

**THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS AT EPHESUS**

Ephesians 1:18-23

**Intro:** Last Sunday morning I sought to point out to you from verses 15 through 17 here in Ephesians 1, the special place that prayer had in the life of the Apostle Paul. And this is not only true in Ephesians, but if you were to take any of Paul's epistles from Romans to Philemon (as they appear in our Bibles), you would see the same strong emphasis on prayer. Undoubtedly this accounts to a great extent for the amazing influence that Paul had throughout the Roman Empire in the first century after Christ. Read again verses 15 and 16 in Ephesians 1. (Read.)

We can see from this Ephesian epistle as well as in his letter to the church at Colosse that Paul prayed for believers that he had never met. In addition, Paul did not just pray when there was some kind of a problem, but he also prayed for churches who were experiencing special blessings from the Lord. I think that most of us are more inclined to pray for individual believers when we know that there is some special problem in their lives, or when a church is going through troubles of some kind. Of course Paul when pray for troubled churches and troubled believers, but he didn't wait for problems to develop before he prayed for them. Often his prayers were meant to prevent the development of problems. Truly, in the highest and best meaning of the expression, *the Apostle Paul was a man of prayer!*

Paul knew that it was through prayer to the Lord that the people of God would be enabled to understand the truth of God. And he also knew that it was through prayer that the people of God would be inclined to obey the Word of God. He wanted to be as clear and as truthful as he could possibly be in teaching the people of God, but he also knew that the effectiveness of his ministry would be the result of prayer to God. How else could we possibly explain his words, his prayer, as he expressed himself in verse 17. If God is not at work when the Word of God is being taught, if the Holy Spirit does not work through the teaching of the Word of God, we might as well save our breath. The Lord never expected his servants in OT times, or in the early days of the Church in the NT, to do His work by themselves. God, especially God, the Holy Spirit, can make us understand the Word, and only He can give us, or anyone else, the ability to understand the Word and the ability to obey the Word in our daily lives. Paul stressed this at the beginning of his first letter to the church at Corinth, and it surely is basic to what Paul wrote here to the

Ephesians about how believers become capable of understanding the truth.

Now today we are going on to verse 18. Here we see, as I have indicated in the title of my message, that we have the primary burden on Paul's heart for the believers at Ephesus with regard to the Word of God. Basically Paul was here telling the Ephesian saints what his primary burden was for them. And it was not something that he had started to pray about as he wrote to them, but it was what he had been praying for them, as he said in verse 15, "after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." He knew many of them personally, but others had evidently been saved since Paul had been there to minister to them. But we need to remember also that this probably was a circular letter, sent first to Ephesus, but was meant to include other churches in the Roman province of Asia, which Turkey occupies today.

### **I. PAUL'S FIRST REQUEST (Eph. 1:18a).**

In the first part of verse 18 we read these words:

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling.

The Greek text actually reads, *the eyes of your heart being enlightened, or being made to see*. That which we are inclined to put in the mind, the Bible puts in the heart. But it is not that organ in our bodies that keeps us alive, it is that which is the center of all spiritual life and understanding. It is that in man which is dead by nature, and it is only through the new birth that we are given the ability to see and to understand things which we were incapable of knowing until we were called to Christ. According to verse 17 it is the Holy Spirit who gives us this insight into the things of God. Spiritually the child of God can say what the blind man who was healed by Christ said when the Lord gave him physical sight, "One I was blind, but now I see." This gift of spiritual sight enables us to know and understand the truth of the Word of God as the Spirit of God teaches us what God has revealed in His Word.

We need to be patient with unbelievers when they show no interest in the Word of God. They are spiritually blind. They need to be enlightened in order to understand their own spiritual need and what God's remedy is for their spiritual blindness. They don't know that they are spiritually blind. An unregenerate person thinks that we are the one's who make no sense. But, as the writer of the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm said so many years ago, it is the

entrance of God's light that enables them to see light. Psalm 119:130 says, "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understand unto the simple." That is why we give people the Word of God. God uses His Word in the hearts of people as it pleases Him, but if they are ever to see the truths of Scripture, it comes by the Spirit using the Word. Peter says that it is by the Word of God that we are born again. Peter's actual words are:

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever (1 Peter 1:23).

