

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

Ephesians 1:18-23

Part 2

**Intro:** I want to spend another Sunday on this first of two rather detailed prayers which the Apostle said that he was praying for those who were to receive this epistle. As I mentioned to you in the beginning of our study the words translated “at Ephesus” are not in some of the MSS that we have of this epistle, while it does appear in others. This has led to the idea that Paul did not just write for the Ephesian church, but that he sent it first to Ephesus and wanted it to be circulated among all of the churches which were in the Roman province of Asia, the land today which is occupied by the country of Turkey.

So his burden in prayer was very likely for all of the churches in that larger area, which also would lead us to believe that this is a prayer which Paul prayed for all of the churches he had established and/or those he was concerned about. And this, in turn, would lead us to believe that this is the kind of a prayer which the Apostle Paul would pray for us if he were alive today. We speak a different language from what they spoke, and modern society differs greatly from that ancient society, *but people are the same today. The Christian life is the same. Our enemies within and without are the same. And so our needs are the same. This prayer should be very important for every Christian to pray for himself, or herself. And this is a prayer that we all should pray for other Christians we are concerned about, whether parents for their children, or elders and deacons for those committed to their care. It would be a good idea to have this prayer printed in capital letters in our Bibles, and even underlined.*

We all need to be taught the Scriptures. We need to have the Scriptures carefully explained to us. We need to read it repeatedly and carefully. BUT, the passage before us teaches us that even though our teacher might have been the Apostle Paul in those days, the teaching alone, while extremely important, needs to be supported by prayer, earnest prayer, and continued prayer. This is what we learn beginning with verse 15 of chapter 1. We need to thank the Lord for saving us, and for saving those who are a part of our family, of those who attend our church. But we need to pray that the blessing of the Holy Spirit will be upon the teaching of the Word, and that He will really open the eyes of the hearts of those who hear the Word so that they will really understand the message of the

Word of God. A person who is not a Christian will find the Bible impossible to understand. But when a person is saved, the Holy Spirit comes to abide in him, or her, forever, and one of His main reasons for coming to us, is to teach us. This is what Paul was talking about in verse 17 and into the first statement of verse 18.

So, if you are saved, the Spirit of God is dwelling in you. He is your God-appointed teacher. But He does His greatest work of teaching when we recognize His presence in us, and ask Him to open the eyes of our hearts so that we will know, really know, know our own inability to understand the Scriptures unless He helps us, and know that He alone can cause us to “know” in a life-changing way, “the hope of His calling,” and what are “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,” and “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe.” Those are the three requests in Paul’s prayer. In our Bibles they are each introduced by the word “that.” (Read.)

The first is:

**I. “THAT YE MAY KNOW THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING” (Eph. 1:18m).**

We considered this together last Sunday, but I want to remind you what I said, and I hope this will help those of you who weren’t with us last Sunday.

What Paul was concerned about here was the question, Why did the Lord save us? What is the purpose of salvation? What can I tell my friends who aren’t Christians, why they need to be saved?

Well, the word saved, or salvation, indicates that there is something that we need to be saved from, something very terrible which we cannot otherwise escape.

The first answer to that question is I need to be saved from the judgment of God. Or to put it another way, you and I need to be saved from spending eternity in hell. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to save us from the penalty of our sins. That is the Gospel.

But secondly Christ died to make it certain that we would go to heaven. The Bible speaks of the death of a Christian like this: “To be absent from

the body is to be present with the Lord.” We are going to the place He is preparing for us. But the Word teaches us that the Lord may come before we die. And if that should happen we will also be “forever with the Lord.

But the third reason actually comes between the first two, and it has to do with changes that the Lord is making in our lives from the time we are saved until that day when we are with the Lord. It is called “the hope of His calling.” It is not a “hope” because there is anything uncertain about it, but because it is something that is still future, but it is just as certain as the fact that Jesus Christ came to save us. The end reason for our salvation is twofold:

- 1) We are going to be forever *with* the Lord.
- 2) We are going to be forever *like* the Lord.

Have you ever read the four Gospels for the purpose of comparing the Lord Jesus with yourself, or with anyone that you know? I am not talking about the miracles He performed. I am talking about the kind of a Person He was, His character. One of the first things that we learn about the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, is that He never sinned. We can't say that about ourselves, can we? I hope that we can all say that we don't sin now like we used to sin. We still sin, but it bothers us, and we are looking forward to that day when for us who know the Lord, sin and sickness and death, will all be a thing of the past. The ultimate reason that the Lord called us, our hope, is that “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Those of us who are saved know that sin has such a hold in our lives that we are convinced that the only One Who could possibly carry out such a hope for us, or for any or all of the redeemed, is God!

Paul prayed that the believers in Ephesus would know *why* the Lord had saved them. He died to save us from our sins. He died that we might have heaven to look forward to. But He died that we might have that certain, unchanged and unchangeable hope, that by His grace we will be like the Lord Jesus.

Now for Paul to pray that the Ephesian Christians in the first century would “know” this, meant that he wanted them to be living every day, seeking to be like the Lord Jesus. This meant seeking to be holy in our character and in our conduct.

Now how does the second petition figure into this? What is the second petition in this prayer?

**II. “THAT YE MAY KNOW . . . WHAT [ARE] THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF HIS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS (Eph. 1:18b).**

Some expositors are inclined to think that this speaks of the inheritance which God has for His saints. The Bible has many references to the inheritance that we have awaiting us. We learned from chapter 1, verse 5, that we are sons in the family of God, and, therefore, as sons we are as Romans 8:17 tells us, we are “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.” In Peter’s first epistle he mentioned that God

3 . . . hath begotten us again unto a lively [living] hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3b-4).

