

"To See the Hope and Power We Have in Christ"

Ephesians 1:15-23

It was quite the week we had around the world. Talk of war between Iran and the USA after the Americans killed General Quassem Soleimani. All 176 people killed on board a Ukrainian airliner leaving Tehran, now believed to have been accidentally shot down by the Iranians. The ongoing horrific brushfires in Australia, a 6.4 earthquake that hit Puerto Rico, the Royal kaffuffle over Prince Harry & Duchess Meghan stepping away from Royal responsibilities.

Whether any of these things left you personally unsettled or not, millions of people were directly affected leaving them to wonder about their present circumstances let alone the future. What does the follower of Jesus do when we are unsettled by world events or even personal calamities? What is the perspective that God wants us to have when our world seems to be falling apart or is far from God?

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul gives Jesus' disciples a treasure trove of spiritual truths that if we grab on to these we should never become unsettled about anything that happens in our life. To show us how relevant these truths are it helps if we understand the context of the letter. Paul was writing from prison and yet he speaks enthusiastically about the great freedom he has in Christ. The great promises that kept him balanced when he experienced setbacks. Paul was writing to believers who lived in the New York or Los Angeles of his day. Ephesus was the second largest city in the Roman Empire. It was where things were happening; the big city. In any big city, one can be overwhelmed by the sheer volume of people, by the power of money, success and entertainment. Ephesus was the center of Dianne worship, a lewd religious cult that attracted thousands to its temple. The red light district of its day.

Big cities are where the world revolves around, where major decisions are made and that set the agenda for culture, economy and politics.

So Paul writes a letter from prison in Rome to the church he founded and taught in for 3 years (Acts 18-20). In vv.3-14 he reminds them of their great position and the many blessings they have in Christ and then in vv.15-23 he prays that the eyes of their hearts might be enlightened to know the difference having these blessings from God makes in their lives. Especially their perspective on life. Because what you see and hear in life is not always what's true. When you see and hear a week's worth of bad things it can cause your perspective on life to be skewed and to live by sight and be afraid instead of living by faith with confidence.

So Paul reviews the blessings we have in Christ in vv.3-14 and emphasizes the believers' security. Why? Because we live surrounded by insecurities. Will there be war? Will the gas prices go up? Will the stock market take a dive? Should we involve our kids with this or that group? Do I mention my faith to that new person I just started a friendship with? Because we get tired of being rejected by the world and we're definitely outnumbered so our voice is hardly heard, where do we find our hope?

Here's the irony; Paul, in prison, tells the Ephesians he is praying for them to grow in their hope. So he begins with praise to God for

- blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
- chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight

- In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ

Why? Because it pleases Him and brings Him glory. How do we have these things?

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹ And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

And then He repeats that we are chosen, predestined and adds sealed by the Holy Spirit. But also reminding us of our own responsibility to the gospel,

when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

And with all that in mind, he prays for them,

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ 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

“For this reason” refers to every blessing he shared in vv.3-14. So how does he suggest we pray for one another?

Pray that our Knowledge of God Would Continually Increase **(Vv.15-17)**

Paul commends them for their faith in the Lord and love for believers – which is the great balance we all need to achieve [love for God results in love for people] – but he prays that it would continue obviously

So our faith and love would grow (v.15)

We can't be content on where we're at. Everyday our security is rattled by this week's circumstances, by the intimidation tactics of powerful people making decisions in our country and world and by our peers, co-workers, family and friends who don't have God's perspective on life. And ridicule us for having God's perspective. We can't stop growing in our faith or in our love. I like how these two go hand in hand. For Paul to have “heard” about their faith means they were acting on it. They were making decisions in their life that put God first. Decisions they believed by faith would make a difference for God and was pleasing to God because they knew God was watching their life. And that they were accountable to God.

That's what it means to live by faith. That you believe in God – whom you can't see – who sees and hears you, that you live as if He does and that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him and His purposes. What exactly did he hear? Most likely that they were telling others that Jesus has more to offer eternally than Dianna does temporarily. That sharing with the poor was better than trying to

keep up with the cultural expectations. That choosing worship and fellowship with God's people was more rewarding than the entertainment selections of the day.

Life hasn't changed much. We grow in faith and love when we are growing in our understanding of God and who He is and what His expectations are for us. And what He has in store for us when this life is over. He prays that our knowledge of God would continually increase (don't think you've arrived and don't need to grow more) and he

Gives thanks that we're not alone (v.16)

When Paul gives thanks he's giving thanks for all the saints; each one. There are more people outside the church than inside. Which means there are more ungodly voices and ideas floating around there than godly ones. So we need the support of the body; people who are faith-minded and loving who know the same temptations and frustrations we have living in a world dominated by ungodliness. Because we sure can feel all alone at times.

