

Ephesians 1:15-23 - June 12th, 2022

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Alright, good morning. It's hard to believe we're mid-June. I was telling Jeff, I thought between camps and vacations and all that, I didn't think everybody was going to show up today.

So if I had known there was going to be this many people, I would have obviously prepared a little bit more than I did. But here we are. Friday is Amy's birthday. I had to give my wife a shout out. Happy birthday.

I lost count, but from the looks of things, I think she's turning 29. It's always nice to make it through another year, especially given who she lives with. So, two weeks ago, we started a new study on Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

It's been good. It's been a study that we've kind of been doing in our men's group and looking at elsewhere. So today we actually get to finish Ephesians chapter 1. And the topic of that is where Paul declares what his prayer is for the believers in Ephesus.

So we'll look at that. We'll read Ephesians, the end of chapter 1. But on the topic of prayer, I have a few riddles to share to get us started. I would call them jokes, but it just didn't feel right. So, here we go.

[1:32] If mice could pray, who would hear them? The Lord Jesus. They get worse, not better.

How did the vegetarian pastor end all of his sermons? Let us pray. There's a strategy to this, I promise.

You set the bar low enough with the jokes, everything else seems that much better. So, who do you suppose that a businessman would pray to? Have I heard this one? The profit margin?

All right. One more. I actually like this one for some reason. I don't know why. So, why do televangelists go to church every Sunday?

To pray on the weak. I know. You'll find comfort in knowing God will hold me accountable for those one day.

[2:33] So, personally, I don't consider myself very good at prayer. So, on a serious note, it was actually refreshing. It was helpful for me to study this text in Ephesians. I still feel like I'm buzzing.

Am I buzzing? Do I need to, am I coming through okay? Okay. Okay. So, just to get us started, perhaps a fair question going into this is, how do I pray for others?

Maybe another way to put that, what do your prayers for other people sound like? Are they light and fluffy? Are they vested? Your answer might be, well, David, it depends on how well I know those persons, those other people.

Typically, if my relationship is stronger with someone, I might pray differently for them. Which kind of begs the question, studying this text, what was Paul's relationship like with the Ephesians?

You might remember some of this from when Dave kicked us off two weeks ago, but let me share a quick bit of context that I think is really helpful for this and for future weeks to come. I've been reading through Acts in the past year and a half, and by the time you get to Acts 19 and 20, if you guys want to open there, there's some reference pages that I sent around.

[3:42] We get a pretty cool insight into what Paul's relationship was like with the believers in Ephesus. And so the first one comes from Acts 19 in verse 11. It says, God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that touched his skin

were carried to the sick, and their diseases left them, and evil spirits came out of them.

Teddy was sharing a story, where's Teddy at? Yeah, about these guys that pretend to have this new revelation from God and how they do all these things. But this was actually happening with Paul in Ephesus.

He had, you know, this miraculous arrival of things that were going on there. And in verse 17, it says, This became known to all the residents of Ephesus, which Dave pointed out a couple weeks ago how big and prominent of a city this was.

And it says, It's pretty neat. We see later in Acts, they endured riots together.

There was an event where all the, not all, but a good portion of pagans stopped worshipping demons and magic arts, and they actually burned their books in the street. It's interesting.

[4:56] It's interesting. So, all that to just remind you of the history that Paul has with this church, and that the context is, these are really some of his best friends. These are some of his good Christian-believing relationships.

Last bit of context here comes from Acts chapter 20. This was at the end of Paul's third mission trip. And in Acts 20, verse 15, Luke writes this.

He says, I like this story in particular because it does speak to the level that he cares for the Ephesian Christians.

And what's happening in Acts 20, they are on a road trip home. And I told some of the guys, like, this is a perfect dad text. Because they have believing friends in different cities from over the years that they want to see.

But they also have a tight timeline to beat. And so they have to decide, how are we going to do this? How many stops are we going to make? Who are we going to see? Who are we going to cut out? You know? Paul wants to go on foot.

