

Deepening Intimacy with God - 3

A Pandemic

- The last time we were in Ephesians was in January. How the world has changed! As we live through this pandemic, that has literally brought the world to a halt, certain things haven't changed:
 - The transient nature of life
 - Over 270,000 people have died within a space of 2.5 months
 - Our vulnerability and lack of control
 - The utter futility of life apart from God
 - Our sinfulness and brokenness
 - The Sovereignty of God
 - The sacrifice of Christ on the cross
- This pandemic is an eye opener of sorts. **It forces us to face truths that are often blurred by busyness, hurriedness and an insane pace of life.** We are forced like Moses in Psalm 90 to reflect on life, death, and the Sovereignty of God
- So here we are and what are we to make of this situation?
- While we often want a clear explanation of how this will be worked out for good, and an outline of what the future looks like, **God offers us a lamp - the lamp of his Word.**

- In doing so, **he redirects our anxious heart back to himself, deepening the relationship between God and us.**
- Pulling on this idea of deepening our intimacy with God, my aim, as we study together today is that:
 - You are reminded of who you are, and whom you belong to, namely God
 - You are pulled into a deep, interactive budding friendship with the Triune God

Recap

- The last time we studied Ephesians 1, we touched on a couple salient points.. Let me quickly recap that to help us set the stage for the study today
 - Paul wrote this letter to a group of churches in Southwestern part of Asia Minor, of which the church at Ephesus is one of them.
 - This is important because **Paul did not know their circumstances** and so his words are applicable to any situation we might find ourselves in
 - In verses 3-14, **Paul launches into this outburst of praise where he outlines blessings upon blessings from God to believers “in Christ” for the sole purpose of glorifying God**
 - The driver of these blessings is the Triune God. The blessings Paul enumerates one after the other, springs out of the loving heart of God
 - **Without any merit on our side, we clearly see the Triune God as the primary initiator of the blessings.**

- These blessings are not based on how morally good you are but simply on the truth of whether you are in Christ or not

Summary of Eph 1:3-14

- Election as Proof of His love (vs 4)
 - We are chosen in Christ before the foundations of this world, that we should be holy and blameless before him
 - Our faith rests completely on the work of God, and there is no room for boasting.
 - The point of election is unto holiness i.e. we are set apart for God, unto God
- Sonship by Adoption (vs 5)
 - In love, God predestined us, deliberately planned that we become His, through the sacrifice of Christ
 - The only one born of God is Christ Jesus, and God offers us the same standing as Christ, who is His firstborn, adopting us into His family
 - God chose sinners like me and you to be his own family...and this he did with deep pleasure and joy
- Inundated with Grace (vs 6-8)
 - You cannot read Eph 1:3-14 and not see how much God lavishes his grace on sinners like me and you.
 - Grace isn't so much unmerited favor as it is demerited favor

- In a sense, “**Grace is God’s unbelievable acceptance of us. It is not so much as something God gives us, rather it is God’s giving us himself**” (NIVAC, Ephesians)
- Grace is empowerment to live a godly life (cf Titus 2:11-13)
- Redemption: The Miracle of All Miracles (vs 7-8a)
 - Verse 7-8a personally blows me away, everytime I am present to these verses
 - **In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us,**
 - *I like to say that if I were God, I would be tired of myself and my sins.*
 - **This verse is a miracle to me, as I am astounded by how much God gives of himself to a sinner like myself.** Here I see clearly that grace is the **Righteous Judge of the Universe, who should condemn me to eternal damnation, adopts me as his child.**
- God’s All embracing Plan (vs 8b-10)
 - It’s pretty cool that God not only redeems us, he actually takes the extra step to ensure we know we belong to him, by making known to us his plan or his purpose for all of creation.
 - **All things will be consummated in Christ. This is where we are going and we are a part of that plan.**

- Godly Heritage (vs 11-13)

- The point Paul is making is this: **everyone who is “in Christ” are God’s chosen people, that have now been claimed by him as an inheritance** (PNTC, Ephesians)
- It’s essentially secure promise upon secure promise, where God is saying I got you. I won’t let you go. I chose you before time, laid out a decree/plan - purpose - and then I will ensure that I work it all out, according to my will.
- **This is God saying If you will have me, I will forever be yours, and you will forever be mine, welcomed into my family**

