

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 1:18
Sermon #11
August 14, 1988

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As a background for our message this morning, I want to read from Hebrews chapter 6 beginning with verse 9 and going down through the end of the chapter. I would like for you to note particularly in the reading the references that are made to our hope.

Hebrews 6, beginning with verse 9:

"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

My text for this morning is the middle part of the eighteenth verse of the first chapter, that little expression "That ye may know what is the hope of his calling." This is the first of three special prayer requests that Paul was praying regularly for the Ephesian believers.

If this epistle were a circular letter, as it may well have been, and perhaps, as I have suggested in past weeks, it was circulated among the same churches that were mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3, this prayer was intended for several churches. These were Paul's requests for all of them. You can easily see the requests because each one of the three is introduced with the word "what": "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 greatness of his power to us-ward who believe."

We can say, without any reservation, that this was undoubtedly one of Paul's requests for all believers when he prayed, that they would know what is the hope of his calling.

If you look at that statement you will see that there are three things that he obviously and clearly is emphasizing. He spoke first of all, and this, of course, applies to the others as well, that there was something that they needed to know, something that he wanted them to know, something that he was praying that they would know. Then, secondly, he, in this request is concerned about the Christian's hope. Then, finally, he relates this as being the object of His calling, God's calling of His people. We want to look at each one of those ideas this morning in the time that we have. I trust that when we leave here we will understand a little bit more about the hope of His calling.

Think, first of all, about that word "know", k-n-o-w. The Ephesians were to know something. Then, it, of course, meant that they had to learn this. It goes without saying, I am sure, that the church today, at least the visible church, the professing church, is not very interested in learning. People are more interested in having a good time. There is nothing wrong with having a good time; but we need

to understand what our purpose is when we gather together. We do not find today that there is a very high priority upon teaching. The pastor in most churches feels a certain amount of pressure to enter into the roll of entertainer, and his effectiveness is usually measured in terms of whether or not he is what is called in our speech today a good communicator. There are a lot of men who are good communicators who are not communicating the Word of God; they are not teaching the Word of God. Paul put, as always, a high priority on teaching and not just for the sake of teaching, but for the sake of people learning, and specifically learning the truth of the Word of God. It is impossible for any of us in our lifetime to learn all that there is to know about the Bible. I am sure most of us have come to the realization that we will never be able to exhaust it.

One of my friends in seminary, when we were graduating, was wondering if he would be able with the things that he had learned to last a lifetime in the ministry. I heard from him some time afterwards and he had come to the conclusion that he would never live long enough to preach everything that is to be found in the Word of God. In fact, you will remember that Paul emphasized to the Corinthian church, which was a church that was very much in need of learning the truth, that we really do not know what we know as well as we ought to know it. There is always more that we can learn about what we do know. Paul expressed it in these words, "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). When we hear truths mentioned that we have learned before, we must not close our minds and hearts to what is being said because it is very possible about those truths that have become precious to us we are going to learn even more that will help us to understand what those truths mean. We ought to come to church to learn. We ought to come to Sunday school to learn; because we will be able to learn more when we come to Sunday school than if we just come to church. We need to read our Bibles regularly so we can learn. Learning the truth of the Word of God ought to be number one with each one of us.

Just to cite some passages, and there are many of them along this line, I could not point them all out if we had more time. You remember that Paul in writing to Timothy said, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). If you look at that verse you will see that there are four spiritual generations that he mentions. Timothy had learned that he was to teach others so that they in turn could teach others beyond them. In what we call the Great Commission, the Lord commissioned His disciples with these words, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations . . ." (Matt. 28:19). To be sure, the word "teach" there is actually the word "to make disciples of", but what is a disciple but a learner. One of the characteristics of the servant of the Lord, according to 2 Timothy 2:24 is that he is to be apt to teach. This means that he is not only to teach and willing to teach, but that he is eager to teach. The Lord Jesus Christ said from the Cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Along the same line, Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8-9). Their chief problem was ignorance, ignorance of the truth of the word of God. As I have reminded you before, Peter's parting words in his 2 epistle, chapter 3, verse 18 are these: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." No book of the Bible places a greater emphasis on the knowledge of God and His Word than does the Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament. It is all through the Scriptures. We can say, if we stop to think about it for a moment, that if the Lord had not wanted us to know the truth, He would never have given us the Bible. The Bible would never have been written. The Bible itself stands as a lasting memorial to the fact that God has many things to teach us that we need to know. Let us not apologize for teaching the Word. In fact, it would be a grave sin against God, would it not, if in our fellowship together we failed to proclaim the Word of God.