[6:02] He wants to see more people in Acts 20. His friends are like, no, we've got to sail straight through. We want to make up good time. So anyway, Paul says Ephesus is a must stop.

We're not even going to touch Asia. We're not going to spend any time there. We have got to stop in Ephesus. So he sends them a letter. He says, hey, when we get through, I want you to come out and meet me. So Acts 20, verse 18, Paul says to them, they come to the boat.

They have this little encounter. And he gives them their history together. He says, you know, from the first day that I came into Asia, from what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable from you, and have showed and taught you publicly from house to house.

Then he tells them later on in that same text that he's going to Jerusalem and bad things are going to happen to him. And in verse 25, he says, behold, you will see my face no more. And so you skip down to verse 37.

This is their last, what I think from scripture is their last time seeing each other, right? This is their moment, kind of indicative of that relationship. It says, then they all wept and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words that he spoke, that they should see his face no more, even as they accompanied him unto the ship.

[7:24] So I know that's a lot of context. I know that's a lot of history you probably didn't want to dig into before reading our text today. But I just, I thought that was so helpful to look at. You know, who is Paul writing to?

Who is he praying about? You know, what is this like when it comes to thinking about the Ephesians? Telling old stories together, laughing together, crying together. And so as we look at Ephesians 1, if you want to turn there and look at, we're going to start in verse 15.

But it's really no surprise then that our text picks up with this. Paul speaking, it says, therefore I also, Ephesians 1 15, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

So in that context, in that frame, you can see this is, at the beginning of this letter, he's actually excited about their obedience. He is thankful for their successes that they're having in the faith,

praying for them all the time, as we might do for someone we care really a lot about. And so with that long-winded context, hopefully it's helpful for weeks to come. But with that context, let's pray this morning, and we'll look at the rest of chapter 1. God, thank you for today.

[8:36] Thank you for the testimonies of camp. Thank you for those that could make it out today and just dig into your word with us this morning. I thank you that you preserve the scripture for us, that you preserve the truth, and that you have the ability to give believers, the ability to reveal truth and provide wisdom and insight for those who follow you.

I just thank you for that this morning. I pray that you would do that again today. Amen. All right, so we're going to pick this up in verse 17 of chapter 1, if you're still there.

This 17 to 22 is essentially what Paul's prayer was for the Ephesian believers. He sort of says what it is, and then he adds the color. So we're going to go through it. But verse 17 and then down starts with, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion in every name that is named, not only in this world but also that which is to come.

And he put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. So, that's a lot there.

For some reason, my prayers don't actually ever sound like that. Mostly about food and sleep, you know. Look back at verse 17.

[10:31] What is the essence, what is the top line of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians? That God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

So, that's the pinnacle of Paul's perpetual prayer. That the eyes of your understanding, it says in verse 18, being enlightened. His premier petition for his friends, not the healing of the sick, not political concerns or dealing with the diverse community, not the crazy economy that's going on at Ephesus or anything else that's happening.

We know Paul cared about those things. We know he knew about them. I mean, he immersed himself in that culture for a long time. He lived with them. He experienced it. But chiefly, the one thing he prays for, it says in the very beginning, that they grow in wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God.

I had to break that down because I feel like I can read a sentence in a text and it sounds Christian and so I'm just like, yeah, that's good. But I don't actually pick up what's there, right? So, the word revelation, it means to make naked or exposing things unknown.

And then the knowledge in that text literally is referring to precise and correct things of ethical or divine nature. So, in other words, Paul is praying that God would make clear what is right and true.

[11:51] As I was doing some prep in this, I was looking at, I don't know, you guys probably see me on my phone when other people are speaking. It's not because I'm on Facebook or anything else. I use a notes page. When someone says something good or references a text, I'm like, that could go along.

