

Summer Prayer
Ephesians 1:15-23
Summer Road Trip Week 3
June 25, 2017

Welcome/intro/vision

This is week three of our Summer Road Trip through Ephesians
it's summer time and for many of us that means getting away for some rest and vacation which is a great thing

But many of us can attest to going on vacation with an unrealistic expectation of the problems it would solve.

Most of us have gone away on vacation and been glad to get away from the problems back home only to return from vacation and find those problems still waiting for us.

There are things that vacation cannot fix!

Some issues in our lives require deeper work: forgiveness, redemption, direction, wisdom, real hope, real healing, real change at deep places in our hearts

So for the next few weeks, we're going take a summer road trip through the first 3 chapters of the New Testament book of Ephesians

to help us to get answers to these deeper questions, to meet some of these hungers that are too deep and too big for a summer vacation to meet

Now this week is our church's last Sunday of our fiscal year

and every year the last Sunday in June we take some time to celebrate what God has done over the past year and look ahead with anticipation for what he'll do next

And this year has been an incredible year of firsts for Chatham Community Church

at every turn, we've taken new risks over the past 12 months and at every turn we've found God to be faithful—God has come through again and again and again

And so it's very appropriate that the passage that we're going to look at today is a prayer that the writer Paul prayed that starts with thanksgiving for what God has done and is doing among the people that Paul's writing to

Paul's going to start with thanksgiving and then he's going to move on to tell them what he's praying for them, what he's asking God to give them

as some of them continue to live their every day lives in the face of serious opposition because of their faith

And this morning, we're going to start by reading about Paul's thanksgiving, and we're going to agree heartily that we've got lots to be thankful for as a church at the end of June 2017, amen?

But I know some of your stories, and for some of you, you're coming to the end of June 2017 with a lot more pain, baggage and questions than answered prayers and things to celebrate

So if you're here and thanksgiving isn't the most natural response to what's happening in your life right now, stick with us

because as Paul starts to drill down into the things he's praying for these people, we're going to get a little window into the prayers of one of the greatest pray-ers of all time

And in this short but very deep prayer

I think you'll find at least one thing that might resonate with you—that your heart or your mind might come awake and say “yes! I need that this summer!”

And that even if you're not a praying person, there might be something here at this stop in our summer road trip

that connects with you and draws you into a much larger world of faith and Spirit, of hope and joy, of power and promises that are unbreakable

If you've got a Bible, turn with me to Ephesians 1, if not it'll be on the screen/no Bible free Bibles

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I have known a few people in my life for whom gratitude was their most natural, default, go-to gear. Have you known anyone like that?

They are both wonderful and occasionally slightly maddening!

They can be a wonderful gift to those of us who are perpetually stuck on what's going wrong and how it's going to only get worse

And at the same time, especially when things are bad you just feel like demanding that they confess and embrace that there's nothing to be thankful for in this situation

And that they join you in your misery because after all misery loves company

Paul here says, “I've heard of your faith in Jesus and love for all the people—and so I give thanks for you.”

and this tells us that he intended this letter not just for the Ephesian people but for all the churches in the area, this was supposed to circulate around and be read to lots of churches

because Paul was in Ephesus for a couple of years, so he knew first hand about them specifically

but there were several churches that we know of that were within reasonable travel distance of Ephesus and Paul intends for this letter to be shared with them

Paul gives lots of thanks! One of those thankful people!

Now here's where there's hope for the bulk of us who aren't naturally grateful-hearted people—Paul wasn't either, remember?

Paul, before he met Jesus, was devoting his whole life to rounding up Christians and imprisoning them and having them killed

He was well on the road to becoming a bitter, self-righteous, vindictive, proud, hardened man.

But then he met Jesus while on the road to becoming that man and Jesus changed him. Profoundly changed him

And now, instead of spending his mental energies rehearsing and reciting in his heart and mind all his own accomplishments and plotting his next step in climbing the political ladder or making the next series of arrests

Now, instead of all of that, do you know what's crowding his heart and mental space?

