

Your Hope and Inheritance

Ephesians 1:15-18 (09/2/17)

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Ephesians 1:15-18 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

It's one thing to admire a picture or poster of a thanksgiving feast. It's another thing to sit down, give thanks, unfold your napkin, pass the turkey, pile up the mashed potatoes, anoint them with steaming gravy, take a nice helping of stuffing (oyster stuffing preferably) and corn, find room for some cranberry sauce, and then take your fork, dig in and enjoy the feast. Paul has set the table in Ephesians 1:3-14. He has piled one glorious truth after another on the table, all set for you, and now he prays that you and I would dig in and feast our souls on the most life-transforming, glorious truths possible from the living God, who poured out every spiritual blessing into our lives through His Son! That's why Paul begins verse 15 with...

“For this reason...”

Paul wants God's people to feast on their spiritual riches. I'm sure there were Ephesian believers then, just like today, who were struggling with the typical sins of worry and anger and bitterness and depression. In Ephesians 4-5 Paul deals with lust and self-pity and difficulties in marriages, so we can conclude there were those in the Ephesian church struggling with these problems. Others were getting weary and losing hope.

So here God says to you and to me, “Wait a minute! Before you cave in to your life struggles, let's remember who you are!” God just explained in Ephesians 1:3-14 who you were and who are now. First, you were a sinner under God's wrath until He brought this message of the gospel to you. Then you believed the message and now you discover not only are you saved, but you have been the target of God's grace from way back before God created the universe and everything in it. God tells us you were in His plan in eternity past when He chose you and predestined to adopt you. Then He sent His Son to earth to purchase you through His blood by dying on the cross. God has sent His Spirit to call you through the gospel, to give you a believing heart, and to seal you securely forever in Christ. God placed His Spirit in you as a pledge or down payment to keep you secure until your final glorification.

You are super-blessed, but Paul knows only God can make all this truth real and compelling to your heart. And so Paul prays unceasingly, and so must we. There are some things we must never stop doing.

FIRST, NEVER STOP THANKING GOD FOR HIS WORK OF GRACE IN THE LIVES OF HIS PEOPLE

– vv. 15-16

15 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

Paul is sitting in a prison in Rome, thinking about those believers down in Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor. Four years have passed since he'd been there (Acts 19). Many had come to Christ while he was there, but there was also plenty of trouble. Some Jews tried to cast out demons using Paul's name. “I adjure you by Jesus, whom Paul preaches!” They thought spiritual power was in a formula. That one demon infested guy jumped on these fakes, beat them up, and they fled, naked and wounded. What a sight! Many brought their magic books to the tune of 50,000 pieces of silver and burned them! Then Demetrius the silversmith, who made trinkets to the goddess Artemis, saw his profits dwindle as more and more Ephesians turned to Christ. So he stirred up the other merchants and townspeople into a rage and

soon the whole city was filled with confusion and protests and riots. The people rushed together having no idea why they were there. They dragged some of the believers into the theater when suddenly the town clerk, knowing Rome would not stand for all this chaos, ordered everyone to stop protesting, and if they had an issue, to bring it to the courts! Thank God for human government!

Faith and Love

Now four years later Paul is in a Roman prison writing to them and thanking God for them. Many more had come to Christ in the last four years, so he thanks God because he heard of their genuine faith and love. These are the two markers of the work of God in a person's life. Faith toward Christ and love toward others!

What is faith, true saving faith? It is more than believing Jesus exists, or even that Jesus came and died on the cross and rose again. Faith isn't just admiring Christianity or famous Christians like Martin Luther, or even enjoying meeting with other Christians in a church service like this. Paul is specific – faith must be in the Lord Jesus. Faith is a heart conviction, a trust and submission to Jesus as your sovereign Lord, your only Savior, and the Ruler of your life. True faith grips you, takes hold of you, turns you around, and controls you. Christ becomes the center of your life, the focus of your life. You came by faith alone to Jesus, the Lord of your life. As the hymn says, "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Your cross I cling." That's true faith; clinging to Christ alone. What are you clinging to? Your works? Your church? Your morality? Paul heard that they were clinging to Jesus as their Savior and sovereign Lord! And he thanks God for that.