When I worked at a grocery store before going to Bible College, I was the lone Christian. The one the boss asked to pray at the Christmas dinner. The one who quieted the break room when you entered because the conversation was inappropriate. The one who said at the Sunday annual golf tournament to put me down for the last tee off time so I wouldn't miss church. Or the only family member who was a Christian who arrived last for the family get together because fellowship and study was a priority on Sunday and even mid-week to help you keep God's perspective in these situations.

We not only need to come together for worship, fellowship and study because we should but because we need each other before we go out to meet with the world we live in. So thank God for each other. Grow in faith and love. And as we grow

Our ability to discern God's will and work will grow (vv.16-17)

¹⁷ 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.

Of course we already have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us because we were sealed with Him when we believed (v.13). Spirit here could refer to our spirit but our spirit works with His Spirit because the Spirit teaches us God's truths. Wisdom is the ability to take knowledge and know how to use it. To make wise decisions based on what we know God's Word says. Revelation means 'revealing'. Paul prays that as we read the Word we would understand it as He reveals it to us and then apply it. That's how we get to know God more because when we obey his Word and see what results we understand why He tells us to do what He says. And this assures us again of the many blessings He has given us. Which helps us to continue to

Pray that We Would Fully See How Much He Loves Us **(Vv.18-23)**

In the second part of his prayer Paul prays

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 the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ

when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

He gives us three ways God loves us and therefore our need to continually pray that the 'eyes of our heart' would be open to see grasp them more and concludes by telling us why. 'The eyes of our heart' is a poetic way of saying our heart would be open to treasure these things and make decisions accordingly. What do we need see more clearly and treasure?

How God secures our future (v.18a)

in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you

Paul commended them for their faith and love but he wants to strengthen their hope – which is what vv.3-14 are really all about; our secure hope in Christ. Called, chosen, adopted, predestined, redeemed, forgiven, sealed, guaranteed inheritance.

He gives us His inheritance (v.18b)

the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

God has waiting in store for us full access to His kingdom, which Jesus is working on as we speak. *"In My Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."* [John 14:1-3]

In John 17:24 Jesus prayed,

²⁴ *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.*

And in 1 Cor. 2:9 Paul said

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him

Paul should know. He said in 2 Cor. 12:4 that he,

⁴ *was caught up to paradise [and] heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.*

And the third thing Paul prays that our hearts would be open to is that

God makes His power available for us (v.19)

God loves us so much that He makes resurrection power available to us. How? Through faith in Jesus we receive the Spirit and a new nature. Through Jesus we now have power over sin whereas before salvation we were powerless against sin. Through Jesus we now have His authority over the enemy. He cannot separate us from God. We stand in a position of authority over the enemy. In 2:6-7 we read about our position;

⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus

This is also very practical against temptations and attacks from the enemy. In Ch. 6 we read

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

God loves us so much that when we accepted Christ He sealed us with His Spirit and positioned us in authority over the all authorities; physical and invisible. What He has we have. That gives us confidence to share the gospel because Jesus said,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

Even nations who are opposed to the gospel like many Middle East and Asian countries but also countries like our own that are indifferent to the gospel. And, as we know from personal experience, this gospel is the power for salvation (Rom. 1:16); it changes lives for eternity.

And this is the reason why we need to pray for each other to grasp the love of God for us;

To give us an eternal perspective on all of life (vv.20-23)

Where is Jesus now?

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Jesus is in the captain's chair, waiting for God to say 'now' to put all things, all people, all powers under His feet. That's the perspective we need to keep when the headlines of this week's news appear as if Jesus is not in control.

This is the hope of the believer. Accepting Jesus as our Saviour, believing He alone forgives us of our sins, places us in Him, a reserved seat in the heavenly realms, awaiting a new resurrected body and in the meantime having the authority to share His message with others – not with arrogance or pride – but in humility and thankfulness.

And this is where prayer is another reminder of the awesome power we have. To pray for anyone, anywhere or any situation in the world, knowing we have access to God who has the power to take our prayers and change hearts and situations in the world, according to his sovereign will.

So Paul was telling the believers who lived in the second largest city of the world, don't let the glamour, the power players or the sinfulness you see around you sway you into thinking God is not in charge. Need proof? Ephesus only exists today as a tourist attraction for Christians, historians and

archaeologists. And history gives testimony to many more cities like Ephesus that used to hold power and ooh and aah the masses, and now no longer exist. Our security and hope exists in the promises of God through faith in His Son Jesus. We need to continually grow in faith, love and hope so we see our life and world from God's perspective. We need to continually grow in our relationships because we need each other to remind us of these truths when we get down, worried or intimidated. And we need to grow in wisdom so that we can make wise decisions that honour God in a world that does not.

*¹ John 2:28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of him. **3** See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² 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. ³ All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.*

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