Thanksgiving and prayer: ever since I heard about you, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

He's gone from a life of self-congratulating, plotting and striving to a mental and emotional life marked and shaped by thanksgiving and praying.

Can you imagine how different those two lives were in terms of who Paul became as a human being?

What kind of person would Paul have been if nothing had changed and he'd continued to self-righteously plot and strive and climb the corporate ladder?

He would have been impossible! you wouldn't have wanted to hang out with him at the office Christmas party or Hanukkah party!

But when we let Jesus have his way in our internal worlds, we become different people, better people, more alive and more life-giving people.

And so to start with today I want to encourage us to give Jesus the same authority in our hearts and minds, so he might do the same type of life-giving work in us that he did with Paul.

Thanksgiving did not come naturally to Paul but when he gave authority over to Jesus to re-shape his internal world, thanksgiving is what Jesus naturally did in him

This was a blessing to all those around him

AND it's a blessing to Paul. Paul's life after he met Jesus was absolutely crazy—you want to talk about stressful! How about he nearly dead multiple times over on account of his faith!

Super-stressful! And you know what a study that came out a couple of years ago found?
Anxiety and gratitude cannot co-exist in the same heart at the same time

Anxiety and gratitude cannot occupy the same space in your brain at the same time, one of them is going to be king and reign and rule in your heart and mind in place of the other one

So as Jesus called Paul to a very difficult life he did the internal work inside of him to equip him to survive and even thrive in the midst of all the challenges he'd face by doing a new work of making him a grateful person

And so Paul opens this prayer portion of his letter declaring his thanksgiving for the people who are reading this letter, declaring that thanksgiving is what is marking his prayers for the people who are receiving this letter

And over the past few weeks as I've been thinking about this message and praying for y'all, I want you to know that I'm deeply grateful for y'all, too.

As we celebrated last week, I just finished my fifth year here at CCC—and I could not be more grateful for how much this community has blessed and encouraged and supported me over these past 5 years. Thank you

My wife and kids LOVE it here, this has been an outstanding church home for all of us as a family

and because I love them more than any other earthly thing, I cannot say enough how grateful I am for how graciously you have treated them and me, thank you, thank you, thank you.

And most importantly, along with Paul, I say thank you for your faith in the Lord Jesus and the love you have for each other and all the other saints.

Thank you for how you're working out faith as best you can EVEN in the midst of challenges and obstacles, some of them literally life-threatening.

Thank you for how you've fought for your faith even though a thousand other things clamor for your affection and your attention and your allegiance.

Thank you for how you've carved out time to serve and love and pray for people who are sick and in the hospital or grieving or hurting,

how you've made meals and listened while they cried and shared, for how you've brought hope and life and light into dark situations, for your prayers for one another. Thank you, thank you, thank you

Paul has much to be grateful for the churches he works with and so do I with this community and so do we as a church for what's happened here this past year.

But it all starts with giving Jesus the authority over our hearts to re-shape the culture in our hearts, that we, too, might be more alive and more life-giving people.

Now from his opening thanksgiving, Paul goes on to unpack what else he's praying for for these churches:

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^[f] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Last weekend my parents were in town celebrating Father's day and my mom's birthday and them just generally trying to get my wife and I out of the way so they spoil the grandchildren unhindered

And Saturday night I was putting one of my daughters to bed and my mom came in as I was praying for her

and I prayed one of my regular prayers for my nine-year-old, I prayed for her future husband, that she'd marry someone who loved Jesus and who also loved her very much.

And after I got done praying, my mom exclaimed to my daughter, "I pray for that too! And I used to pray that for your dad and look how great it turned out!"

My mom famously prayed for my future wife and kids just about from the very beginning of my life, and it did, indeed turn out wonderfully

She just kept asking, kept praying, literally every day of my life, one of the greatest gifts anyone's ever given to me

Paul ***keeps asking*** on behalf of these churches, keeps praying, it's an ongoing, regular, maybe daily, maybe multiple times a day, prayer.

