

Ephesians 1:15-23

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 September 2020

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

- [0 : 0 0] Folks, great to have you with us today, however you're watching this, whether you're live with us in the building or you're tuning in online, it's just so wonderful to have you with us.
- Come with me if you've got a Bible there to Ephesians chapter 1, the verses we've just read, where Paul is praying for the believers in Ephesus.
- And let me just tell you, as I've kind of hung out with him this week, let me tell you what his prayer has reminded me of, right? It's reminded me of something that happened when I was a teenager, right?
- This craze that happened where everybody was buying a book, okay? Everyone's buying this book. And the book, and one of you remember this, okay, it was called The Magic Eye, okay?
- It was this magic eye book, maybe you're a generation, you might remember that. If not, Google's your friend, okay? You can do it afterwards. The Magic Eye. And The Magic Eye really was this book full of optical illusions, right?
- [0 : 5 8] And everybody seemed to have one. And pictures, it was full of pictures that when you first looked at it, all you could see was kind of weird colours, lines and shapes.
- And you're looking at it thinking, what is this? What is this? Mum, we paid how much for this? Did you keep the receipt? She says, yes, we did. We're Scottish. But we're looking at this thing thinking, this doesn't make any sense, this 2D image.
- And the trick was that if you looked at it long enough and hard enough, all of a sudden this 2D image would, in your mind, become 3D, right? This 3D world would open up in front of you.
- And all of a sudden you would see the kind of picture or the word that was right at the heart of it in this kind of 3D world. And you'd go, wow, I never saw that before. How cool is that?
- I see it now. It was 2D, but I see it in 3D now. How awesome is this? And that's essentially what Paul's praying would be true of these Christian believers spiritually, right?
- [1 : 5 7] If you want one line that maybe gets you to the heart of this prayer is, I pray that you'd see it, right? I pray that you'd see it. Okay, think of it like this. He's presented them in the beginning of chapter one with this in Christ picture, right?
- Think of it, this in Christ picture. What God has done for the believer in Jesus Christ. Remember what we saw last week? We think back really quickly. The believer's been given a better identity.
- Okay? Chosen by God the Father. Redeemed by God the Son. Sealed with God the Spirit. Better identity. It's true of you. Okay? Not because you've earned it, but because God has given it to you.
- It's true of you. So important is it in our lives that we remember that God has said this is true of us because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Seems to me that the devil, friends, only has one trick, one line in his book, and it's the line that he played in Genesis 3, did God really say?

Okay? You and I trip up all the time. Did God really say that you were chosen? Yes, he did. Did God really say you were redeemed by the blood of his Son? Yes, he did. Okay?

[3 : 03] That we know who we are. We've been given a better identity. And we're now part of a bigger story. Do you remember that? Verse 10. God's plan, his purpose since the beginning of time to unite all things in heaven and on earth in Christ Jesus.

Okay? We're part of this bigger story. Those things true. Better identity, bigger story. True because we are united with Jesus Christ. And in light of that, Paul is saying, I'm praying that you'd see it.

Okay? I'm praying that you'd see it. So come with me to verse 15. Let's get into these verses together. Do you know what I love about Paul here, straight off the bat in his prayer?

Okay? I love how he celebrates what God is doing among them. You see it? And I thought to myself this week, how long did that be true in my life?

Okay? The fruit of God's spirit at work, that you celebrate how he is at work in the lives of other people. Do you see how he's heard about them? Do you see it? He's heard about their faith.

[4 : 07] He's heard about their love for Jesus. Some of these folks he might remember from his time in Ephesus, but I'm sure there's lots more people in the equation now in this church who he doesn't know. He celebrates them.

And he's heard about their love for God's people. See that? Their faith and their love. And in his mind, these are telltale signs that somebody has become a Christian. Right?

Faith, hope, and love. This is his triad. We'll come on to hope in a minute. Faith, hope, and love. It's in your heart. This is what you do. Now let me just ask you, we have application here. When was the last time you celebrated the grace of God at work in someone's life?

Think about it. When was the last time you did that? Particularly when it comes to people who we have heard about yet never met. As you hear how God is at work.

Tell you how this worked out for me this week. Over the last couple of weeks rather. I was reading on Twitter about a pastor and a church called City Bible Church. Right?

[5 : 10] Do you know where they are based? In the heart of Beirut. They started as a Bible study in a living room for 10 months. They studied Ephesians together. They outgrew their living room.