Paul also heard of their genuine love they had for all the saints. Genuine love is the second marker of God's work in your life. After faith in Christ comes love toward others. True faith cannot exist without true love. Faith is like the sun's light; love the sun's warmth. The two can't be separated. 1 John 3:14 says we know we've passed from death to life – how? Because we can cite all 66 books of the Bible? No, new life in Christ is evident because we now love other believers. Paul says they loved all the saints, and that's not a selective love. They loved rich and poor believers, smart and not so smart ones, men and women, slaves and free, young and old, Jew and Gentile, easy ones to love and those not so easy to love.

God plants and grows this Christ-like love in the hearts of believers – a sacrificial, self-denying love that acts in kindness, patience, and forgiveness toward others. Can you honestly say your life at its core is one of faith and love?

Giving Thanks

Paul is unceasingly giving thanks for these believers. This is absolutely beautiful and something you and I can immediately apply to our lives. Open those pages of the church directory and give thanks for each one. Give thanks for those people in your small group and in your discipleship group, for church leaders, for your wife, husband, and children. Paul had a grace-filled heart and he was constantly thanking God for the people in his life. And he told them! Those are powerful words, "I'm thankful to God for you!" These Ephesians knew that up there in that Roman prison Paul was breathing out their names in thankfulness to God. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 1:3...

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.

A thankful heart is a healthy heart and a strong, encouraging heart! Bitter, critical, selfish people aren't thankful. A thankful heart is quick to forgive when someone offends. A thankful church is a spiritually alive church. Never stop thanking God for His work of faith and love in others' lives.

SECOND, NEVER STOP GROWING IN GETTING TO KNOW YOUR GLORIOUS FATHER MORE AND MORE – v 17

17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

Paul's prayers go farther than giving thanks for them, and so should ours. He wants us to know the God and Father of our Savior, Jesus Christ. When you come to Christ, you begin a life-long pursuit of knowing God – factually, personally, and zealously.

Paul describes God as “the Father of glory” or “the glorious Father.” This is our God! He is the fountain and source of highest glory, excellence, perfection, and being! This alone should melt our hearts. Take off your shoes; you're on holy ground here! Sin brings darkness and ugliness; God's glory brings light and beauty. Everything God does reveals His glory. The heavens reveal His glory. Jesus' miracles revealed His glory. But nothing radiates with glory like God's saving plan as Paul just described: how God so worked and designed to save sinners and bring them into His Son to share His glory! That's what Paul is getting at here. The God who chose you, redeemed you, and called you into His Son is your glorious Father! Think on that! Again and again! You can never get enough of that!

Now you would never know your Heavenly Father on your own; you need a spirit of wisdom and revelation to know Him more and more. God puts a high premium on you getting your thinking filled with God's wisdom and submitting to His revelation. You need a continual mind renewal in the knowledge of God. You need your thought system about God “power washed” by the Word. Your view of God is naturally skewed. Your thinking before knowing Christ was completely self-focused. But now that you're a believer and you have true faith and love, God wants you to come to know Him more and more in all His glory. Your Bible is packed with God's wisdom and actually is God's revelation. You need God to keep on giving you that inner spiritual desire and capacity, that “spirit” to really want this knowledge and to grasp it so that what you learn changes your life.

The word “knowledge” in verse 17 is the Greek word “epignosis,” which indicates full or effective knowledge. It's like the difference between you knowing my wife and me knowing her. You know about her; I know her. I know her in a much deeper way. I know her likes and dislikes, her joys and fears, her dreams, her strengths and weaknesses, her love for me. God wants us to really get to know Him in a personal, life-changing way.