I make a note of it. So, just for future reference to avoid Christian judgments here. But somebody shared this verse a few weeks ago and it's Paul's prayer for the Colossians in chapter 1.

Listen to how this sounds. So, Paul writes to Colossians chapter 1. This might be in your sheet. For this reason, we do not cease to pray for you, okay, to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Sounds kind of familiar. Right? In fact, this is his prayer just about every time he reaches out to a group of believers and declares what he's praying for. It was routinely at the top of his mind and list when he was praying for other believers.

Despite everything else going on, nothing concerned Paul more than having a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the things of God. And I don't want to belabor that point, but I just thought we can't miss that.

[12:59] It's so pure and it's so helpful and it's so relevant for us as we think about each other, as we encourage each other, as we challenge ourselves. And just wanted to share that right out the gate, that that is Paul's premier prayer and the spirit revealing this prayer to the believers in Ephesus and Colossae and elsewhere.

What's great about this letter is that actually the spirit opens up the workings for us. We get the prayer, we get the headline, but then we also get how it's made up, how it comes to being. So the first question you might ask, looking back at the text, from where does this wisdom, from where does this revelation come?

Verse 17 says, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ might give unto you the spirit of wisdom, that your eyes may be enlightened. So I think that's worth pointing out, right?

Paul's saying this, he's sharing this, but it's God given. The spirit is the source. He's not saying necessarily go out and study books or, you know, procure this outside of that.

And here's a thought, right? Compare the secular religion around the Ephesians. What was modern society saying at the time? They were preaching learning.

[14:18] They idolized wisdom and knowledge and gaining understanding. But it was from mankind's origin. That's how the enemy works. I realize this picture in studying the text is Paul is praying for them to get it right, to pursue things that were being pursued but with the right approach, right?

And, you know, the culture was broadcasting that message and I think it's important for us to see that's how the enemy works. It's a slight perversion of the truth.

It's a kiss that betrays. It's a fruit that brings death and not life, right? And then I thought, well, that's interesting. What would our culture say about this today?

What does our culture value? What does our society point to in terms of knowing God and finding wisdom? The, excuse me, I might be turning 17.

The atheist claims there is no God for us to know. The agnostic holds that if there was a God, we can't know him. The humanist claims that we can define God so it's essentially pointless, right?

[15:27] But as Christians, the Apostle Paul has met Christ face to face, has confirmed the source of true knowledge and understanding and it's become his prayer to all the believers he passes by.

Certainly a contrast. It was interesting to read as well the Corinthians were given this direction as Paul wrote them later in the first book to the Corinthians, the first letter.

He actually has to outline where the source comes from and if you look at 1 Corinthians 2, verse 10 to 12, it says, God has revealed them, them, this is referring to spiritual truths, God has revealed them to us through his spirit.

For the spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. Even so, no one knows the things of God except the spirit of God. And then it finishes by saying that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.

Have you ever thought if the apostles were alive today or if someone wrote Bethel Community Church a letter, what would they say? What would they pray for us about? I think we have an idea.

[16:38] I think this is such a paramount piece that I think we at least have a glimpse. So with our remaining time, I sort of got the emphasis there in what Paul's praying about, but I want to look at the details.

I want to share with you the workings of this prayer because it's three things that sound familiar, but they're worth breaking down, right? If you're reading back at like verse 17, 18 to the rest, you notice there are three areas that support a believer's journey towards wisdom and understanding.

And as it's written, it says to know the hope of his calling, to know the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and to know the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe. Now the first seems obvious, right? To know the hope of his calling. I did a lot of word studying and breaking down to get some meaning out of this, but that word hope means joyful and confident expectation, typically used in line with eternal salvation.

So Paul's, and the prayer here is that the Ephesian believer would know and give attention to and cherish that hope. Now what's interesting, I don't know who's got next, you have next week, don't you?

