

Ephesians 1:15-23
(Proverbs 2:1-10; Matthew 11:25-30)
“Remembering You in My Prayers”

Introduction

Have you ever noticed that the entire first chapter of this letter, from verse three to the end, is a prayer? We have spent the past several weeks studying the first part of the prayer, a single sentence of over two hundred words in Paul’s Greek, structured around a celebration of what each person of the Trinity has done to redeem us and save us from sin and death. It is, in other words, a prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Now, in the second half of the first chapter, Paul turns to intercession, as he prays that those reading his letter might know and experience the reality of this great salvation for which he has been thanking God. He opens with an acknowledgment that God has been at work in the lives of his listeners, working in them the faith in Christ and love for each other that are two of the three vital signs that we have been born of the Spirit, the third being glad obedience to God’s commandments, which is a major theme of the second half of this letter. He opens our text with these words:

For this reason, because I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know ... (1:15-18).

It is important that we notice what Paul is doing here. He has already thanked God for giving us, in his Son, “all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will” (1:8-9). Now, he prays that we might hold these truths in our hearts and minds, and experience the power to walk out these truths in daily living. Once again, his prayer is Trinitarian, noting the work of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Note, too, that Paul always prays like this in his letters. *Our* prayers are usually context-specific: sickness, crisis, trouble, something we dread or something we desire. And it is perfectly right for us to pray such prayers. Our heavenly Father invites us to bring everything to him, even our complaints and laments. The Psalms are full of such prayers. However, we should also, and I think mostly, pray more maturely for one another and for ourselves. We should, in other words, learn to pray as Paul prays here and as we will hear him pray again in the second half of chapter three. His prayers focus on asking God to help us become what his Son’s victory and his Spirit’s power have made possible for each of us, namely that we may be increasingly conformed to the image of Christ, even transformed from the inside out, so that we take our place in the mission of God.

So, here, Paul asks specifically that we might know three things:

Body

1. The hope to which he has called us (1:18):

Many commentators take the words, “to which he has called us,” as defining the meaning. Thus, they interpret this first point as referring to our present life in Christ. My problem with this is that, by definition, Paul always elsewhere uses the words, “the hope,” to focus on the future, and the rest of the Bible usually speaks of it in these terms. As Paul writes elsewhere,

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience (Romans 8:23-25).

I think that the point of Paul praying that we would know “the hope to which he has called [us]” is that we are not to live in doubt and fear, whatever our circumstances. Such a thought was surely very important to Paul as he wrote this letter from prison, where he awaited trial for his faithfulness to the gospel of Christ. He is calling us to know and remember the promised destiny to which we have been called, what has been promised us in the age to come, when at last our faith in Jesus is vindicated, our tears wiped away and sorrows forgotten, our joys amplified and all that we have longed for that is good and just and lovely is at last the substance of our daily experience.

So note that Paul begins praying for all of us who receive and read this letter by asking that we might know what is coming, what has been promised, what no reversal or sickness or failure or distress can ever thwart, and therefore that we might not suffer disappointment and hopelessness from having invested our hopes and dreams in things that are passing away.

2. The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints (1:18):

Some interpret this to mean that we are God’s glorious inheritance, but in his parallel texts (e.g., Colossians 1:12) as well as in the context of this entire chapter, Paul clearly refers to our inheritance in Christ. So what is Paul writing here that differs from his first point about the hope to which we have been called?

While keeping his focus on the future, Paul now brings the experience of the future into the present. God has called us to be his children and to be made “holy and blameless” in Christ Jesus. Paul has already written over two

hundred words describing what God has given us in Christ. And he has told us that the best is yet to be, that all we have known and experienced is only a down payment on what is coming. So for a Christian to ever give up hope and yield to despair is to lose sight of what God has given us in Christ. As we focus on what Paul has already described as “the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us” (1:7-8), we realize that nothing can separate us from God’s love or wrest his promises from us.

But don't forget that our down payment or guarantee of what is coming is experienced here and now and it is, in effect, the presence of the future, as we begin to taste and see “the glorious riches of his inheritance in the saints.” Remember that in the first half of this chapter, Paul referred several times to this inheritance, and it may be most simply stated by remembering that, if we are in Christ, *all that is his is ours*. We have been taken up into the love of the Trinity, and as the Father loves the Son, so too he loves us, who are his adopted sons and daughters.

What do we now have *in part* that will one day be ours *in full*? Clearly, in Christ we have been reconciled to God, freed from guilt and from bondage to sin and shame, adopted as sons and daughters, enlivened and empowered by God’s Spirit, and invited to join him in his mission of uniting all things in Christ. As we avail ourselves of the means of grace – prayer, meditation on God’s Word, community worship around the Lord’s Table, fellowship with one another and ministry to the world around us – we grow in grace and in personal knowledge of the life to come. We are invited daily, not only to hope for the future fulfillment of God’s promises, but to taste and see even now the goodness of God, the values and power of the age to come.

3. The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe (1:19):

Finally, Paul asks that we have the one thing necessary to experience all the rest: namely, the power of God’s Spirit. He wants us, not only to *know about* what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, but to *experience* it – that same power that raised Jesus from the dead and enthroned him in the heavenlies, where he is head over all creation and over his body, the church.

It is the gift of God’s Spirit to God’s children that brings us all of the blessings that God gives us, what he here calls “the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.” Apart from the Spirit, we will never know that change of heart and mind that moves us to repent deeply and truly of our rebellion and sin, to turn to the Lord in faith, to follow Jesus on a new life trajectory, and to begin to love the Lord and others as we have been loved. Only God’s power working in and through us by his Spirit will bring about the new life promised in the gospel.

And this is not something eked out to us, something God grudgingly gives to a select few in answer to pleading, all night prayer services. Paul calls this, “the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.” God’s power given to us in Christ is immeasurable, immense and free. And it is for “us who believe.” If you are in Christ, then all this is yours, and you can choose to live in spiritual poverty by not studying God’s Word and claiming his promises, or you can begin to possess those things that are yours even now in Christ Jesus and follow him on the path of love, joy, peace and fruitful service in the power of his Spirit.

Conclusion

Paul began by praying that we might know enough of our future in Christ to live in hope. He then prayed that we might begin to know and experience even now something of the life that one day will come in its fullness. Finally, he prayed that we might not just know *about* the Spirit’s power, but personally and experientially know the power of the life of God at work within us, making the rest possible.

So what will we do with this today? Will it change the way we pray for one another? Will it change the way we think about the gospel? Will we begin to realize the height and depth and length and breadth of what God has done for us through his Son, and desires to do in and through us by his Spirit?

Let’s not go on living in spiritual poverty, driven by the circumstances of the day, when God has already given us “the riches of his glorious inheritance,” and “the immeasurable greatness of his power.”

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