

Paul's Prayer

Ephesians 1:15-23

1 John 5:1-13

Romans 8:1-11

Responsive Psalm 84

This morning we are going to be continuing in chapter 1 of the book of Ephesians, we are not up to verse 15 as we have been making our way through this chapter. We have spent the last few weeks going over the first half of this chapter which was Paul's introduction to this letter, in which he has laid down the ground work for this letter pointing to God's sovereignty in all things, in which over the past few weeks we looked at rather extensively, because, at least personally I don't find any greater peace and rest then to know that God is sovereign over all and I think its good to be reminded every now and then of this reality.

In our passage this morning there has been a little shift though, Paul shifts from an instructional introduction, to a prayer, for the Ephesian church. This particular prayer is the longest of any of the recorded prayers of Paul. There are 2 such prayers in this letter, this one starting in verse 15 to verse 23, and another in chapter 3. So why don't we go ahead and read our passage this morning, starting in verse 15 to the end of the chapter. Notice it starts with the word therefore, so even though this is a prayer Paul is not jumping into new territory, but is rather linked to everything in which is wrote in his introduction. The Greek connection word here is Oun, which translates, "because of this reason." The reason for Paul's prayer here is because of all the things that God has done for the Ephesians, which is what he had written about in his introduction. Giving thanks that God has blessed them with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, (election, predestination, adoptions, grace, redemption, forgiveness, wisdom, understanding, revealing the mystery of God in Salvation, the sealing of the Holy Spirit, and finally an inheritance.) Therefore Paul says he does not cease in giving thanks to God for his revelation to the Ephesians, so that they may know, understand, and follow God, and be partakers of these spiritual blessings.

Paul commends them on both their faith, and their love for the people of God. These are 2 things that go hand in hand. When we were going through the book of Romans we talked about the love of God which is reflected in the love of his children for one another. We are to love as Christ loves, a sacrificial, selfless love toward one another. Verse 9 of chapter 12 of Romans Paul wrote, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate toward one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference for one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the lord. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulations, continueing steadfastly in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." This is the heart and mind of the believer which flows from a heart changed by God, and it is this kind of love which Paul writes about in Romans that he says is the fulfillment of the law, in Christ the righteous law of God is fulfilled in love. As he wrote in verse 9 of chapter 13, "For the commandments you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not covet and if there is any other commandments all are summed up in this saying, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor, therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

And it would seem that Paul is commending the Ephesians for having such a love, which is a distinguishing mark of a true believer, for such a love does not come from human desire, but from God and God alone. And this type of Godly love flows outward from an active and vibrant faith which is another thing Paul is commending them on in verse 15. I don't think he is simply rejoicing in their belief, though that is surely part of it as well, but I think he is rejoicing in their active faith as it plays out in their lives. I say this because it is also tied to "the love of the saints" which is part of the active out-flowing of a working faith. And can sort of work as a litmus test of the faith, for a true faith can not be a loveless faith, because that dynamic christian love flows out of a vibrant active faith. Just as it says in 1 John 5, which we read this morning. "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves him who begot also loves him who is begotten of him." These 2 things are tied together and can not be separated, faith and love go hand in hand, you can not have one without the other.

The reality is, if our faith does not make us more loving, then there is something wrong with our faith, that is we need to check ourselves in the reality of our faith, if the signs of faith spoken of in scripture to not align with what we are, then we are in danger of a false faith. Christian love is that central to belief, you can not have faith without it, because true faith produces it. Because we love Christ, we love his body, that is, his people. And it is this combo of faith and love that the Ephesians must have been good examples of to get such a commendation from Paul. He says, when he prays, he thanks God for them and he says this is something he does constantly. Paul here is encouraging them in that faith and love in which they strive, that it is right, that it is just, and that it is commendable before God. It is a great encouragement to pray for one another, to petition God on behalf of one another, and it shows forth again, an active faith abiding in love for one another. Praying to God on behalf of another saint shows compassion, and love, and concern for that fellow believer, whether it is for wisdom, deliverance, or blessing it comes from a heart of a true love for that brother or sister.

Paul I think is likely proud of the Ephesian saints, as one who ministered to them, he is rejoicing in seeing their faith, and love toward on another. It is important to be an encouragement to one another, to rejoice together, in faith and love. Even the world understands the importance of telling someone you love them, and living with the regret of not saying it enough. But love is more than words, and is meaningless if those words are without action, Christian love is expressed by action, and one of those actions is praying for one another, as Paul says never ceases praying for the saints in Ephesus. His prayer for them is 2 fold, he rejoices in their faith and love, and prays that they would be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know God more.

Verse 16, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; 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." As John Stott wrote, "What Paul does in Ephesians 1, and therefore encourages us to copy, is to both keep praising God that in Christ all spiritual blessings are ours, and to keep praying that we may know the fullness of what God has given us. Paul is not praying here for further blessings, but rather that they would know the blessings in which they have already attained. And he wrote in verse 4, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who HAS blessed us with EVERY spiritual blessing.