- An Unshakeable Anchor (vs 13-14)

- The Holy Spirit is **God’s first installment on our salvation, a deposit that guarantees that there will be a full payment i.e. the consummation of all things in Christ**
- **This text fires me up because I am excited about what the future holds.** No matter what is happening and what happens, **victory in God is assured - We are forever His.** We know how all things end - everything will be summed up in Christ.
 - **We are not alone, we are not left hanging. We belong to God now, as evidenced by the fact that we have Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our inheritance**
 - **God’s ownership of us will be finalized when Christ sums up all things**
- **This text calms me down because it is an anchor for my soul** especially during turbulent times and when faced with the storms of life.

- I am reminded to live life but to always leave room for the divine mystery... This verse reminds me to wear this world loosely and to carry myself lightly. And to do so, not with despair but with Joy.
 - Why, you ask? Because I know whom I belong to. I am His. I belong to God!

- Now in light of all these promises, let us delve into today's text

Text

- The bulk of our study today will be focused on Eph 1:17-19 but I will be reading from Eph 1:15-23 for a broader context
 - **15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,**
 - **16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,**
 - **17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,**
 - **18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,**
 - **19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might**

- **20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,**
- **21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.**
- **22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,**
- **23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**

Observations

- I will be organizing my thoughts today under 3 main headings: 1) A Reminder 2) A Prayer, and 3) An Exhibition. We will spend the bulk of our time on the second observation

A Reminder (vs 15-17)

- **15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,**
- **16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,**
- **17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,**
- In light of their faith (which is evidenced by their belief in Jesus as Lord and their love to neighbors (all the saints), Paul prays for them.

- Paul is thankful because they are in Christ and therefore they are partakers of the blessings he just enumerated,
- In addition would seem that Paul desires that the recipients comprehend the blessings/themes he has just touched on in verses 3-14, hence the phrase “ **For this reason**”
- Let me remind you again that Paul is writing to a collection of Churches in Southwestern Asia Minor, and most likely he is not aware of their current circumstances, which likely would include persecution, famine, being in need, death, etc.
- **In essence Paul is laying out truths that the recipients should be anchored in regardless of their situation.** Paul is in some way laying out his own theology of life, and the purpose behind all of this is for the glory of God
- **He is calling them back to the reality of their identity...as he is calling us back to the reality of who we are, even in this pandemic.** Our true identity remains unchanged. We belong to the Lord. Christ is both our Savior and Lord
- Before jumping into the prayer, Paul highlights whom we pray to with the phrase “**that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory**”
- This is a reminder that the One to whom we pray and belong is:
 - First of all the God of our Lord Jesus, the one in whom we believe. This is the same God who deliberately offered up Christ for our sake, to reconcile us to Himself.
 - This is the Sovereign King who loves us so much to sacrifice His son for our sake

- Secondly he is the Father of Glory, which speaks to the supreme majesty of God. He is truly the One who stands above all things, including this pandemic. This is a reminder that you stand in the presence of majesty

- Our Father is One who is not limited by time, scope or influence; the One for whom nothing is hard

- Do not miss the word Father that Paul uses which establishes a familial link to us.

- It is to bolster our faith and to remind us that **if we are in Christ, God is responsible for us**

- Very often, **I tend to live like a functional atheist.** While I believe in Christ as Savior and Lord, I can function as one who doesn't see Christ as Lord and Savior and God as Father.

- Functionally, there is a bent in me to rely more on myself, to be curved inwards rather than to bend outwards and roll everything to God

- **But thanks be to God for the gift of trials, and brokenness to help us see that I am vulnerable and ever so desperately in need of him**

- In this times of uncertainty, where it feels like everything we build our lives on is shifting, may we be reminded that we have One who is truly unchanging and completely in control

- May we see **the hidden blessing of these times i.e. an opportunity for us to truly become more and more dependent on the One who is unchanging,** namely Christ Jesus

A Prayer (vs 17-19)

- **17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,**
- **18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,**
- **19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might**

Why this Request?

