

Series: Unsearchable Riches in Christ (Ephesians)

Text: Ephesians 1:15-23

Message #6 (September 24, 2006)

## LIFE'S GREATEST NEED AND HIGHEST GOAL

### Introduction

1. We talk about prayer and we have been told that we ought to pray, but how do we pray? What do we say? For what should we pray? We probably have some answers to those questions gleaned from things we have been taught or people we have observed and imitated. There are also questions concerning the purpose of prayer in the context of a God who knows all things and works all things after the counsel of His own will. Paul clearly talks about God in these terms, but still he prays and what he prays is instructive for us. He gives us some significant insight into praying to a sovereign God on behalf of others.
2. Clearly, the content of his prayer is inseparably linked to the praise he offers to God (vv. 3-14). "For this reason" demonstrates the tie to the earlier text. On the basis of the Father's blessings and Son's redemptive work and Holy Spirit's ministry, Paul prays.
3. Paul began by expressing to his readers His praise for God. Now he turns to God in prayer and expresses his thanks to the Lord for these people in terms of what God had done and was doing in their lives. Let's follow his prayer and see what we can learn in relation to the content of our prayers and the manner in which we pray.

### I. THANKSGIVING FOR GOD'S GRACE IN THEIR LIVES (15-16)

- A. It was God who intervened. The Ephesians' conversion and transformation were causes to thank God for His gracious intervention in their lives. That should be a reminder to us as well. We ought never to get over the transforming work of God in the lives of those He has brought to faith – and we should make that known in thanks to God.
- B. It was God who transformed. Whatever Christian virtues were evident in the lives of these believers, since God was wholly responsible, such virtues gave occasion for heartfelt thanks to God. (Anonymous hymn, **Carson, p. 171** *I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my heart to seek him, seeking me; If was not I that found, O Savior true; No, I was found by Thee. Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine*

*enfold; I walked and sank not on the storm-vexed sea; 'Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold As Thou, dear Lord, on me. I find, I walk, I love, but O the whole of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee! For Thou wert long beforehand with my soul; Always Thou lovest me.*). Surely we can understand why Paul thanks God for these believers. If we were to hear of a number of people in some city or country who had been genuinely transformed by the gospel, we would probably not travel to see them to thank them for becoming Christians. Instead we would thank God for working in them. What is true of salvation is also true of Christian maturity. And so Paul thanks God for what he sees in the transformed lives of the Ephesians in both their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints). There are few things sweeter than to see believers really care about each other. It is not some sappy sentimentalism, but a genuine love and gracious caring for one another. There are few things more ugly than to see and hear believers take each other apart. Such behavior denies the very truth we profess to believe. How the latter must grieve the heart of God, but how the former must delight Him! And when His people praise Him for the work He has done in the lives of these believers – that brings Him great glory. Transformed lives speaks of the gracious work of God in us, and thus God is glorified! So Paul thanks the Lord for His grace in their lives.

**II. INTERCESSION FOR GOD'S HOLY PURPOSES IN THEIR LIVES (17-19a).** (There are things that God has declared will happen in the lives of true believers. But we are also told to pray about these things and we are given that model of prayer as well. For example, Daniel prayed for the end of the exile. How could he confidently pray that way because God had promised that it would end. So here, Paul prays that Christians might grow in their knowledge of God, because God has declared His intention to expose His people to the glories of His grace and the wonders of His plan and purpose for them, so that they will grow up in Christ. That is why Paul can pray with confidence, knowing that his prayer is the will of God). Let's consider precisely what it is that Paul prayed for.

A. Paul prayed that his readers might know God better (which is an often repeated theme in his prayers)!

1. Surely none of us know God well enough! This is at the top of Paul's request list for these believers. Note here two expressions:

- a. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ (through whom all of God's blessings are mediated). Paul must start here. Our knowledge of God essentially begins with our relationship with Jesus. The Son has made known to us the Father. He is the express image of the Father. To see Jesus is to see God. To belong to Jesus is to belong to God. So, to speak of knowing God, Paul starts with Jesus.
  - b. The Father of glory – What does Paul mean when he prays that we might know God? To know God **personally** is **salvation**. To know God **increasingly** is **sanctification**. To know God **perfectly** is **glorification**. Paul is interested that these who belong to God might know Him progressively better this side of heaven. He wanted them to have a precise, exact, full-orbed, thorough understanding of God. Frankly that ought to be the burning desire of every believer. It is certainly a need for all of us. (Even the great Apostle Paul, after years of serving the Lord faithfully, expressed to the Philippians, “that I may know him...”). O may God make that the cry of the heart of this congregation as well as our prayer for one another! And how can we get to know God better?
2. We need the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that we might know God better.
    - a. When Paul prayed for them to have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, he was dealing in part at least with their capacity to know. Some may get nervous wondering what Paul meant by a spirit of revelation. I believe it is accurate to say that God has revealed Himself and such revelation has concluded with the completion of the New Testament. The ministry of the Holy Spirit now is one of illumination. Sometimes when the Bible uses the term revelation it may be close to the meaning of illumination as well as revelation. I think that is true here. Paul used the word this way in Philippians 3:15 in the sense that God would make these things clear. The word is reveal, but the concept is illuminate. The point is, we need the ministry of the Holy Spirit to make things clearer to us so we can know God better. So Paul prays for this. We should do the same! Not to so pray may suggest that we really are not that interested in knowing Him.
    - b. Paul prayed that these might have, in his words, “the eyes of your hearts enlightened.” Some translations say “eyes of your understanding.” The word is

“kardias” or heart. In present day culture, when we speak of the heart, we usually think emotions. (“I love you with all my heart.”) That was not the idea in the minds of the Hebrews or the Greeks, however. To express feelings, they used the term “bowels.” Somehow, “I love you with all of my bowels” loses something, but that is where we feel it. When the emotions are involved we get “butterflies in our stomachs” or we are tied up in knots. We even speak of certain things being “gut-wrenching.” When they spoke of the heart, they meant understanding. The heart is the inner man. Paul was praying that they might have the ability to understand spiritual things. What was Paul praying that we might know?