And he asks for a couple of key things with a couple of sub-clauses:

Paul Prays that God would:

**-Give them a Spirit of wisdom and revelation
-in order to know God better**

And this whole idea of knowledge, understanding, grasping, continues to get unpacked, but it's not just head-knowledge, it's the whole-person, he prays

**-That the eyes of their heart might enlightened
-to know the hope of the inheritance to which God has called them**

-to know God's incomparably great power

Notice that Paul's not talking about anything outward or behavioral whatsoever, he's not praying that they'll be nicer, be people of good values or merely follow Jesus's example to start with it's all internal and about the central processing of our hearts and minds.

One of the biggest challenges for those of us who grew up in the South especially but maybe in America in general

is that we think about faith as essentially about religious stuff like going to church and then behavior modification—do this, don't do that that makes faith essentially about external list of actions or activities

And many of those are good things but they're secondary things, they are the outworkings of something deeper

And many of us growing up never got the core of it, we just got the behavior stuff and the rules and if you liked rules then religion or faith worked for you and if you didn't like rules then you ran kicking and screaming

Throughout the Scriptures, faith is not just external religious exercise! Not JUST be nice to each other and try your hardest and say your prayers and walk old ladies across the street and don't cheat on your taxes

It's deeper than that--it's the energy that animates us and gives us life—it's inside-out, it's an internal heart change, transformation

The faith we have in Christ is a love that motivates us, a grace that sets us free, a vision of the goodness of God that compels us to serve others, make sacrifices, go against the flow of our own inclinations sometimes and against the flow of the surrounding culture sometimes.

So yes, there are outward behavioral steps that we take, but those things are secondary to the core of it. The core of it is not merely be a good nice American neighbor

The core of it is a heart change, a total paradigm shift, a relationship with God that is making us new from the inside out

And so Paul covers the fullness of what's inside of us—he starts with the head, and then he goes to the heart, praying that the head would understand and the heart would be compelled by Christ

How many of you have ever felt like your head and your heart were at odds with some decision as to what you should do?

Jesus has come to heal that split.

God has sent his Son to bring wholeness and healing to these various divisions and factions that war within each of us internally

Because what God has done in Jesus is the only thing captivating enough, wonderful enough, and powerful enough that it can unify all the various appetites and warring impulses within us.

So first he prays that God would fill them with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation—that leans a little more cognitive, a mental understanding

And then he prays for the eyes of their hearts to be opened, enlightened—in much of the biblical text the heart is the seat not only of our emotions but of our desires and also our will, the heart contains the energies that drive our lives

HEART knowing is a knowing that captivates us, shapes us, re-frames how we live our lives here, how we treat people around us, how we navigate and handle good news or bad, riches or poverty, blessings or curses

All of that gets processed through this grid we all have that we use to process the challenges and opportunities that come along in our lives, sometimes instantaneously and then we act and move in one direction or another

Paul is praying that the grid of our minds and our hearts might be opened further and further for us know cognitively

AND he's praying that the eyes of our hearts might be able to see and delight in and hope in and wonder and sing and rejoice at a heart level over what God has done over the ***inheritance God has stored up for us***, which is waiting for us at the end of all things

and that we might just know, without any doubt, ***the power of God***

The gods that were all around the Ephesians and others claimed to be very powerful. Diana was the goddess who reigned in Ephesus and she was mighty and she had a rabid following

And so Paul says to these people who have withdrawn from the worship of Diana who was said to have great power and who was understood to be a god that you did not want to upset

Paul says that in Jesus Christ, God has unleashed and revealed INCOMPORABLY greater power than anything that you've left behind

Now we don't worship the gods of the Greek myths, but there are plenty of gods all around us, the world that we live in is swimming in gods, all sorts of them, that clamor for our attention and worship

and the truth of the matter is we fall for it. All the time.

For many of us those gods have worked to some extent for some period of time.