- Of all the things that Paul could ask for, he makes a request that **“the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him“**
 - We could ask the question - why make this request?
 - As mentioned before, we understand that Paul likely doesn't know the circumstances of his readers, which could include need, persecution, death, and even maybe an epidemic. It's also possible they were flourishing and doing quite well
 - Yet this is what Paul asks for in light of all they could be facing
- Without going into the semantics of the language, **Paul is really asking that his readers have a deepening intimacy with God.**

- He is asking that his recipients be blessed with revelation/understanding of the mysteries he just spoke of in Eph 1:3-14, which is grounded in the knowledge of God.
- He is also asking for his readers to be wise i.e. to get a grasp of the implications of these mysteries and apply it in their lives.
 - Regardless of the circumstances, **it makes sense that Paul is asking that his recipients have a deepening intimacy with God**, and an understanding of what God has provided for them in Christ Jesus
 - **Why? Because intimacy with God is what anchors you in Him, regardless of what comes your way**
 - Without intimacy with God, we are tossed to and fro with every wave of uncertainty and unexpected outcomes.
 - Without intimacy with God, we are a deer in the headlights of the fads, trends, relative truths, pop culture, and every other thing that comes up.
- John Stott puts it aptly: 'What Paul does in Eph. 1, and therefore encourages us to copy, is both to keep praising God that in Christ all spiritual blessings are ours and to keep praying that we may know the fullness of what he has given us'
- The core of Paul's prayer is for true intimacy/knowledge of God, which is expanded upon in the rest of the prayer in vs 18-19

Three Realities

- The purpose of Paul's prayer is for his readers to grasp 3 realities.

- The phrase “**having the eyes of your hearts enlightened**” refers to illumination or spiritual insight of the person.
 - In other words, **Paul is asking that as a result of intimacy with God, that the recipients of this letter be enlightened to grasp three major realities that provides a solid footing in any situation**

The Hope of His Calling

- “**18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints**”
- **The first thing that must be said is that it is God who makes the call.**
 - The hope to which we are called is from God and not something we fabricate or come up with or use for our own selfish desires.
- A quick commentary on the use of the word hope
 - Today, **we use the word hope to convey a sense of optimism** - basically something uncertain that we wish for. For example, I hope it is warm tomorrow
 - However in biblical terms, **hope represents a confident expectation of God’s actions**, regardless of circumstances.
 - Hope in biblical terms carries with it a certainty. What is hoped for will happen for sure, it is only a matter of time. There is no uncertainty here.
- What is the hope into which God has called us into?
- **The hope to which God has called us into is the consummation (redemption) of all things in Christ.** It is a reminder of our destiny, of the purpose God has for us and where he is taking us.

- **The hope to which we are called is a reminder that a day is coming, where God will redeem all things in Christ,** where “**He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.**” (cf Rev 21:4-5)
- It is to remind us that God will right every thing and fully redeem us unto himself
- Though we live in the tension of **the already** (today’s realities and battle with sin and darkness), and **the not yet** (when all things are consummated in Christ), we know how things end
- **We live out our days based on our hope of the future.**
 - **When we know how the story ends, and we know we will be victorious in Christ, it has a calming effect on how we live out our days in the here and now**
 - It is those who truly have their hope in Christ that can be selfless and can extend mercy and grace unto others
- Though we live in the tension of today’s pandemic and its ramifications on health, career, sustenance, we can be rest assured in the hope that God truly is Sovereign over all and He will redeem all things including all that we’ve seemingly lost.
- **God is good and will do good by you! He will redeem all things**

