

DATE: May 12, 2024

TITLE: Lavish Love Inspires Lavish Prayer

TEXT: Ephesians 1:15-23

EMPHASIS: A prayer for the church to understand her union with Jesus – who we are and what we possess.

Introduction

We gather as a local church on a weekly basis because we believe, value, and prioritize certain things like singing, community/fellowship/relationships, the reading and exposition of the Scriptures, and prayer. This list is representative, not exhaustive. These are regular components built into our weekly service. But let's isolate this component of prayer:

1. What is prayer?
2. What's the purpose of praying?
3. Why do we value prayer?

While this isn't a sermon series exploring all the mysteries of prayer, I want us to slow down enough to consider why we value prayer, personally and corporately. What is our "theology of prayer"? How is our prayer life informed by the text? How is shaped by the pressures of life? While I could make a case that we're always praying, there are times in which we are more intentional than others. For example, we often pray before meals. Why? Jesus did, right?

Think about our meal praying. We just want to get to the food, am I wrong? We offer up a token prayer without thought. I'm going to call out my son on this one, mostly because many of you have been exposed to our little "prayer sheriff." His radar goes off whenever food is present and he's the first one asking if he can pray.

Jesus taught on prayer to help us pray more intelligently, more intentionally. In Matthew 6, Jesus warns us not to pray like the hypocrites who want to appear super spiritual and become the focus. He also warns us not to pray like the pagans (Gentiles), who heap up empty phrases believing a greater word count will surely get the attention of the deity. Then, we take his sample prayer and turn it into mindless rote that we put on repeat – as if this is the secret sauce to getting your way in prayer.

Our text this morning isn't the Apostle Paul's "*Lectures to my students on prayer.*" Rather, it's Paul's response to God, for the church, in light of the lavish grace of the gospel to redeem and adopt sons and daughters into the family of God. This isn't a sermon to challenge your prayer life, expose any weaknesses in your praying, manipulate you to pray a certain way, or guilt you into praying. This sermon is a simple explanation of how the lavish love and grace of the gospel informs, impacts, and inspires a lavish prayer for the church.

In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul is simply praying for the church to understand their union in Jesus. He longs for them to grasp the fullness of this reality – who they are and what they possess in Christ.

I. The Intent of Prayer (v15-17a)

These first few verses describe why Paul prays, when he prays, and who he's praying to. This prayer is the result of the previous section – "For this reason...". In verses 3-14, Paul describes our union with Christ using extravagant language. This description is meant to overwhelm us, grip us, captivate our senses, and arrest our hearts and minds. If you missed last week's sermon, take

some time this week to listen/watch as Pastor Pat unpacks the immeasurable riches of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus!

A condensed reminder of our union with Jesus results in overflowing with every spiritual blessing, being immersed in the lavish riches of his grace and love and forgiveness and generosity and on and on it goes...into the coming ages (cf. Eph. 2:7). The praise of God's glorious grace envelopes his adopted children with lavish expressions of immeasurable proportions! And it's this union that launches Paul into prayer.

A) Why Paul Prays (v15): He prays because he heard about their faith in Jesus (cf. v3-14; union), which results in love for other believers (the saints).

B) When Paul Prays (v16): He doesn't cease giving thanks for them and praying for them. Paul is constantly praying for the church in Ephesus (specifically), but also for the church (globally) as it continues to advance throughout the known world (cf. 2 Cor. 11:28).

C) Who Paul Prays to (v17a): He prays to "...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory..."

Given the intent of Paul's prayer, let's turn our attention to what he's actually praying for the church.

II. **The Content of Prayer** (v17b-19a)

We'll consider the content of Paul's prayer by, first, looking at the parallel requests for understanding and fully appreciating this union, and secondly, we'll consider the three specific requests that flow from this union.

A) The ability to see, know, and appreciate...

Paul asks God to give them "...the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him," (v17b), and in the next breath he asks for the same thing using slightly different language – "...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know..." (v18a).

Paul's asking that God would empower them by the Spirit to fully know and appreciate, to see and understand the relationship (the union) they have with God.

- Wisdom (*gk. sophia*) emphasizes a spiritual wisdom (cf. Col. 1:9)¹
- Revelation (*gk. apokalupsis*) meaning to uncover, reveal, disclose, or make fully known²
- Knowledge (*gk. epiginosko*) sometimes implies a special participation in the object "known," and give greater weight to what is stated. J. Armitage Robinson (on Ephesians) points out that *epignosis* is "knowledge directed towards a particular object, perceiving, discerning," whereas *gnosis* is knowledge in the abstract.³

B) The specific requests Paul prays they would fully grasp...