We don’t know, and won’t know, all that that means until we get to heaven, but we can be sure that it will be wonderful than we can possibly imagine. Heaven itself is our inheritance.

But I have to come back to the fact that to the words that Paul used here in this prayer in Ephesians 1, say “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

Now I agree with Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones that it is hard to think of God having an inheritance. Somehow that sounds backward from what it should be. But that is what Paul said. Now like so many things in Scripture, I don’t profess to be able to explain this to my own satisfaction, but taking what Paul wrote at face value, it seems to me that Paul was talking about how God will benefit Himself in your salvation and mine.

Think for a moment about what sin did to God’s original creation. It affected and ruined all of creation. Now what God has done in His Son in bringing a redeemed people to glory, speaks of what God will take for Himself by the work that will be done in redeemed saints! If He looked upon original creation and saw that it was “very good,” God will look upon the new heavens and new earth and declare that it is “eternally good with a goodness that will never, and can never be changed!”

We know that God takes all of His delight in His Son, and so it is His

eternal purpose that in the new creation He is going to have a people who are just like His Son!

But what about “the riches of the glory.” Do you remember when I started this present study in Ephesians that I gave you a threefold outline of this epistle. And it was summed up in three words. They did not originate with me, but I told you that I was following the plan suggested by other Bible teachers, and one of them was a woman. The words are the wealth, the walk, and the warfare of the Christian. The wealth is in chapters 1-3. The walk (where that word for the life of a Christian is more prominent than in any of Paul’s epistles) is found in chapter 4, 5, and down to the ninth verse of chapter 6. The warfare is in Ephesians 6: 10-20, with verses 21-24 forming the conclusion of the epistle.

What is our wealth as Christians? It is all that we have in Christ. Generally it is included in the first fourteen verses of chapter 1. It all has to do with what God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, have provided for the people of God in the Gospel. The inheritance of God, which is the work of the Godhead, is all that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have done in securing the salvation of all who have believed in Jesus Christ.

I believe that the Lord was talking about His inheritance as it related to the nation of Israel in the words that are recorded for us in Isaiah 43:1:

1 But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

To take a NT example, let me call your attention to our Lord’s words in John 10:27-30:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

You and I will never really understand how the Lord delights in us because of our relationship to His Son, until we get to heaven. But in those times when your spirits droop, think of what it means to you that you are the Lord’s inheritance!

But now the third request which takes us to the end of chapter 1.

### **III. “AND WHAT IS THE EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TOWARD US WHO BELIEVE (Eph. 1:20-23).”**

Now after all I have said, trying to explain what Paul wrote to the Ephesians and probably other churches in the same area, thinking about our hope, and even the inheritance of God, we all know that inheritances can be lost. A lot of financial experts have the jitters because of what happened in the stock market this past week. Many of us can remember the Great Depression of the early thirties when many wealthy men committed suicide because when the great crash came, they lost everything! Does what Paul wrote here sound too good to be true? Can it be that we could lose all that we presently have in Christ? Are we Christians kidding ourselves, or is our hope secure?

Let’s look at what Paul wrote in the last four verses of this chapter. Here the Apostle Paul made several points that can set our hearts at ease. And they all have to do with the power of God and of Christ.

The first is that we need to remember Who God is and what He has done if we are to rest in total security. We need to remember His power toward us. He has made a change in our lives that we could never have made for ourselves, nor could anyone else have done what we needed to have done in our hearts. We are the result of the working of His mighty power. His work is not yet complete, but the goal is secure because it is dependent upon Him, not us. As I have told you before, we have here the greatest assortment of words having to do with the power of that can be found any place in the Bible.

Verse 20 tells us that the mighty power that is doing the transforming work in all of us, is the same power that it took to raise the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. And not only to raise Him from the dead, but that God has also seated our Savior at His own right hand, the place of acceptance and authority. This is all in verse 20.

In placing the Lord Jesus at His right hand, God has placed His Son, not only above all earthly and heavenly powers, but “far above” them! His power is greater than any power or any combination of powers that exist in all of the universe. Take the power of the United States, the power of England, the power of Russia, China, the Muslim world. Take the power

of all of the nations of the earth, and the Lord Jesus is supreme over them all. I am afraid that our nation has aligned itself with the other nations of the world according to the language of Psalm 2 which tells us:

- 1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
- 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying,
- 3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.
- 4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.
- 5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure (Psa. 2:1-5).

In Daniel 4:35 we read these words:

- 35 And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

And, according to verse 21, what the Lord directed Paul to write here applies not only to all of past history, but for the rest of time which is yet to come.

And finally in verse 22 and 23 we see that the true sovereign of the earth at this present time, is the Lord Jesus Christ. And in particular, He is the Head of His church. We are the fulness of Him Who is omnipresent throughout heaven and earth.

**Concl:** Let us pray that we will all “know” these truths and see their practical importance in all of our lives. These are truths that we need to keep us steady in these turbulent and evil times in which we live. God is in charge. His Son is the Sovereign over men and angels, saints and demons, and His is working all things out in accordance with the will of God.

The truth of this prayer should put all of us on our knees praising God for His sovereign power and for His amazing grace to us. Is our hope going to be realized? There is no doubt but that it will be because it is all based upon the promises of God and the power of God. He cannot and will not fulfill all of His purposes to the eternal glory of His own Name and the Name of His Son. Pray that we might be used by the Holy Spirit to help others to “know” what we by God’s grace know with absolute certainty!