

The Message

Note: No sermon is quite the same when you read it. You miss the inflections, the understanding that you gain in the hearing. Nevertheless, the words are shared with you here.

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Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23

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JOY 'N CHURCH

Today we focus on one of the two great prayer passages in Ephesians. In this passage, Paul offers thanksgiving for the believers in Ephesus and commends them for the efforts and diligence.

However, one person who never received much praise was a young man named Victor. He felt like a loser. He didn't do very well in school. In fact, he was such a poor student that when he was sixteen a teacher advised him to drop out of high school and get a job. Unfortunately, Victor didn't do much better in the working world. By the time he was thirty-two, he had failed at seventy-six jobs.

But applying for job seventy-seven changed Victor's life. As part of the interview process, he was required to take an I.Q. test—a test designed to measure his intelligence. A score of 100 was considered to be normal; Victor scored 161. Victor was a genius! The knowledge of this fact transformed his life. Victor Serienko went on to become famous for his research in laser surgery and to become president and founder of MENSA, an organization for geniuses. This change—from loser to winner—all came about because a test said that he was special.

We don't need a test to prove that we are special to God. He has said some tremendous things about you and me. God has said that as part of the communion of believers we are special to him. And in this chapter, Paul calls us to open our eyes and see that we have a glorious inheritance in our faith and immeasurable power for the sake of the world.

Regrettably, many of us are like Victor Serienko before he discovered his gift. We wander aimlessly in life without purpose, all the while possessing a great gift that could benefit others. We must understand the nature of our inheritance and the power given to us and align our lives with what God has given us.

Paul had heard some news about the Ephesians, reports that drove him to his knees in thanksgiving. What news was this that he heard? It was news of their faith in the Lord Jesus and of their love for all the saints. Faith and love are like

snow skiing and snow; water skiing and water; football and football pads; baseball and steroids (oh, wait...). In each of these examples, you can't have one without the other. It's the same with faith and love. They are incomplete without the other. Faith provides the direction we are to travel and love provides the vehicle needed to make the journey.

In verse fifteen, Paul writes: "...I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints..." We tend to think of "saints" as people who did amazing things in their lives and whose histories have been imaginatively rewritten to inspire the living to "live right." Nevertheless, that is not how Paul or God speaks of saints. Saints are sinners who have been invited to eat at the table of God and forgiven. Not innocent. *Forgiven.*

This may come as a surprise to you, but God didn't pick you for your great looks or sunny disposition. You may have those qualities—indeed, many of you do—but God doesn't pick his people based on any good quality.

When God picks us and we sit as those guilty and forgiven at the table of Christ, something happens. We have been bathed in both *faith* and *love* to match. As we seek to live in love of God and neighbor, there is a truth Paul wants to make sure we know and experience. As we pray for ourselves and others, we realize our prayers have to do with hope, inheritance, and power. For example, Paul prays that the Ephesians have a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in their relationship with God. This is not a prayer for mental understanding or comprehension; this is a prayer of experiential knowledge.

Two years ago, I went on what I thought was a prayer retreat. I discovered that it was a spiritual renewal retreat. In this type of retreat, the participants are supposed to work out their "issues." Each person was to reveal something personal that had been affecting her relationship with God. Not knowing these people, I decided to create a story; I didn't want to share something personal with strangers. When my turn came, I surprised myself by revealing something that happened to me when I was eleven years old. I was new in school and had been accepted by the popular clique. On my birthday, I had my first sleepover and invited the group. After the party, they dumped me.

Now, I made new friends quickly, but I always wondered why I was rejected. I continued to see these girls for the rest of my school career. I even saw them at my ten-year high school reunion. At the retreat, the memory of this trauma came pouring out of me. I hadn't thought about it for twenty years, yet I cried and said that I wanted to know why they rejected me. The moderator, Peg, asked me, "Have you asked Jesus?" Well, I had never thought of that. She continued, "Do you want to ask him?" I feared that if I asked I wouldn't get an answer so I made her ask.