And now they're a thriving church in that city center. Right? Doing just what we're doing. Meeting on Zoom to pray. Right? Trying to do stuff online. Trying to be involved in one another's lives.

Trying to love the people around about them. Who, given the heartbreaking things that have happened in that city in recent months. Trying to love their neighbor well. Show Christ's love to people.

Do you know what? Ever since I heard about them, I have never stopped giving thanks for them. A heart of Beirut. Praying for them. Praying for you. Do you know what I've found is, as I've thought about how can I best pray for the people in my spiritual family, my church family.

I found this letter, sorry, this passage rather, so instructive. I mean, isn't it interesting to consider what Paul doesn't pray for here? He could have prayed for a ton of stuff. Right? He doesn't pray that it would go well for you.

[6 : 13] He doesn't pray for provision. He doesn't pray for health. Right? Not wrong to pray for those things. Definitely not. Because we love one another, we will be concerned about the practical aspects of our life.

But Paul's prayer here reminds us that we're playing in a much bigger game. Now what's he praying? Verse 17. Come with me. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

See it? 2D. 2D. I'm praying that God, through the work of his Holy Spirit, won't blow your mind with this and you'd see it in 3D. What God has done for us in Christ, you'd see it more.

You'd know Jesus better. And he puts flesh in the bones of that prayer. And this really is going to be our two points really quickly for this morning, if you're taking notes. I don't know if you are, maybe mentally.

He's praying for two things. Okay, here's the first. He's praying that they'd know the hope that's theirs for the future. The hope that theirs is theirs for the future.

[7 : 23] Friends, if ever there was a time when the people in our world are desperately in need of hope, surely we're living at one of those times in our lifetimes.

Right? Let me just ask you, whoever you're watching this, whoever you are here today tuning in, where are you looking to for your hope? Your hope.

You remember that song by Gary Jules all those years ago? Right? Called Mad World. Remember it? Mad World. Every time I hear it, I'm always intrigued for no other reason than it's a fascinating observation about how many people in our world live their lives.

Right? It went like this. All around me are familiar faces. Worn out places. Worn out faces. Bright and early for their daily races. Going nowhere. Going nowhere.

Their tears are filling up their glasses. No expression. No expression. Hide my head. I want to drown my sorrow. No tomorrow. No tomorrow. Sound familiar? I take it that because that song still gets airtime all the time, that it is.

[8 : 31] Right? The cyclical and the often exhausting nature of life on the treadmill that for all of us will end in us facing the same grave.

You know, I remember going to a humanist funeral a number of years ago and the service began with a really heartfelt and lovely poem about the deceased and about nature and the beauty of the spiritual.

And it ended up with us going out to the Bee Gees. Right? And I remember driving home with a friend with hearts breaking for the people that were there thinking that that was an occasion utterly bereft of hope.

Friends, where is your hope? Where is your hope? Here is the Christians. Verse 18. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.

The riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. So here's what we need to see. There are two sides to the hope coin. Right? Think about it like a coin.

[9 : 34] Right? Two sides to the hope coin. First of all, one side it reads, we get God. Okay? We get God. He is our inheritance. Him.

We get Him. It's where it's going. It's where we're going. He is our inheritance. As you trace the Bible story through the Old Testament, this promise develops. Of God promising his people a land.

Right? There's a place. It's where it's going. The story's going somewhere. God's leading them somewhere. And it's not the land in and of itself that is the goal. It's what the land symbolizes.

Okay? The riches that God will pour out on his people. Why? Because he is there. He is there. Right? Not kind of some estate agent that's sold them a place and gone somewhere else.

He is there. He is dwelling with his people. And it's why you get this constant refrain in the Psalms that the Lord is our portion. Right? It's Him that we get.

[10 : 32] And if he is good all the time, this three-in-one good God who is love, then that is an amazing thing to think that we will inherit at the end of the story.

Of course, fast forward in the story, we get to the New Testament. We're looking towards the land of the new creation. If you come tonight, you will be thinking about the heavenly city. The heavenly city.

Okay? Christ. That's where we're going. Christ. He is the goal. The goal. He is the treasure of the Christian life. We get God, says one side of the coin. Flip it round.

And the other side of the coin, and get your heads around this. Okay? The other side says, God gets us. God gets us. Feel the language there.

Right? We are his inheritance. What? Us? Me? You? All our failings? All our baggage?

[11 : 29] All our mess? Yes. Yes, he gets us. You see, God is not in the business of reluctantly bringing us home. Right? Like a parent tapping their watch saying to their teenager, what time did you get in last night?