B. Paul’s prayed that his readers might have clear insight

1. To know the hope of His calling

- a. God deals with us on the basis of our future, not our past. Paul prayed that believers would understand God’s election in eternity past, God’s glory in eternity future, and all of God’s blessings in between (Romans 8 – “Whom he called he also justified and whom he justified, he also glorified). God sees this as a completed transaction and He wants us to understand that. By promising us a future, He has encouraged our hope while we live in the present. The hope of our calling is ultimately life in the new heaven and the new earth. It is fixing our eyes on the city whose builder and maker is God. Knowing the hope of our calling makes a huge difference in the way we view and live our present lives! Too few believers care about, much less know, the hope of their calling! In the words of D. A. Carson, “What we will have to show before the great King on the last day will be infinitely more important to us than what we leave behind here.” O that we would learn that lesson now. That was Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians and it should be our prayer for one another!
- b. God desires that we know this hope because it glorifies Him and sanctifies us. The Scripture reminds us that we were “called by His grace” (Gal. 1:15), “called with an holy calling” (2 Tim. 1:9), “called out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9) and He has “called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). And this wonderful hope to which He has called us, purifies us (1 John 2:28-3:3), moves us

to obedience (Hebrews 13:17) and to maintain our faithfulness (Luke 12:42 ff.).

Without Christ we are without hope, but with Christ we are confident. Paul wanted his readers to know the hope of their calling. Before we knew Christ we were without hope, but in Him we have a living hope while we eagerly await His coming – the blessed hope! Oh that we might know this more intimately!

2. To know the riches of His inheritance (More accurately, Paul wants us to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. In a short phrase, all that God has, He says belongs to us! What is he talking about? (Note 3:8. Paul calls these things “unsearchable riches”). They certainly include the riches of His grace (1:7), the riches of His mercy (2:4) and the riches of His glory (3:16). And when Paul talks about the inheritance with the saints, he is suggesting that God looks at us and sees us as part of His wealth. God’s plan for me is to be an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. How very important it is to understand our position in Christ! This does not suggest that we will be focusing on ourselves, somehow commending ourselves for belonging to God. All of these unsearchable riches given to destitute sinners is strong motivation to give endless praise to God. The better we understand the riches of His inheritance, the more full and passionate will be our praise – and all of that brings Him great glory!
3. To know the greatness of His power – We need power because we are too weak to handle by ourselves the great spiritual wealth we have in Christ, not to mention the fact that we are surrounded by many enemies of the truth who would like nothing more than to rob us of these spiritual blessings. But we have this great power available to us in Christ. Paul spoke of power using at least three words to describe it. “According to the working (that is operating power – energy) of his great might (that’s ultimate power) that he worked (that is endowed power) in Christ.” And then to make sure we understand, Paul gives some illustrations of such power in action. The power that works in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and it is the same power that exalted Christ to the highest place and the same power or authority that placed all things under His feet! That is saying something! God wants us to know that because it is that power which is at work in us to bring us into conformity to His

will and purpose, preparing us for an eternity with Him! Just how that works in us, Paul saves for his second prayer in chapter 3. Stay tuned!

## Conclusion

1. Many years after this letter was written, Paul wrote to Timothy, who was serving at the church of Ephesus. Timothy was apparently struggling, thoroughly discouraged and ready to quit. Paul did not tell him that he needed to rededicate his life or that he needed to repent. Instead Paul told him to “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead.” What Timothy needed was a fresh reminder of the greatness of God’s power at work in his life. We need the same.
2. We don’t need something more – we are complete in Him. He has already given us everything we need for life and godliness. What we do need is to live in light of what we are in Christ. We need to know that the past call of salvation is producing in us our present hope. We need to know that our future inheritance promises a measure of glory. We need to know that the power at work in us provides daily victory! That’s pretty good, don’t you think – hope, confidence, victory and glory – all in Christ! We need to know that. That was Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians and that should be our prayer for our church!
3. Glory to God for the unsearchable riches we have in Christ Jesus!
4. Let me close with these few paragraphs from D. A. Carson. Consider carefully.

*Not a drop of rain can fall outside the orb of Jesus’ sovereignty. All our days – our health, our illnesses, our joys, our victories, our tears, our prayers, and the answers to our prayers – fall within the sweep of the sovereignty of one who wears a human face, a thorn-shadowed face. All of God’s sovereignty is mediated through one who was crucified on my behalf. For Christians, that means God’s sovereignty can no longer be viewed as a merely creedal point, still less as the source of endless mystery. There is more than enough material for creedal confession here, and not a little mystery; but these mysteries revolve around one who died in my place. The mysteries of prayer remain, but they dissolved in worship and gratitude. It is far easier to accept the mysteries of divine sovereignty when the divine love is as great as the divine sovereignty.*

*All of this sovereignty is exercised for the church. This is a stunning thought. God*

*“placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” (1:22). What gratitude should this call from us! What an incentive to pray in line with God’s purposes for his people!*

*Brothers and sisters in Christ, we will sometimes come to places where, as we try to think about God, we will conclude that these things are way beyond us, that we cannot take them in, that we cannot comprehend him. But if we focus on what God has revealed of himself, such meditation will become a ground not for complaint, not for self-interest, not for fatalism or as excuse to sin, but a ground for worship – and an incentive to approach this sovereign, loving God and intercede with him according to his own plan and purpose declared in Scripture for his Son’s glory and his people’s good (pp. 179-180, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*). Amen!*