Glorious Inheritance

- **“18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”**
- It is important to note that this is God’s inheritance and so this passage is not in support of the prosperity message of having your best life here.
- **Rather the text “what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” points to the portion that belongs to God, namely his people**
- **It is not that we take possession of an inheritance, it is that God takes full possession of us i.e. we are His portion, we belong to him, we are forever his.**
- Let me read from a commentary here
 - God’s people, comprising both Jews and Gentiles, are his inheritance, his own possession, in whom he will display to the universe the untold riches of his glory.
 - That God should set such a high value on a **community of sinners**, rescued from perdition and **still bearing too many traces of their former state**, might well seem incredible were it not made clear that he sees them in Christ, as from the beginning he chose them in Christ’.
 - As a consequence, then, Paul prays that **his readers might appreciate the extraordinary value which God places on them**. He views them as “in his beloved Son” and estimates them accordingly. (PNTC, Ephesians)
- What I am hoping you see here us that **you matter to God**
- I am hoping you see the value God places on you, if you will accept him as Savior and Lord

- **I hope you see that the prayers of Paul is not dependent on how morally good you are but it is entirely dependent on the action of the Triune God**
- **If you are in Christ, you belong to God! You are His!**
 - You are not a wayward stepchild but a beloved son/daughter of the Most High
 - This is your identity, even in the midst of this pandemic. Your value and identity is not based on what you possess or what people are saying about you or what you are currently doing. **Your identity is simply this: you are a beloved child of the Most High God**
- You belong to God; He is yours, and so He is with you. Please do not forget that, **God is with you**

Immeasurable Great Power

- **18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might**
- The third reality that Paul wants his readers to know is the Power of God.
- In reading the text “**what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might,**” Paul uses several terms (“immeasurable, greatness, power, working, great, might”) to convey something of the surpassing nature and potency of God’s power.
- Do not miss that this power is available to us, who believe in Christ, who see Christ as Savior and Lord

- **This power is not for the prosperity message of health, wealth and fame.**
- Rather, this power is for the purpose of God. It is demonstrated in what God has secured for us (go back to verses 3-14) in Christ Jesus, by way of his sacrifice and resurrection
- **The idea for Paul's readers, who primarily lived in pagan communities with a fusion of different religions, cultures, etc., is to remind them of what God has accomplished for them in Christ Jesus**
- **This is true for us today. This should build our faith and confidence in God [not in an end], knowing that we have the Supreme Being on our side.**
- While this pandemic shows us, what was always true - that there is no security to be found in wealth, health and career, **we have an eternal security in the person of Christ Jesus.**
- **Though we are abject sinners, because we are redeemed by the blood of Christ,** we are backed by a power that is above all others, spanning through age, never limited to circumstance or happenstance.
- **And all of this is due to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.**
- We, though sinners we may be, are redeemed by the blood of Christ! Thanks be to God for in his love and Sovereignty, he has made a way back to Himself through Christ Jesus. Hallelujah!!!
- I hope you see that God is truly Sovereign and there is nothing beyond him, and **he works and deploys this power for our good.**

An Exhibition (vs 20-23)

- Desiring that his readers come to fully appropriate every spiritual blessing that have been graciously given to them in Christ (Eph 1: 3-14), Paul prays for intimacy with God, so that we may
 - **Live into the divine call upon their lives**, which points to our place in God's divine purpose of consummating all things in Christ
 - **See that we belong to God; We are His! And this is possible only because Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Tim 1:15).**
 - It truly is a great joy to know that God places such a high value on us by redeeming us through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus
 - **Grasp the power of God that is available to us who believe** - to know that we are not orphans left to the whim of this world
- As a way to bring home the point of his prayers and **to make an emphatic point to his first century readers and to us, Paul then lays out an exhibition of the power of God and what that power has accomplished for us**
- Without explaining much, let me read the passage as it is self explanatory, showing us what God has secured for us in Christ
 - **17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,**

- **18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,**
- **19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might**
- And now comes to the exhibition of all that God has accomplished for us in Christ
 - **20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,**
 - **21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.**
 - **22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,**
 - **23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**
- **Do you see how the Triune God leverages His power to ensure you are secure in Him, eternally?**
- **Do you see that Christ is Sovereign over all things and you can rest easy enough because nothing is above Christ?**
- **Do you see that death can never be the last word for us? Do you see what your ultimate end is? And where your journey leads?**
- Do you see that while a pandemic might affect you negatively here in the interim, what God has secured for you can never be taken away

- Do you see that basing your identity on anything other than God is a result of being short sighted?
- **Do you see that you matter to God? And that he has ensured that in Christ, our sins are no match for his grace and mercy?**
- Do you see that life here is a dress rehearsal for life eternal, and that nothing can truly separate you from the Love of God?

