



ephesians

a church becoming

Sunday, September 29, 2024

Ephesians 1:15-23

In just a few moments we are going to take a look at our next section in Ephesians. Chapter 1:15-23. Yes, that is correct, today we finish off chapter 1 of Ephesians! Now, in my Bible and perhaps yours too, the heading on this section is: 'Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom.' And what's interesting to me - even before getting into the reading - is that this title alone indicates that there is a shift in Paul's writing happening here. He now shifts from preaching to the Church in Ephesus to praying over them. One could say that whether he is preaching or praying, it's the same dissemination of information - whether Paul is preaching it in his letter or praying, it's basically just the same thing. I disagree and actually think that this subtle change in description is significant because it shows us that Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus isn't just a letter of instruction; it's a heartfelt prayer from someone who genuinely cares for them. You see, preaching imparts knowledge and instruction, but prayer invites the presence and power of God to take that knowledge and instruction and bring about transformation. So by switching from preaching to praying, Paul is now showing us that he's not just concerned with teaching the Ephesians what they need to know, but he's earnestly asking God to reveal it to them in a personal and powerful way.

And there is something so beautiful and intimate about prayer because of its ability to connect teaching to transformation. Whether it's a personal prayer that we offer up to God or it's a prayer offered by someone else on our behalf, it moves beyond just words and information by inviting God into the process of change. Ultimately, prayer takes what we know in our minds and asks God to make it real in our hearts. When Paul shifts from preaching to praying for the Ephesians, he's not just hoping they understand the message intellectually; he's asking God to open their spiritual eyes, to give them wisdom, and to transform their lives through the power of His truth!

This is precisely why we bookend the message portion of our services with prayer. Because ultimately the goal is the same for us as well - to allow the truth of God's Word to bring transformation to our lives.

So, as we step into our text this morning, let this be the cry of our heart. Lord- allow the truth of your Word to bring revelation to our souls and transformation to our hearts!

Ephesians 1:15-23

'Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your heart being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.'

If I were to sum up this section I would say that Paul's aim here is that he wants the church in Ephesus to KNOW God. Not just to know ABOUT God.

Example: Switzerland. I read all the books, watched all of the reels and instagram posts and even talked with people who had gone there....but the knowledge that I had about Switzerland was nothing compared to being in Switzerland.

We especially see this change evidenced in Paul's life - and I think that's why he makes such a strong point of this here. In the opening verses of his prayer in verse 17, notice that he says, 'The God of our Lord Jesus Christ.' We know that before Paul was a Christian, he was one of the highest ranked Jewish leaders in the world. And so, for years, when addressing God, the Jews would reference Him by saying, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' It might seem like semantics, but the difference in phraseology here is absolutely monumental. Paul's language now reflects a completely transformed understanding of God - no longer known through the experience of others (Abraham, Isaac...Jacob), but now personally through Jesus Christ. This shift highlights that knowing God is now direct and personal through a relationship with Christ.

So Paul's goal here is that the church in Ephesus would not just know about God, but that they would truly know Him. And we see this in the language that he uses in verse 17 when Paul prays that the Lord would give them, 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Almighty God.'

The first thing that I want you to see here is that Paul's use of the term 'spirit' is not in reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has already been given to them upon their salvation. We saw this in vs.13 when Paul said at that time they were sealed in Christ with the Holy Spirit. So the term spirit here is more nuanced and meant to refer to the work of the Spirit who is within us, drawing us ever closer in relationship to the Lord.

And Paul uses two words here to describe the nature of this specific work of the Spirit: wisdom and revelation. These are important words. The Greek word for wisdom is the word, 'sophia' which means the ability to understand and apply God's truth in every day life. While this might seem straightforward, it's important to recognize that wisdom doesn't begin there. Paul isn't introducing a new concept here. According to Proverbs, the beginning of wisdom doesn't start with the application of truth but with fear. Now that I've got your attention:

Proverbs 9:10 says:

*'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.'*

Now, 'The fear of the Lord' is an interesting phrase and concept because depending on how you relate to the word 'fear,' this statement alone can evoke different reactions. The word fear is the Hebrew word, 'yira,' and carries a duality in its interpretation as it can mean both terror and awe/reverence. In one sense we are afraid of God and in another sense we stand in awe of God.

However, Proverbs 9:10 does not indicate which response is to be used here, perhaps because the writer of Proverbs would have assumed that you had been reading chronologically and already finished up chapter 8, which states that:

Proverbs 8:13a

'The fear of the Lord is to hate evil...'