[17:56] Yeah. I don't know who's got next week and how far it goes, but in Ephesians 2, chapter 12, Paul writes about the unsaved. Here's what he says. That at the time you were without Christ, being aliens from Israel, having no hope, and without God.

So Paul's prayer for the believers is that they would revel in this hope that they have as Christians, and then immediately points out, look, this is new to you. This was not available to you previously. So it's definitely a contrast.

Romans 5, 1 to 2, it says, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus and have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of his glory.

There's a verse in Titus there as well. You can read, I'll skip over it for the sake of time, but Paul says the spirit of wisdom in Revelation starts with the foundation of knowing our hope.

That's the first one. The second is that they would understand the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. It's another one of those compound sentences.

[19:02] I read a lot and it's like I can't ever staple it down, so I have to do this in chunks. I don't know if you're the same way. But that riches, okay, so riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, that's what we're doing.

Riches is what you'd expect. It's abundant wealth. It's fullness. Of the glory, that phrase indicates brightness or splendor or having an excellent view or exalted state.

Of his inheritance, and that word's used as a property received, given as a possession, something that's not borrowed. And it says, in the saints, so of believers.

So, Paul's praying that they would gain an understanding of the revelation of this inheritance.

Knowing its abundance and fullness, it's given as a possession.

It's not borrowed. This is the understanding that he wants them to come to as a reality for believers.

Peter describes an inheritance in 1 Peter 1.

[20:02] He says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has blessed, sorry, has begotten us to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away reserved in heaven for you.

Which kind of, you know, you take a pause on that, right? You think about what else could the Ephesian churches have found security in? Where else could they have looked for riches or glory? I think it was previously mentioned by both Dave's, we have a lot of Dave's by the way, we realized that, you know, speaking about a couple weeks ago, but the church at Ephesus, the community like America, was a wealthy place.

They were made up of Gentile believers, converts from paganism, so they, you know, it was very likely these folks had successful trades, successful businesses, savings, probably a physical inheritance of land or possessions.

It doesn't overtly say it, but there's a chance that Paul was aware of this, aware of that possibility that they might find comfort or security in a physical inheritance.

[21:18] And so Paul's prayer is that they would seek the wisdom and the hope and the splendor that came from what God has assured of, not the false securities of the world. I was watching a movie on a flight recently and I always enjoy true stories or based on real life events for some reason.

those appeal to me and I watched the movie about the Gucci family. Has anybody seen that? The Fashion Empire? No? Not typically my cup of tea, but I, that's where I ended up.

It was a very interesting story though and the whole, the whole premise followed this family. You know, crazy amount of wealth, crazy amount of property, land, all over the world, right?

a prominent name. You know, we are Gucci, is like how they said it in the movie. And they had seemingly few children. So as a math guy, I'm like, got a lot on the top end of that, fewer to divide it by, like you're talking about a substantial amount of inheritance.

I don't want to spoil the entire movie, but most of the film was spent describing how they squabbled over this control and influence and the final caption read this, no one from the Gucci family owns any part of the company today.

[22:31] Outside of just buying public stock, you know. And I thought about that in light of the inheritance that the believer has, you know. All the growth that they could have had, all the, all the inheritance, you know, diminished in the Gucci family.

Thankfully, that's not an option for we who believe in Christ. Paul writes again to the Colossians in chapter 1 in verse 12, says, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness. So it's no surprise that's part of Paul's prayers that they would just focus on that understanding.

So finally, here's the last item on the list. And I think it's the most involved. Maybe, not necessarily the most complicated, but just, you know, a little more abstract. Paul's praying, Paul's prayer for the believers that they might grow in wisdom and knowledge of God's power toward us.

So again, I keep asking, what does that mean? You know, we don't get mutations in special powers like the X-Men, although that would be super cool. Dangerous for most of us, I would imagine.

[23:44] But what is this great power toward us that he's referring to? In Romans, Paul writes about this. He says, So part of that is God's Holy Spirit in us.