How did you get in here? See, friends, how much we are treasured by our heavenly father. Again, not something we've drummed up. Something he has said is true of us.

Right? Bestowed with dignity. Given value and purpose in life. We'll hear Jesus talking in the Gospels about how it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.

See how much God loves his people. He loves his people. We saw that, didn't we, last week at the beginning of chapter one. In love he predestined us.

Right? Love is at the foundation of this. See how much God loves his people. And Paul is saying, there is your hope, Christian. There is your hope for the future.

[12 : 33] And I'm praying that you'd see it. Let me ask you an honest question that I asked myself this week. How often do you think about the future? Okay, I'm not talking about like next week.

I'm talking about the future you have as a Christian. The hope here. How often do you think about it? And let me take that question. Let me make it into an observation that I hope causes all of us to think here this morning.

Okay? And here's the observation about the church. Okay, I think about my grand generation of church. Right? Fair to say a godly, devoted generation of believers.

But who were perhaps so fascinated with the future of the how, the when, and the where, that perhaps they took their eyes off fully engaging in the present.

Okay? Generalizing somewhat, but it might be a kernel of truth in there. But I tell you what is definitely true about my generation. Okay? We're the others. We're the other way around.

[13 : 40] Okay? Perhaps so fascinated with the present that I think we have failed to fully engage and think about the future. And I think what Paul is saying here is that we need to see that the two are intrinsically linked.

Right? How often we're like, and this was Martin Luther, he used to talk about the church being like a drunk man trying to get on a horse. Right? Try and get on and you fall off one side and he tries to get back on and it falls off the other side.

How often we get the extremes wrong. Paul is saying that the two are intrinsically linked. That the key to living faithfully in the present is thinking clearly about the future.

So again, the key to living faithfully in the present is to think clearly about the future. Where this whole story is going. The hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

Friends, let me just say, if ever there was a time for us to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ, it is now. Yeah?

[14 : 43] You want proof of that? I heard in a church leaders call recently, Evangelical Alliance, that Nicky Gumbel, rector at Holy Trinity Brompton down in London, recently reported that apparently roughly 16,000 people in the UK have signed up and attended an online alpha course in the last few months.

Okay? People are searching. There's a hunger there to, and a restlessness, I imagine, looking at a world and thinking, what is the best at a time like this when all is taken away? What is the best that our world has to offer?

And the answer is not very much. But in Jesus Christ, we hold out the hope that we have for the future. And we say, this is so much better. He is so much better than anything that the world can offer us.

Paul's praying that they'd know the hope that they have for the future. And secondly, he's praying that they'd know the power that is theirs in the present. Okay?

The power that's theirs in the present. What does Paul want them to know? Come with me to the text. Verse 19. Of the incomparably great power for us who believe. Okay?

[15 : 53] And just like hope is a two-sided coin, let me suggest that power is a two-sided coin as well. Right? On the one side, it reads God's incomparably great power.

I remember growing up when we were young, every game we used to play in the school playground, the rule was winner stays on. Right? Just competitive bunch of boys. Winner stays on.

That was the rule. It doesn't matter whether it was cuppy. Okay? Some of you played that football cuppy. Whether it was drafts, whether it was concurs, that was the rule that the winner stayed on. And you stayed on by making sure that nobody beat you.

And if you were off, the whole aim in your mind was to topple the guy who was up there undefeated and knock him off. Winner stays on. What Paul is saying here, that when it comes to power, nobody is knocking God off of top spot.

Okay? For the simple reason, verse 20, that there is no greater demonstration of power than the crucified and the risen Christ.

[17 : 00] God is, verse 21, who God has seated far above all rule and authority, and who has put all things, quoting Psalm 8, under his feet.

And it's at his name that one day every knee will bow. And I take that whoever you are watching here today, whatever you think about this, God, let you hear me clearly say that at one day every knee who has ever existed, every person will bow at the feet of Jesus.

It's his name that one day every knee will bow. What a comfort for these believers in Ephesus. I take it this is why it's written, so that they could stand in the spiritual battle that they're in.

Right? What a comfort for these believers in Ephesus, surrounded by the power of the Roman Empire. Right? Surrounded by the power of the occult and surrounded by the power of Artemis. What a comfort for them to know that there is no greater demonstration of power than the crucified and risen Jesus.