- What is the **hope** to which he has called you (v18b)
- What are the riches of his glorious **inheritance** in the saints (v18c)
- What is the immeasurable greatness of his **power** toward us who believe (v19a)

Can we just hit the "pause button" at this point? This is where we meditate on these things. These requests lie at the heart of this lavish prayer for the church. And this prayer is directly inspired by the lavishness of the grace and love of the gospel on display in the previous text. This prayer is simply a summary of verses 3-14. This was Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus. It was a

prayer he prayed for all the churches. This prayer lies at the heart of the elders of Waukesha Bible Church for this fellowship!

- Our **confidence** is in our union with Jesus – he is our hope!
- Our **citizenship** is in another realm with Jesus – he is our inheritance!
- Our **circumstances** are no match for the ability of Jesus – he is our strength!

The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe is now qualified, expanded upon, and explained in verses 19b-23.

III. **The Extent of Prayer** (v19b-23)

The immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe is described as the very power that raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the grave and seated him in his rightful place in the heavenlies. Let's not get weird on this point, as if the resurrection power described here becomes our proof text for all kinds of foolishness (like we do with Philippians 4:13).

It's at this point we need to consider a reality that's very difficult for us to grasp – that we are part of two very real realms: the earthy, terrestrial realm and the spiritual, heavenly realm. These realms overlap and intersect in ways that make it uncomfortable for us to process and explain.

The spiritual realm and “in the heavenly places” will continue to be a theme throughout the letter of Ephesians. As we wrap up this study, I want us to briefly consider this dual reality so we can further build on it as we work through this letter.

Considering the Spiritual Realm

God has revealed the mystery and purpose of his plan to unite the earthy realm and the spiritual realm in Jesus when the time is right (1:9-10). “In the heavenly places” (1:3, 20; 3:10; 6:12) is an already/not yet reality that is ours through our union with Jesus Christ by which we have “every spiritual blessing” (v3), a rich inheritance (v11-14, 18), our hope (v18), and the power to live in both realms (v19-21).

While both realms have positions of power and authority we're familiar with in concept, we have a difficult time wrapping our minds around what rulers, authority, power, dominion, and names/titles really means in the spiritual, supernatural realm. And we have an even harder time wrestling with how these forces overlap and impact each other in real time.

In our present text, as a consequence of the resurrection, Jesus is the **ruler** of all realms (heaven/earth) (v21). Jesus is the **king** with all things under his feet (under his authority) (v22). Jesus is the **head** over all things to the church (his body) and his fullness fills all in all (v22-23).

The redemption described in 1:7-10 is a rescue mission planned by the Father, executed by the Son, and secured by the Spirit. This rescue from the spiritual realm of darkness will be further explored in our text next week. Paul writes more about this in his letter to the church at Colossae when he describes it like this: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14).

As we get into the context of chapter 3, the “mystery hidden for ages” and the “eternal purpose” of God are on display in and through the church. Through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (3:10).

The letter concludes by describing the power that's ours to stand against the schemes of the devil, and reminds us that our fight (wrestling/warfare) is not really against the people and realm we can see with eyes, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (6:10-12).

Conclusion

Let me conclude with an illustration from the Old Testament to help shed light on this overlap of realms. In 2 Kings 6, the king of Assyria was warring against Israel. Time and again, the king of Assyria's plan was outsmarted by the king of Israel. Assyria's king was getting pretty upset assuming there was a mole in his council. It was reported to the king that there was no mole, but rather it was the "man of God," the prophet Elisha.

The king of Assyria planned to deal with this threat. He found Elisha's location in Dothan and sent a great army by the stealth of night to surround the city. When Elisha's servant woke up and surveyed the situation he said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (which in Hebrew translates into words I shouldn't share from the pulpit 😊).

Elisha's response was direct. He said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." You can imagine the look the servant gave Elisha and what was going through his mind in that moment. Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha." [You can read about this scenario in 2 Kings 6:8-23]

Shepherding the Sheep

The prophet's prayer for his servant and the apostle's prayer for the church is similar, that our eyes would be open to see with clarity how God is working amidst both realms.

- Read and meditate on Ephesians 1:3-14.
- Pray for yourself, your family, and our church family what Paul prays in Ephesians 1:15-23.

¹ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Vol. 2, p. 678). T. Nelson.

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 338). United Bible Societies.

³ Vine, W. E., Unger, M. F., & White, W., Jr. (1996). In *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Vol. 2, p. 347). T. Nelson.