We were getting something out of building our lives around people's approval

We were getting something out of our own stubborn independence and refusal to be dependent on anything or anyone, our refusal to let anyone in, for some of us even God

We were getting something out of building our lives around our own careers or our kids careers or around money or around vacations and escaping and getting away

Those gods are loud in our culture and they make big promises which they only partially deliver on or they deliver on with much collateral damage to people all around us

For some of us, those gods are what keep us from coming to faith in Christ, they're working okay enough for you for right now. You've decided to put your trust in those things rather than Christ to make your life work

For others of us, we've got one foot in faith in Christ and the other foot putting our faith in some other god to try to get that god's goods as well as Jesus's goods all at the same time

Paul here uses that important word 'incomparably' on purpose. Yes, there are a ton of other gods all around you. No, they do not have the power that Jesus does.

Do you know why we know that? That's where Paul goes to next as he drifts from his prayer and launches into this bit of reflection.

That power is the same as the mighty strength²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

I have this thing where sometimes I'll be praying and then suddenly I realize that I've stopped praying a while ago and I'm drifting off into lah-lah land—ever happen to you?

So I'll be praying for my dad and then I'll think about that time that we went to get ice cream for my birthday at Ben and Jerry's when I was 14—Chocolate mouse Royale was my favorite ice cream and I'll think about how good it was

And then I'll think about how I can't eat ice cream any more because I'm lactose intolerant and then I'll think about how my wife Kelly found some really good lactose free options at the store the other day

And how awesome it is that Breyer's now makes a legit dairy-free ice cream and my life is great

And I'm 5,000 miles from anything resembling prayer!

Paul is having his own stream of consciousness here

He was saying how much he wants these people to know the power of God available to them and for them through Christ

And that sparks him into this reflection on the INCOMPORABLE power of God. Paul's saying to the churches surrounded by all these other gods,

here's how we know this God is at work in ways that are more powerful than any of the gods that you used to worship and that your neighbors and family still worship

You know you're on the right track with the right God and the right representative of God when God acts in such a decisive way to **raise him from the dead**

No other God has the power to not only raise a man from the dead

but then to exalt that man to a **new status in the cosmos** where he is above every authority and the power anywhere, in this world and in the spiritual world, always and forever amen

God has put everything at Jesus's feet and said "it is yours to reign over, to sort it all out, to redeem, to heal, to restore, to judge with justice and wisdom, to bring life to it

Paul describes Jesus as the one who fills everything in every way—the one who fills EVERYTHING in EVERY WAY. Let me see if I can illustrate this for us

The Milky Way galaxy is about 100,000 light years across. I found it in miles but it had too many zeroes and I didn't know what to call it after quadrillions

Current technology helps us to see about 100 BILLION galaxies, that Billion with a B

But scientists think that with better technology that number will likely increase to 200 BILLION with a B galaxies, all in the same ballpark size-wise

That's how big the cosmos is. And for the sake of illustration, let's say that all of that is gathered up into this sponge

And for the sake of illustration, let's say that this bowl full of water represents Jesus

What Paul is saying here in Ephesians and what the rest of the Scriptures assert as well is that this is reality: the fullness of Jesus who fills everything in every possible way

Nothing exists outside of Christ. Everything is held together in him, by him, through him, and for him.

If anything somehow escaped or got outside of Christ it would simply cease to exist, cease to be

Close your eyes: Jesus fills this space all around you, fills you right now, your body is held together by Christ, the space between you and the person next to you is filled in by Christ, this whole room is saturated by the fullness of Jesus

PRAYER

Paul wants these churches and us today to know that in Jesus there is a power and a strength that is unstoppable, glorious, majestic, life-giving, life-sustaining, life-changing

There is a larger reality that we participate in in Christ that re-frames and changes and re-shapes everything.

In this passage, Paul's prayer starts with thanksgiving and then presses quickly into a prayer for understanding, wisdom

that we'd be captivated with the goodness and the power of God expressed and demonstrated in Christ Jesus

This morning's summer road trip through Ephesians brings us to a prayer that has a number of elements that we might integrate into our own prayer lives

And **Today's Wildly Important Take-Home** is this:

Which of Paul's prayer elements might you take and make your prayer for summer 2017?

Here they are:

Thanksgiving: what if you spent the summer asking God to make you a more thankful person? What if you identified that anxiety is your constant companion and decided to spend the summer not only asking God to make you a more grateful person but to practice it over and over and over again?