Isaiah, seven hundred years before Christ came to earth as a Man, said this about the Word of God:

10 For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater:

11 So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa. 55:10-11).

And another verse that is important to know is Hebrews 4:12:

12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God uses His Word to transform lives, to give light and sight to those who are spiritually blind and unable to understand the truth. Therefore, if we want to see God at work, we need to use the instrument that brings light to blinded hearts.

So the first request that Paul prayed repeatedly for the people of God, was that they might "know what is the hope of His calling."

"His calling" is what God does in bringing anyone to salvation. Our salvation does not originate with us. We are not the captains of our souls. God, we have learned in our chapter, has chosen His elect to be saved. He made that in eternity past before He created the heavens and the earth. And throughout time God has been calling His chosen ones to salvation. And then He draws us by His Holy Spirit, gives us eternal life, and grants us faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me go ahead at this point to three

very familiar verses in Ephesians 2 which help us to understand this wonderful salvation that the Bible tells us about. Follow it in your Bible as I read verses 8, 9, and 10. God chose us. He sent His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for us, taking the penalty for our sins upon Himself, and everyone of us here this morning who is saved, has been saved because God has called us to Himself, has given us life, and we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, and He will never cast us out. We are eternally secure in Christ. He saves us, and He keeps us for all eternity.

But what did the Apostle Paul mean by “the hope of His calling.” This very simple word has special meaning in the Bible. We often use the word “hope” to describe something we want, or some event we want to take place, but when you use the word that way it always carries with it the possibility that it may not take place, or if it is something I want, I may get it, or I may not! But the Bible uses that word “hope” in many places to speak of something that is future, but it is absolutely certain.

And so the Bible speaks of the hope of our salvation when it speaks of why we have been saved. What was God’s ultimate purpose in saving us?

Someone will say, “He saved us to keep us from going to hell.” And, thank God, that is true. If you are saved, you are not going to hell. Others might say that the Lord saved us to take us to heaven. And that is true also. We are learning in our Tuesday Class from John 14 that the Lord went back to heaven to prepare a place for us, and that He is coming again to receive us to Himself. So that is a wonderful part of our salvation.

But as wonderful as all of those certain hopes are, that is not the main hope that we have. Let me say this simply and clearly and I hope that no one here this morning will ever forget it. When God designed our salvation, His main, ultimate objective was that everyone who is saved would be made like the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle John wrote in his first epistle that, speaking of Christ, “we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.”

The Apostle Paul speaking about what is going on in all of our lives today, and has been going on since we first came to the Savior, had this to say in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of

the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

And let me add to Paul's words in that verse, what he said in Romans, chapter 8. (Read verses 22-25, and then verses 28-30.)

And then I want to add one more passage of Scripture found in Paul's letter to Titus, verses that we had in our memory work earlier this year. These verses are found in Titus 2:11-14:

- 11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
- 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;
- 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;
- 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Now there are three requests that the Apostle Paul was presenting to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory." And all three of these requests are introduced by the words "that ye may know . . ." (Read them with this phrase, "that ye may know.")

Now if you have been listening to me this morning, you probably understand what, you "know what is the hope of His calling." But do you? And do I really "know" this as Paul was praying that those believers back in the first century were to know them. ***The way you know that you know is when it makes a difference in the way you live. And the way that I know that I know is when it makes a difference in the way that I live. When we really "know" what is "the hope of His calling," then we will go to our Bibles with a new desire to do what the Lord want us to do, and to be what He wants us to be. That is why the Lord has filled His Word with commandments which tell us what He wants us to do, and what He does not want us to do, and with what He wants us to be, and what He does not want us to be.***

**Concl:** When the Lord had washed His disciples' feet in the Upper Room because none of them was humble enough to do such a menial task, He said to them, "Know ye what I have done to you?" Of course, they knew. They had all seen Him wash their feet. On the surface that sounds like a strange question for the Lord to ask His disciples unless they knew, and

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unless you and I know, what “know” means in the language of God. A few verses after the Lord asked them that question, He made a very important statement that I hope I will always remember, and I hope that you will always remember it too. He said, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:17).

Be like Jesus, this my song, in the home and in the throng;  
Be like Jesus all day long. I would be like Jesus.

And lest we think that this is only New Testament truth, I would call your attention to the last verse of Psalm 17 which is called “a prayer of David,” we read that David said, “As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.”