Looking further, though, Paul actually expounds on the nature of this power in verse 19 and 20. He says, this power towards the believer is according to God's mighty power, which raised Christ from the dead.

One. So it's a power that overcomes the natural laws of physics, things that otherwise would not be possible. That same power that's used to bring a life back from the grave.

It says that we would know and see and view that same power of God towards believers. We don't have time today, but if you find yourself looking for something to read, and you end up in Acts 25 and 26, we'd be reminded that it was Paul's confession that Jesus was raised from the dead.

That power, that aspect, his testimony there is what put him on the witness stand. Before the Sanhedrin, before Felix, Agrippa, even Caesar himself, that facet of Jesus and God's power to come back from the grave, to defeat death, that was uniquely offensive to both the Jews and Rome.

[25:03] And yet Paul says wisdom and understanding grow in that power that raised Christ from the dead. It's kind of neat, actually, looking at that whole picture. It's a power that establishes heavenly rule.

If you look at verse 21, even beyond comparison, it says, power far above all principality and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also that which is to come. So there's a lot of color in those verses and you probably want to read it more than once, but Paul wants the believer to understand, he wants his Ephesian friends to be reminded with what power their God exists, saves, and operates in our life.

Which is why he ends his letter with this in chapter 6. Finally, brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. This won't surprise any of you, but in the same exact vein that we talked about, just as the world offers a false hope and a temporary inheritance, right?

This world that we live in today loves, loves its power, loves to flex that, right? We can save the planet. We can justify sins.

[26:13] Hey, it's pride month, right? We decide what's right and wrong. We decide to rule and oppress and war. We have the power to kill. We have the power to define life. Me speaking as humanity, right?

The world doesn't have any power except that which God has allotted it. And the Spirit through Paul is reminding us and the Ephesians in wisdom that we're on the winning team.

It's a beautiful fact. In verse 22, as it sort of wraps up the text and we're almost done here, he closes chapter 1 by saying, and he put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

It's just a reminder that this isn't like the power in our homes that with a storm or a tired Ameren employee can down the neighborhood, right? It's even superior to things we don't know and can't see.

So in conclusion here, it's important to see just that final fact that Paul is praying and reminding the Ephesians, praying for and reminding the Ephesians that everything is under the rule of our seated king.

[27:30] And with that power to use and witness to overcome sin, to pursue holiness, to fight against the schemes of the enemy, we were talking about that this morning, to maintain faith towards the church and to ministry.

And so I'll ask you, just as a self-challenge, as a corporate challenge, as an application from this text, do we find ourselves growing in wisdom and understanding?

Are we praying for that? Are we seeking that revelation from the Spirit of God? As the musicians want to come up, we can wrap up today. I sort of had this final concluding thought on why did Paul write this in the prayer?

Or why is this captured for us in history? Does it seem just theoretical? Like, hey, this is what his prayer was? And I sort of lean towards this application side of it.

Why this one thing? So maybe you're here today and maybe it's a battle with pride. You're just dealing with pride and you're just tired of it, right? The Spirit of Pride says, I've got this.

[28:37] I don't need help. I'm good with me. And believe me, I know what that, it's a familiar voice. I'll put it that way. The Spirit of Wisdom says, I've never had it alone.

I've always needed God. Maybe it's not pride. Maybe it's coveting. Maybe it's lust. Right? That Spirit says, that's good for me. Spirit says, or the Spirit of covetous or lust will say, that will satisfy me. That's my hope. The Spirit of Wisdom from God says, there's only one hope. There's only one truth. There's only one thing that will really satisfy. Really, any struggle, I started thinking about this, any struggle that you got, any sin that you can't get past, any particular challenge, if there's one thing that's going to solve and satisfy it, it is Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

It is that concept. And so let us seek that for ourselves and also pray for those we loved for the same thing. Right? I'll read it one more time. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, being enlightened, that we may know what is the hope of his calling, the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us.

You believe. Let's sing.