As soon as Peg prayed, my eyes must have said something because she said, “You heard something.” Out of God only knows where, I heard two words—“set apart.” Then, Peg asked, “Do you get it?” I realized that God had set me apart; I wasn’t rejected. I was set apart. It was my call to the ministry. If I had known that I was set apart and not rejected, I would not have wasted years. Paul writes: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be *enlightened*” (Ephesians 1:18). I couldn’t be enlightened until I asked!

In the same verse, Paul explains why we need to be enlightened: “...so that you will know what is the hope of his calling.” He prays that we would know the hope of the calling we have received from God.

What is hope? The dictionary defines it as a “confident expectation.” But the point in this scripture passage is that we have something in which to hope. We have a hope into which we have been called. To what have we been called? We have been called to be like Christ and to be in him. Why? Because Christ died for our sins and rose again to eternal life, we have been granted eternal life. Because he is righteous, we have been declared to be righteous by the Judge of all men.

In preparing for this sermon, I borrowed one of Godfrey’s books. There were pages and pages of explanation of this text. However, written in the margin, Godfrey had written these words: “Hope is how we experience now, what we will receive in fullness later.”

Seldom, in our culture, do we talk about death. But it is important for us to remember that the here and now is not all there is for us. It is as much a mistake to live entirely in the future as it is to live in the present without any regard to what is to come. Hope is how we experience now, what we will receive in fullness later.

In verse 18, Paul continues to pray that we should know “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” For us, heaven is to come. Knowing we have this inheritance should shape our lives and the way we live.

William Randolph Hearst was known for his extensive art collections. In his home in San Simeon, he displayed some of artworks—statues, paintings, antiquities, etc. Once he read about an extremely valuable piece of art which he decided to add to his vast collection. He instructed his agent to scour the world, find, and buy it at any price. After several months, the agent reported back that he had found the artwork—in one of Hearst’s warehouses. Hearst already owned it.

In this prayer, Paul is trying to spare Christians the frantic search for something that we already possess. Our inheritance is not a private party for each individual. It will be for all of the saints who make up God’s people. It is the

communion of all believers together. We don't need to be like Hearst searching for something we already own!

Finally, Paul prays that we know "the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe" (Eph. 1:19a). There is now a power principle in our lives. It is the same power that reached into a sealed tomb and made a dead man get up and walk.

These are in accordance with the working of the strength of his might which he brought about in Christ, when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (Eph. 1:19b-21)

If you have confessed your sins in Christ and live with him as your Lord, then this power is at work in your life, too.

God is powerful in all kinds of ways that we do and do not understand. He is the one who created the universe out of nothing. He is the one who continues to sustain our very existence. He is able to be everywhere at once, both present to you and present to another halfway around the world. He has access to all knowledge and wisdom, from the most profound knowledge of science to the most unique thoughts of your mind.

God has all manner of power, and Jesus initiated a new one at work within humanity—the power of the resurrection. This power defeats the undoing of creation. It defeats death by transforming something cold, dark, and lonely into an eternal community of life. Christ's resurrection is the forerunner of our own. He is the assurance of a future resurrection. Because he rose from the dead, we shall also rise.

However, it's not all about tomorrow. We have a new life NOW. And the power that was involved in making a dead man get up and walk is the same power that is involved in saving us and bringing about our growth as Christians. Is this power at work in your heart?

The same power that conquered death and hell can change your life forever. The power which raised Christ is the same power of regeneration with which God makes us alive. Just think if we all activated our power to full capacity! If we did, just think what we at Foundry UMC could do for the kingdom of God in northwest Houston!

Paul takes us to the mountaintops of Christian truth and invites us to look at the breathtaking view! Pray that you "may know Christ better." Seek the power of God to be at work in the coming week. Pray for God's inheritance and his resurrection power and see the changes in your life.