Thinking specifically about our text and the context of this statement, let me just mention three other things about this knowledge of the hope of His calling that come from our text.

We saw last Sunday, and this has been emphasized over and over again in our recent lessons on

Sunday morning in the first hour, that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as our teacher. This is not the only reason that He has been given to us, but this is one of the greatest reasons. We saw that last week in verse 17, the verse just before this, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit (the Holy Spirit) of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." When the Lord Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit in His Upper Room Discourse, He said, among other things, that "He would guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). Not all kinds of truth, but

all the truth of the Scriptures. Again referring to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where he had so much to say about knowledge and wisdom, he said this, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Many people just take that verse and say, "well, when we get to heaven we are going to find out what the Lord hath prepared for us, and won't it be wonderful to find out what those are?" That is not what Paul was saying, because he went on to say, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). So when he says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man . . ." he is saying that we do not learn spiritual truth just by our natural abilities. Obviously, if we are going to learn the Word of God we need to see it and we need to hear it and we need to comprehend the truth; but if we are left to our own abilities we will never understand it. That is the reason the Holy Spirit has been given. The most intelligent person who ever lived, and I do not know who that would be, of course, excluding our Lord Jesus Christ who obviously was the greatest of all; but the most intelligent person who ever lived is powerless to understand the truth of God if he does not have the Holy Spirit as his teacher. The reason that you and I came to understand the Gospel is because the Holy Spirit was teaching us. The Holy Spirit was making the truth known: Before we knew that there was a Holy Spirit, or before we knew that the Bible was really the Word of God. The Holy Spirit has to reveal to us the meaning of what He revealed to the writers of Scripture so that they could write what they wrote. We must never forget this important truth. The Lord may use some person to help you or to help me to understand more about the Word of God; but always, always, without exception, that person is an instrument of the Spirit of God in teaching us things that God wants us to know.

The second thing that comes out of our text about knowing the Word of God is that this ought to be a matter of prayer for us. This appears in a prayer, does it not? Not only that, Paul says, as he is referring to his praying, in verse 16, "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." This was a request that he prayed about not just once for every Christian, but he prayed this over and over again. If we were more faithful in praying this for each other, perhaps there would be fewer of us who would get away from the Lord. Paul was very faithful in this. We should never read our Bibles without praying that the Holy Spirit would enable us to see what He wants us to know. We should never come to church to hear a message or to attend a Sunday school class without praying that we and others who are listening will be brought to understand the truth of God. In the quietness of your own heart as you are listening to this message this morning, I hope that you will pray for me, pray for yourself, and pray for the others who are here, that the word of God would really get through to us. Sometimes, and I have had this experience quite frequently, while I am preaching I will see something from the text that I have spent hours over that I did not see when I was preparing the message. When this happens, obviously the Holy Spirit continues to be at work. I need to learn. I need to be taught just as much as you need it. Regardless of how long I live, I am in the same category as you: there will always be much more that I need to know, and the truths that I do know I need to know better. That is the second thing: This ought to be a matter of prayer for us. It is a good lesson for us on how to pray for each other.

The last thing that I want you to see is that we are to know here things that people do not naturally understand unless they come under the influence of the Word of God. When they come under the influence of the Word of God, it has a life-changing effect upon them.

What I am saying, and what I believe Paul was saying, is that he was not emphasizing the fact that

they would simply become experts in the doctrine of Scripture. I will be mentioning in a moment what he had in mind when he spoke of the hope of our calling. Quite often, churches like ours are criticized because we stress doctrine so heavily. I am not going to apologize at all for that; but I think that we need to understand that when we come to the comprehension of spiritual truth, one evidence that we really are understanding the truth is that our lives are going to be changed. This is involved in what the Apostle Paul was saying. Consequently we need to keep this in mind. If the Word of God leaves me the same as I was before then I have not gotten it, I have not understood what I need to understand; but if the Spirit of God is teaching us, and as we read the Word and as we hear the Word of God preached, we are coming to a true understanding of the Word our lives will reflect that we are learning the truth of God. Truth leads to practice. The ministry of the Spirit of God in communicating to us the knowledge of these great doctrines of Scripture is to have a life-transforming effect upon us so that the best taught church ought to be filled with the holiest people. That is the significance of what the Apostle Paul was saying here. The burden of his heart was that the people of God would continue to learn the Word of God, continue to understand the truth of God, see what God has revealed about Himself, about the Lord Jesus Christ, these great truths of the Bible that are so precious to those of us who believe.

Specifically, he says here that "I am praying that you will know what is the hope of his calling."