What if you prayed and practiced all summer and came to September 1st, end of the summer, and you could say that gratitude had replaced anxiety 25% of the time? What if it had replaced it 50% of the time

What if gratitude and thanksgiving was a new character trait marked you and made you?

Wisdom: what if you spent this summer asking God to give you that Spirit of wisdom and understanding, to reveal what is true about him most of all, but also about you, about how the world works?

Wisdom is one of my most constant prayers, still waiting for God to answer that one!

This is a great prayer for those of you who are on a journey of considering faith but are head-first people and you've got head-first kinds of questions

What if you prayed all summer long for wisdom and came to September 1st, and looked back and could see two or three situations that you navigated a little bit differently than you would have before? What if you were given the gifts of wisdom and revelation to see God more clearly and trust him more fully?

Heart: what if you spent this summer praying that God would open the eyes of your heart to see how good he is, how powerful he is, how much he loves you?

What if the place where your will and emotions and imagination and passions was all full of the life-giving Spirit of Christ?

What if you came to the end of the summer having done some deep, core soul work that equipped you to be less petty, less easily rattled, more clear about who you are, who God is, what you're all about, why you're here?

Power: what if you spent the summer asking the Lord to actually show you how powerful he is?

We live in a world full of little gods and little goddesses, clamoring for your attention by promising to deliver you some sort of happiness, promising to make you happy in some way

The Scriptures declare to us that Jesus alone has done what it takes to secure eternal happiness for all those who would trust him

And that Jesus alone has the power to deliver on that promise.

What if you came to September 1st more able to trust in God because you'd spent the summer asking God to show you how powerful he was and you'd experienced it more fully and personally?

Your mission from here this morning on the summer road trip is to take one of these prayers and make it your prayer for this summer.

For the next 8 weeks or so, you're going to pray for this one thing consistently—maybe daily, maybe multiple times a day

going to ask for it to be brought to bear on everything else going on in your life this summer

Your going to practice thanksgiving or ask for wisdom or ask for your heart to be opened up or ask for God's power to be demonstrated as you go to the beach, as you navigate the family that drives you crazy at the family reunion

As you parent the kids, as you go to work, as you mow the yard, as you handle whatever circumstances come your way this summer

If each one of us came out of summer 2017 with any one of these added or more fully developed in our lives, can you imagine the difference it would make in our own lives and in our community together?

Try that over these next few weeks and see how the Lord might meet you—**PRAY**

Going to get this started for us this morning by expressing thanksgiving. Like we said earlier, today is the end of our church year and it's been a huge year of firsts for us here

And we've put together a little video to celebrate how faithful God has been and to declare with thanksgiving that God's been good to us and his power has been at work here in our community as we've taken small steps of faith.

VIDEO HERE

No better way to end one year and get us started into the next by welcoming some new people into the family of Christ through baptism, which we're going to celebrate today

For 2,000 years, Christians have celebrated and demonstrated their coming to faith in Christ through baptism

It is an outward sign of an inward reality: that the person becoming baptized is putting their full faith in Christ and trusting him to be Lord and Savior

In the Scriptures, baptism is described in a number of different ways

1. It's a union with Jesus. Just like Jesus was dead and buried with our sin and came back to life 3 days later, so, too, we are buried with him, joined with him, sharing in his death and his life with him
2. It's also described as a cleansing experience. We go into the waters of baptism marked by sin and death, we come out clean, forgiven, coated with forgiveness so that any accusation or shame or guilt slides right off as we look to Jesus for forgiveness
3. It's also described as a new birth. We come out of the waters of baptism born in the Spirit, born into the family of Christ.

Call up the two candidates and introduce them

What we'll do is have them share their story one at a time, then we'll baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, just as Jesus commanded us to do

And then we have a wonderful tradition here of clapping like crazy

Then I'll pray for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit, God's Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the greatest gift he could give to his followers would be God's Spirit, which is made available to us most fully once we've accepted his gift of cleansing and forgiveness

So we'll pray for them to receive that Spirit and then I've got a gift for each of them.

TRE first, Anne second

Pray for them together after done and transition into worship