Remember those two fellows walking with Jesus on the Emmaus Road? “How our hearts burned within us as He opened to us the Scriptures, showing us in the Old Testament all about Him.” (Luke 24:13-35) He probably started in Genesis 1, “I created all things. I walked with Adam and Eve. I am that seed of the woman who would crush Satan's head. I closed the door on Noah's Ark, I brought fire down on Sodom and Gomorrah. I called out to Abraham to keep from killing Isaac on the mount. I led the way through the Red Sea. Moses carried the supernatural staff, but I controlled the whole thing. I met with Moses on Sinai. I fed those whining rebels in the wilderness and gave them water from the rock. I met Joshua outside Jericho as the Captain of the Hosts of the Lord. I was in that fire with those three Hebrew young guns and I closed the lions' mouths for Daniel. And all those prophecies about the Messiah being born in Bethlehem, wounded for your iniquities, rising from the dead in Psalm 16 – they were all about Me!” Those two men on the Emmaus Road surely never read their Old Testament the same again! They got a good dose of “epignosis” that day!

Open your Bible every day. Let God's Word “power wash” your minds. Never stop growing in knowing God and His Son, your Savior, Jesus.

THIRD, NEVER STOP BEING GRIPPED BY THE RICHES OF GOD'S GRACE IN YOUR LIFE – v 18

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

Now we come to the specifics of Paul's prayer, and while these three things are brief, they are colossal. Paul prays that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened to grasp them. The ESV is a better translation because the word “enlightened” is in the perfect tense. Paul is really saying, “Since the eyes of your heart have been enlightened.” Paul knows God had pierced through their heart's darkness in sin. But the fact is, even as believers, you cannot really grasp the spiritual riches of God's Word in your own natural mind. So you depend on God to keep your eyes lightened up. Don't let them grow dim. David prayed, “Open my

eyes, that I may see wonderful things out of your law.” (Psalm 119:18) Only believers can see wonderful things from God’s Word.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells about William Pitt and William Wilberforce going to hear a great preacher in London. They were both heavily involved in the political life of England in the 18th and 19th centuries. Wilberforce was hoping God would do a work of grace in Pitt’s heart. There they sat, two very intelligent and influential men, listening to the same sermon. Wilberforce, a believer, was blown away by the message, feeling like he was in heaven itself. Afterward, anxious to hear his friend’s response, he asked him what he thought. Mr. Pitt answered, “I haven’t the slightest idea what the man was talking about!” The eyes of his heart were plastered shut by his natural condition in sin.

What did Paul pray would grip them and fill them with joy and strength and encouragement? Listen, no matter who you are or what your struggles are in this world...maybe your marriage is hanging by a thread, your body is emaciated and about to give in, your job is up in the air, or you’re uncertain about your immediate future...let these three spiritual realities shine bright glory into your heart.

Bright Hope – “the hope of His calling.”

Never stop being gripped by the bright hope you have in God’s calling. He has called you to spend eternity with Him. He’s guaranteeing it, and every day you need to be gripped by that hope. This is not a “hope so” hope, but an absolutely certain hope that will keep you stable and enduring through the trials of this life. Hope is the ballast, that water in the bow of the ship that keeps it upright through the most severe storms of life. When you are secured by a strong, bright hope, you know an infinitely better future is just over the horizon. No matter how tough it is, this hope says you have a sovereign God who has your tomorrows in His hand and it’s going to get brighter and brighter until the full day. Pray for one another that we’ll all be gripped by this bright, sure hope because God has called us to Himself through Christ. Live with the bright hope of forever every day!

Rich Inheritance – “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

Never stop being gripped by the unbelievable prospect of inheriting all of God’s possessions with Jesus Christ. The riches of his inheritance! God wants you to know He’s got big stuff out ahead. Not just riches, but the riches of the glory – there’s that word again. The inheritance He has for His people is bright with glory. Jesus is coming in the glory of His father, He’s going to sit on His glorious judgment throne, and then we’re going to reign with Him as royal priests forever and ever in His eternal bright and beautiful glory!

If that’s not enough, God has infused into your soul His resurrection power. That’s enough power to handle any trial or temptation God brings into your life. That will be the focus of next Sunday’s message.

SO WHAT?

- Has God done that great work of faith and love in your heart?
- Is your heart hungry to know God more and more?
- Are you gripped by the great hope and marvelous future God has in store for you as His son or daughter?