If you are reading through Ephesians, you perhaps have discovered that there are three times in the epistle when he speaks of our hope. We have the first one here in our text this morning in Ephesians 1:18. The second we have in chapter 2 and verse 12, and it is an entirely different situation when he speaks about those who have no hope. Paul makes it clear that the believer has a hope. The Christian has a hope. The child of God has a hope. But the vast majority of people in the world are without Christ and are without God, so they have no hope. This is the worst possible condition that a person could be in. He might have his bank account full, he might be robust as far as his health is concerned, everything in his life may be going the way he wants it to go; but if he has no hope he is to be pitied. He is to be pitied. The third occurrence of this is in Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 4. It is linked to our calling again when Paul reminds us that we are called in one hope of your calling. There is only one. There are not two. There are not a half a dozen. there are not a hundred. There is just one--one hope. This hope is spoken of many, many places in Scripture. We read about it this morning in Romans chapter 8. "We are saved by hope," Paul said, "but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24-25). Obviously, hope has something to do with the future. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul wrote, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). The original language means "most to be pitied." As wonderful as it is to be a Christian, if you take that future hope away from us then it spoils everything here because everything that God is doing with us now is in view of that hope that we have. We can conclude from these verses that we have not realized our hope yet. It is something that is future. It is something that will not be realized in this life. Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied." It is something that is going to come in the future and it is only going to come when we are with the Lord.

By definition, the Biblical word "hope" means "a certain expectation of some future good." I would like for you to remember that if you would: A certain expectation of some future good. Something good is in store for us, something that is better than anything that we will ever have in this life. It is absolutely certain to come. There is absolutely no doubt about it. That was clear from our reading in Hebrews chapter 6. It is just as sure as any of the promises of God because the hope that we have in Christ is one of His promises.

Now. What is our hope? What are we talking about when Paul says, "that you may know what is the hope of his calling?"

We will let John the Apostle answer this for us. We find the answer in 1 John 3:2-3. Notice the way he uses the word "hope". "Beloved, now are we the sons of God . . ." If you say, "I hope I am a child of God," but you think that somewhere down the line that you may really become a child of God, you are not talking the language of the Bible. The hope that John was talking about is for those who are the sons of God. He says, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know (notice the certainty of it--it is not just a 'hope so' thing in modern language, but this is something that is future and it is absolutely certain) that, when he shall appear, (and here it is) we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Then John says this, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." You see, if you have this hope in Christ that someday you are going to be like Christ, when you are with Christ, then it is going to have a tremendous effect upon the way you live now. You'll be purifying yourself even as He is pure. You are going to be making use of those instruments that God has given to us for the sake of our purification. Notice that John says, "We know that we shall be like Him." It is absolutely certain. Our hope is future: "When He shall appear." Then, it has a present practical effect upon us. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." Our hope is our certain hope, our certain expectation, the future good that is coming for us is that we are going to be like the Lord Jesus. We are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not say this with any degree of uncertainty, but we say it with the same certainty that Paul said when he said that we are saved by hope. He meant by that that when the Lord saves us, and even now when you and I have come so many years from the time that we first came to know the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not, even this morning as we are here in this service, what we are going to be throughout all eternity. You are going to be changed more. I am going to be changed more. That process has been going on from the moment that we received the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not finished yet. I can say to my own shame that there is so much about me that is not like the Lord Jesus Christ and I am grieved by those things; but by the grace of God I can say with the Apostle John that "we know that we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." This is our hope. This is our one hope. This is our only hope. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Philippian church, "Being confident, being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). You see, my hope is not that I can make myself like the Lord Jesus. My hope is that He is going to make me like the Lord Jesus. God guarantees success with every one of His children. There may be differences between us as far as eternity is concerned, differences when we get to heaven; but one way in which we are going to be alike is that we are going to be conformed to the image of God's dear Son. That is a precious hope. If you do not have that hope this morning, let me encourage you to listen to the Gospel message and to understand that this is the reason why Jesus Christ came. He came and offered Himself as a sacrifice that sinners might be transformed into saints by His mighty power and through the shedding of His precious blood. All who come to Him and put their trust in Him are heirs of this wonderful hope that we will be like Christ.

Now. This is the hope of His calling. What does this mean?

Will you look at the first verse of the fourth chapter of Ephesians? You will see that Paul begins the practical section of the book. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." It is really saying that ye walk worthy of the calling by which ye have been called. How did you and I ever come to have such a hope? that we guilty sinners, deserving of the judgment of God, defiled by our sins, weakened by our sins, rebellious against God, would have such a marvelous destiny? I do not know how you feel about yourself, but when the Lord undertook to change me from what I was when I was first saved to what I am going to be when I am like the Lord Jesus, He took on a tremendous project. It is nothing, perhaps, to God; yet, when we look at ourselves we see that this is going to mean some tremendous changes.