Now, follow this thought: if the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, then wisdom begins when we first hate evil. So, for every person, the journey to wisdom starts with a deep hatred for sin and a recognition of its consequences - which the Bible teaches is death. To fear God, then, is to understand that He alone has the authority to administer the consequences for sin. And this is where the dual aspect of fear comes into play:

For those that have accepted salvation, then we stand in awe and reverence of God but for those

that have rejected salvation, they would stand in fear of God for the consequences of their sin. For the saved, fear is rooted in a deep respect for God's holiness and love, knowing they are safe in His grace. But for the unsaved, fear takes the form of dread because they face the reality of God's righteous judgment. In both cases though, this fear points us toward wisdom - either by leading us to repentance or by continually deepening our reverence and understanding of God's authority and sovereignty in our lives.

And so, because Paul is talking to a group of Christians, his call to wisdom is therefore not a call to repentance, but rather to a deeper understanding of who God is and how His wisdom works in their lives.

Now, the next word that Paul uses in connection with wisdom is the word revelation. The Greek word for revelation is the word, 'apokalypsis' which is a really interesting word especially if you were a part of our Revelation series last year. In the very first message of that series we learned that this is a word that when understood correctly, really helps to shape the overall purpose of that book. Apokalypsis is where we get the word apocalypse from. And in our day and age we have come to embrace this term as one that means the arrival of chaotic events associated with the end of world.

However, this is not at all what this word means. This word simply means to reveal or even more simplified, to open up. Picture a box with a lid that opens up to reveal the contents inside. Or visualize a curtain that is pulled back to reveal the beautiful sunrise in the morning. Or a door that opens to reveal a welcoming home. In the first century, apokalypsis referred to the unveiling of spiritual truths and realities - things that were always there but had been hidden until God chose to reveal them.

In this sense, revelation (apokalypsis) is deeply connected to our relationship with God. The Bible teaches that Christ is the door, and when we enter into a relationship with Him, that door opens to reveal the deeper truths of God's character and His love. As we walk with Christ, He continually reveals more of Himself, uncovering the spiritual realities that shape our lives and draw us closer to Him. This is what Paul is praying for in Ephesians - that the Ephesians would experience ongoing revelation, continually discovering more of who God is and His love for them. He saying, don't you dare settle for less than more. Isn't this such a true and real word for us here today? If we were to assess our individual relationships with Christ, how many of us would admit that we have actually settled into a rhythm of the mundane, where we have just accepted that this is all there is. But this is not what Paul is saying here. No, Paul is saying that there is more that just because the door is open under salvation doesn't mean that there is nothing more to see. There is a whole wealth of

revelation to be held by you and me if we are willing to keep walking through the door.

So, when Paul prays for the believers to receive both wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God he's asking for two connected things here:

Wisdom: the ability to understand and apply God's truth in daily life, and Revelation: the ongoing unveiling of deeper spiritual realities about who God is.

It's not just enough to know about God. The point is to know Him and make Him known.

And what Paul says next is the exclamation point in all of this. He says this so that the eyes of their heart may be enlightened.

Now, I'm no doctor, scientist or biologist, but I'm pretty sure that eyes don't grow on hearts. What an interesting thing for Paul to say. Many of you didn't even bat an eye because this is a term that we've heard for generations and a hymn that we've probably sung longer! At any rate though, what Paul is doing here is genius. He is connecting the message of the spirit of wisdom and revelation now to the heart. Why the heart? Because in the first century, the general belief was that the heart was the center of a person's being - not just the source of emotions, but also the seat of intellect and decision-making. When Paul talks about the 'eyes of the heart,' he's speaking to the core of who we are. He's asking that God would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation and that He would enlighten the deepest part of our core.

Why?

So that we would know the hope to which God has called us (v.18). This is not just any hope, but the profound assurance of eternal life, purpose, and the fulfillment of God's promises to us as His people. Paul wants the Ephesians to live in light of this unshakable hope that transforms how they see their present and future.

Second, Paul wants us to know the riches of God's glorious inheritance (v.18) – that we, as believers, are not only recipients of God's blessings, but that we ourselves are God's prized inheritance. He calls us sons/daughters and co-heirs with Christ - WOW! This should shape our identity and self-worth, understanding that we are valued and loved by the Creator of the universe.

And finally, he prays that we would understand the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward

us who believe (v.19). This is the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of God, far above every authority and power (v.20-23). Paul wants us to realize that this resurrection power is actively at work in us, enabling us to live victoriously. The same power that raised Christ from the dead dwells in you and in me! So let's start living like it!

Ultimately, Paul is praying that the eyes of our hearts would be opened so we can truly see the hope, fulfillment, and power that come from being in relationship with Christ. It's a call to move from simply knowing about these truths to living in the reality of them every day.

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