Application

- These are truths that anchors our lives, wherever we may be or whatever we are faced with.
- **Life can be hard and very uncertain. We are vulnerable and have little to no control.**
- Everything around us is essentially shifting sands. Death comes for all. One way or the other, our mortal coil is burning down.
- How are we to process these things?
- **The only way to do so, appropriately, is in light of the sacrifice of Christ and what God has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus**
- It is in light of the accomplished work of Christ on the Cross that we have a hope, that we are God's portion and his inheritance, and that his immeasurable great power is at work in us
- What then are some practical steps we can take in light of this passage?

Repentance

- The very first step in partaking of these realities is to be in Christ. **If perhaps you have not come to truly accept Jesus as Savior and Lord or you have at some point departed from the faith, then I encourage you to run into the loving hands of the Father.**
 - Find someone who is a believer to walk you through what this means so you understand the downward spiral of your sins and the extent of God's mercy and love for you
- In addition, **we all know we sin, and I am a poster child for this. But thanks be to God that he offers us the grace of repentance.**
- **A critical part of our journey and maturity in Christ is repentance. Repentance must be for all of life.** Repentance has to be a consistent theme in our interactions with God.
- **Unless you are perfect, repentance must be the bread with which our mouths are always filled.**
- My encouragement is that you make repentance a consistent part of your engagement with God. When you pray, stand before God and ask that he show you your sins

Way of Life

- With this pandemic, I hope we see that everything in this **life is transient.** The illusion of control we hold on to, is being **painfully but mercifully eroded**

- This pandemic is a **mini training on the importance of being rooted in God**. I hope with the reality of this pandemic, **we see the futility of anchoring our lives in anything other than Christ Jesus**
- What then should our response be?
- If we are in Christ, and long to be the kinds of people that lay hold on the realities Paul spoke of, then **we cannot be complacent in our relationship with God**
- **Transformation into Christlikeness or living a life that glorifies God is not a passive process**
- My suggestion is that we step back and use this down time to think about developing a way of life that naturally draws us closer to God.
- What I am saying is this
 - Reflect on the normal routines of your day to day life
 - What one or two things can you add in there that helps open you up to God
 - It might be deciding to wake up a bit earlier to start walking through a particular book of the bible (either on your own or following a trusted teaching series)
 - It could be carving out time in the evenings to reflect on your day with God
 - It could be reducing time spent on other things to memorize scripture or take seriously feedback you've been getting from your spouse
 - **The point is to come up with a way of life where you get to engage God through prayer, scripture reading, meditation, silence & solitude, fasting,**

service, etc., not as an end in itself, but as a means to open you up to an interactive relationship with the Triune God

Reflection Questions

- How has your world changed during this pandemic? What has been bubbling in your heart? What has God been bringing to mind that you naturally might not pay attention to in your normal pace of life
- Read Eph 1:3-14. Which one of those promises arrests your heart especially with fears or uncertainties around this time? Journal about it. Maybe memorize those specific verses and continue to ruminate on it
- Does repentance (actively confessing specific sins and working with God on it), feature much in your engagement with God? If no, why not? Does guilt or shame hold you back? Or do you generally think it is not a big deal and God sees my heart?
- Reflect on the sin patterns of your life. You could limit this to a particular time frame (the last 1 week or 2 months or year or decade or just any particular season). If you haven't spoken to God about this, do so. See God as your father and unburden yourself to Him, and maybe a trusted believer. See how much God loves you and how he nails it all to the cross. Immerse yourself in scriptures that remind you of the truth of the cross and your sins
- Take some time and reflect on your daily routines. What 1 or 2 things can you tweak to incorporate practices (eg prayer, scripture memorization, scripture reading/studying,

fasting, service, etc.) to engage God more deeply? Are there daily practices you can implement or weekly or monthly?