opened to see their rich and glorious inheritance that awaits all the saints. All the saints will enjoy our inheritance together in fact it is this togetherness, which makes the inheritance even more glorious. It is only a clear understanding of what awaits us that will keep us focused on our future with Christ and as a result it will stop us getting drawn into accepting the philosophy of this world.

b) That they might know what has happened to them (vs. 19-23) - Not only do we have to understand where we are going but it is important that we grasp what God has done for us and as a result what has happened to us who believe. God has worked powerfully on our behalf, in fact Paul says that the same power that works in us to bring us to faith and to keep us in that faith and

to one day bring that faith to its intended goal in heaven is the very same power that was at work in Christ.

Now what did this power do for Christ for when we understand that then we will understand what God's power has done for us who believe. God's power raised Jesus from the dead and took him and placed him at God's right hand where he exercises his absolute authority over everything; in the present age and in the age to come. He has absolute authority over all spiritual beings over every human authority and over any other authority you can think off.

The reason why he rules is because God in his power has placed everything under his feet he is the head over everything, there is nowhere that Jesus Christ does not rule. But the really interesting thing is for whose benefit does he rule the universe? Well verse 22 gives us the answer. He does it for the church; he reigns in order to further the interest of believers. We are down here on earth seeking to live each day as Christian people but as we do so we must remember that our Lord is reigning and ruling for our benefit. He is our head we are his body we are bound to him and he is bound to us as his church and his church is described as the fullness of him (v 23).

Now verse 23 is a very difficult verse to understand but I think it is saying that in some way and we must be careful here Jesus Christ regards himself as incomplete, he is not of course incomplete but he regards himself as incomplete until every person whom the Father has given him has been joined to him in living faith But this expression means more than that. How is Jesus Christ represented here on earth? It is through the church his body, the church is suppose to be a full expression of its head Jesus Christ.

He reigns and rules over the whole universe for the benefit of the church and the church is to live as God's representative here on earth, we show the world what our ruling Saviour and Lord is like. But why is Paul telling the church at Ephesus all this. Well let us go back to verses 19-20 again. Paul is saying that the power that did all this for Christ is the very same power, which works in the Christians at Ephesus or the Christians here in Wensleydale. It took God's power the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to raise us from our spiritual deadness. It was God's power that did that for us we could not raise ourselves as we will see next time but God did it. It took some power to raise Jesus from the dead and to place everything under his feet. It takes some power to rule and reign over everything in the universe.

It takes some power to bring dead sinners to faith in the Lord Jesus to connect that person to Jesus so that they become part of his body the church. Paul is praying that the church at Ephesus might just realise and understand the power involved in bringing them to faith and in keeping them in that faith. Paul longs that these Christians will have their eyes opened to see exactly what has happened to them, who has brought about this radical change in their life?

Who has given them new desires and new drives so that they now want to walk in daily obedience to Jesus Christ? Do we ever pray like this? We should pray that new Christians should understand what has happened to them but we should surely also pray that every Christian no matter how long we have been saved will continually grasp what God has done for us that we will continually comprehend just how much power is involved in keeping us in the faith and to understand and see the privilege and responsibility of belonging to Christ's body the church. If only we could really see what the church means to Christ, what God has done for the church, why Christ rules and reigns then we would be filled with wonder and praise and awe for our God and for our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we fully understood this then surely we would be overcome by the fact that God took such an interest in us that he did all that for us. Such an understanding of course will affect the way we live. Anyone who understands and sees conversion for what it is; will be someone who simply

wants to live for their God who everyday wants to submit to his authority in their life and everyday wants to grow in their knowledge of their Saviour and God.

Such a Christian will ask everyday why me Lord, why did you save me, why did you exercise such power for me, why did you make me a member of your body the church? Such a Christian will want to speak of their great God they will want to give him the priority in their lives and following Christ will be their everyday goal.

Wouldn't it be lovely to be in a church where people understood where they are going and what God has done for them?

Sadly no church is completely like that, that's why we must pray for ourselves and others that God will grant to us such an understanding and knowledge and that His Spirit will open our eyes so that we can clearly see our destiny and our privilege as one who by the power of God has been brought from death to life and made a member of His church, His body for which Christ died and rules.

Amen