There is always a thought that we need more from God, a temptation to ask for blessings but the reality is we have been given all things through Christ, we have already attained these blessings from the heavenly places. Now I am not saying that it is wrong to go to God in prayer and ask for things, for we know that all things come from the Father, and he has chosen to bless us through prayer, he has designed that we have the need, and desire to go to him in such a way, to approach him, to ask him, and recognize our need for him through it. But as Paul points out here, we have been given the greatest blessing, which is to know Christ, we have been given the greatest mercy, which is to be forgiven of our sins, and we have been given the greatest hope, that in death we will be made alive to walk to streets of heaven with our Lord and Savior. WE should not lose our grasp on what we have been given in hopes of something we hope to receive.

Look at what Paul prays here for these Saints, verse 17. “Tha 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, the eyes of your understanding 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, and what is the exceeding greatest of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.” This likewise should be our prayer, that we may grow to know God more, that we may understand his word, and his work in our own lives more, that we rest in the hope of his calling, the surety of our faith, looking to the riches of his glory in which we are inheritors. In many ways, if we grasp these realities, if we strive for this truth, we can say, like Paul in his letter to the Philippian church, “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need. I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me.”

Recognizing that God has in times past, given us every spiritual blessing is how we can be content in whatever thing we experience, or endure. As we talked about last week, even our hardships, our trials, the difficulties we face in this life are not without purpose, and are not outside of God's perfect plan for us, as he works in us, to draw us closer to him. As we go to him in prayer asking for deliverance, asking for mercy, asking for grace, to wisdom and strength to endure. he is working in us the ability to do so as we rest and rely on him. Everything that Paul writes here up until verse 15, is in the past tense, all of the In Him statements, the promise of our hope, are all past tense, have already been accomplished in him, the who one HAS blessed us with every spiritual blessing, the one who HAS chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, having already predestined us to adoption as his children according to the good pleasure of his will.

As Casey would often say, God has written our story, but we still need to walk through it, we still need to live it out.” Each day is fresh and new to us, each moment is unique and new to us, but not to God, the author of our lives who knows all, and is sovereign over all. He knows your needs, he knows your desires, he knows your trials, and temptations, and in his wisdom, he calls us to endure and rest on him, because he has given us redemption, and deliverance. Though we may not always get deliverance in this life, we have hope in the final deliverance from our sinful flesh as we will one day be called into his very presence. In that moment, all worries, all cares, all troubles and trials will cease as we live in peace in the presence of our father. Paul has pointed out throughout this chapter that all of this is accomplished through Christ, that God the father has put all things in the care of his Son, and it is through him that we receive all blessing, and all knowledge, all wisdom, and hope.

Paul points out that a part of the knowledge and wisdom he is praying for, and by extension we should also pray, is that the eyes of our understanding be enlightened, to know the hope of our calling, the riches of his glory, and the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly places. We share in that future inheritance, one in which has already been accomplished in Christ, that shall one day be fully realized. Our life, our identity, our hope is all in the one in whom God raised up from the dead, In him we have inherited every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. This can not be overstated how huge this actually is. And it is the hope and prayer of Paul that these saints can grasp this, can know this, and will ultimately rest in this reality.

There is always the danger of the opposite happening, which is sinking into a sort of spiritual complacency. Paul Prays that the Ephesians Saint's "eyes of understanding be enlightened." If one can be enlightened one can also be dull, hence the need for such a prayer. I talked about this a little last week, we can intellectually understand a biblical truth, without truly seeing it, or knowing it, or it really effecting our lives. Sometimes things can also become sort of old hat for us, and we need to meditate, and see again the beauty of God's work. And we do so by prayer, by the reading of the word, by meditating upon the glories of Christ, the unmerited gift we have been given, and truly the blessings we have. Through such things, the Holy Spirit works in us, to enlighten, to grow, to learn, and to see God more and more. So that we do not become dull of hearing, and blind in our understanding, we are to remain sharp, battle ready, for God to use us as he sees fit, and a part of that is seeing God for who he is, our loving father who cares for, and provides for us. In troubled times, and trials we can lose sight of this reality, believe that we are suffering because of God's wrath, or punishment...but we as his children are never objects of his wrath, and any punishment we receive from him, is for our benefit, it is the punishment of a loving father who is concerned for the well being of his child.

So the challenge from Paul today, is to seek knowledge, to get understanding, to see God as God over our lives, but not as a ruling tyrant as some may want to believe, but as our loving father who has given us all things through his son, as a loving father who sent his own son to pay the price of our sins so that we may be reconciled to him. As a father who has called us to himself, who has opened our eyes, heart, and mind so that we may know him. And then to rest in this reality, the rest in the one in whom has accomplished all this on our behalf. We are to know the hope of our calling, and the exceeding riches of our inheritance in him, who worked in us by his mighty power to raise us from the death of sin in which we were so entangled, and has freed us by the blood of Jesus Christ. The very power of life in the resurrection of Christ is the power of new life we have in him. That is what Paul says in verse 19 and 20, "What is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places."

What God has done, can not be undone, if you are his, you are held by his incredible exceeding power, the same power that raised Christ from the dead, he raised you from death in sin, to life in grace. May our sight never become dull, may we always strive for understanding, for wisdom and knowledge, ever growing in our love and understanding of him, never becoming complacent, but to live our lives vibrantly, and completely as God's children.