The way we came to the possession of this hope is that we were called to it. We were called to it. We were called to it when we were called to salvation. People often have the idea that salvation is something that we decide upon. I hear until I am sickened every time I hear it that our destiny is in our own hands. Thank God my destiny was not left in my hands, I would be just headed straight for

hell as I could possibly go--and you would be too. The reason we have this hope, the reason we are change, the reason we are the children of God, the reason we know the forgiveness of sins, is that we are called. We are called. Who called us? Why, God called us. Why did He call us? He called us because, as we learned in the Book of Ephesians, from the foundation of the world He chose us to be Himself. Were we seeking Him? The Bible says that there is none that seeketh after God. I was not seeking Him and you were not seeking Him. We did not want Him, but He was the One Who was calling us because He wanted us. He claimed us for Himself. When the Lord calls in this effective, effectual way, when people are turned from a life of sin and turned to Jesus Christ, they come. When God calls men, women, boys, or girls to Himself, to Christ and to salvation, they come. All of our resistance breaks down. Our wills are overwhelmed by the gracious will of God, and out of our darkness and sorrow and sin we come to Him because He has called us by His marvelous grace.

The purpose of His calling was not just to forgive our sins. That would be far more than any of us deserve. Nor was it just to take us to heaven. I am thankful for that too. Nor was it just to bring us into His family. Any of those would have been far beyond what we deserve, and far beyond perhaps what we would have dared plan if salvation had been of our own doing. Ultimately, the real purpose of His calling is expressed here in this verse "to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ." If we know the hope of His calling, if we know the purpose that God had in mind when He called us by His grace, called us to Himself, and we came to Him, it was His purpose that we would be like the Saviour. That is what our ultimate destiny is going to be.

If you need further evidence of this, listen to these words from Romans chapter 8, familiar, I am sure, to most of you, starting with verse 28:

"And we know that all things work together for good . . ." I said, in defining our hope, that our hope is a certain expectation of some future good. Many people read Romans 8:28 and see, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God" and interpret this as meaning that I may go through difficult times, but God is really going to give me what I want to have. He is going to work things out how I want it to be worked out." That is what we expect. But now listen, he says, ". . . good . . . to them who are the called according to his purpose." The good that God is accomplishing by working all things together for good is the fulfillment of His purpose that He had when He called us to Christ. He takes all of these various details and circumstances, and when God works in our behalf it means that our trials and our difficulties and our sorrows and our problems, as well as those things that are obviously blessings and things that bring a great deal of delight, God works it all together for those who love Him in the fulfillment of His purpose. Then he says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30).

I think I have told you before that the Apostle Paul, there in Romans 8, talks about our glorification when the hope of our salvation is going to be realized, and we are conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus. He speaks of it there in Romans 8:30 as already accomplished; not because we are already glorified, but because it is absolutely certain, every single one of us who love God, will eventually be glorified. So my glorification, and your glorification, can be spoken of in the same way that our justification is spoken of and our calling to God when He first saved is spoken of--"that ye may know what is the hope of his calling."

Do you know it this morning? I know that if after, if you have been listening to me this morning, and I would come up to you and asked you Why has the Lord saved you? that you would say, I hope, "that the Lord has saved me that I might be like the Lord Jesus Christ." You would be right.

Can I ask you this further question? Is there evidence in your life this morning that you really know it? Is it something that has really penetrated into the depths of your heart? Has it become your real

expectation? Has it caused you to yearn for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it make you careful in your life from day to day because you want to please God and you want to do His will and you want to be, even here and now, as much like the Lord Jesus Christ as you possibly can?

If Paul believed that if people really know why they are saved, what their final destiny is, that that . . . I hope you will listen to me, this morning, because it is very significant that he puts this first--you think about the end first of all. He believed that more than anything else this would make them live holy lives through the power of the Holy Spirit Who causes us to understand this great and wonderful truth. It is amazing, is it not, that Paul begins with this request. When you lead somebody to Christ, do not waste any time in telling them why they have been saved. God wants to conform them to the image of His Son and everything that touches their lives--everything--God is going to work together for that good purpose. That is the reason you and I can thank Him for our trials and our testings because through those trials and testings God is furthering His work of sanctification in our hearts in anticipation of that day when we will be like the Lord Jesus Christ.