No one is knocking him off the top spot. No one is knocking him off the top spot. There is no greater power than that. And I take it that's the reason why people in places like North Korea and in the underground church in China, up against a regime that is trying to do everything to stamp out the name of Jesus, decide that Jesus is worth following.

[18 : 25] Right read this week. The country apparently with the fastest growing church. You know where it is? It's in Iran. Iran. Not a single church building in sight.

And yet people are flocking to Jesus. And I take it it's the same reason that connects all those things together. That God by his spirit has installed inside of people, deep inside of them, this growing conviction in their hearts and in their minds that this is who Jesus is.

Right? Matthew 28 right at the end is true when Jesus pronounces that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Right? We do this every year as an elders team.

We go away for a day. Right? Try and go down to the Leith or out to Pennycook or somewhere like that. We did it yesterday morning on Zoom. Okay? The times were in. But we had this guy leading us from down south.

He came up and helped us think about the future. Okay? Thinking of celebrating the past of how God has been at work. Celebrating now what God is doing amongst us even in these crazy times that we're living in.

[19 : 33] And thinking about the future. Where might God be leading us? Okay? And just asking us, what are your aspirations? Talking about our aspirations. And these will come out I'm sure in the months to come.

Talking about the things that we'd love to see the Lord do. The thing that connected every single one of them was to see more people come to know Jesus. Okay? And the only reason we have confidence that that might happen and that will happen is because of this growing conviction of who Jesus is.

That all authority in heaven and earth really has been given to him. That he rose and he reigns and he is accomplishing his purposes for the glory of his father. His incomparably great power.

This is who Jesus is. And I say that's an encouraging thing. Okay? I think if it wasn't for the second half of that sentence that this would be a terrifying thing. Okay? If it weren't for the fact of his incomparably great power.

Two words. For us. You see it? In the text. For us. Who believe. So the other side of the power coin. Incomparably great power.

[20 : 43] The other side of the coin is that the risen Jesus is for us. Guess what it reads? For us. One side incomparably great power. Other side for us. You know I always think when we hear in our news.

Don't we remember back in my law days always used to hear it from people. High profile court cases. What is it that people always come out and say they're going to get? The best legal team money can buy.

That was the line. Okay? You heard that before. We're going to get the best legal team money can buy. Going to get the best in the business to come in and bat for us. Okay? Represent us. Okay? I bet it was when Lionel Messi announced that he thought he could leave Barcelona for free a couple of weeks ago.

That they got the best legal team money could buy. To come up and say. Yeah. I don't think so mate. Okay? Unless somebody can cough up 700 million. You're not going anywhere. Best representation we can get.

Friends. I want you to know that there's no one better. There's no better power to have on your side than the risen Christ who loves you. There's just no one better to have your team on your side.

[21 : 47] It doesn't mean life's going to turn out swimmingly in this life. But it does mean that. Think of the end of Romans 8. That nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. There's simply no one better to have on our side.

And not only that. Verse 22. Get this image. God the Father has given the reigning and ruling Jesus with all power. The supreme ruler over all things who declares everything is mine.

The one who's beat the universe dances to. He has given him to whom the church. You see it? The church. In fact so caught up are our lives with his.

That the church can be described here as being his very body. Back to this idea of reunion with Jesus Christ. Aren't we? His body. And we're going to see that play out.

How that works out in the weeks to come as we travel through this letter. Let me just make one last observation and then we're almost done. Okay. As we think about power and for us.

[22 : 46] And as we look out at a world. Seems to me that there are lots of people with power. But who have very little love and concern for the people who they are over.

And flip it around. There's a lot of people in our world with a lot of concern and love for people. But who have no power to do anything about a situation. And yet how glorious is it that Jesus is both all power.

And he's all love for his people. Here's the Christ picture. I'm praying here. I'm praying that you'd see it. Right.

That the eyes of your heart would be enlightened. I'm praying that you'd see it. That this 2D picture of who Jesus Christ is and who you are in him. I'm praying that God through his spirit would take that and vump.

That it would become 3D in your minds and in your hearts. That you'd know the hope that you have for the future. And you'd know the power that's yours in the present.

[23 : 53] Friends, maybe one thing to do this week in practice. Just make this your prayer for the week. In your own life. Lord, help me to know Jesus better.

It's a kind of four-year-old prayer, isn't it? Right. But it's a wonderful prayer. You'd help me to know Jesus better. And then take three people in this congregation, church family.

Maybe scribble their names in your Bible this week or something like that. And pray it would be true for them. That they, Lord Jesus, would know you better. You remember this really simple song by Graham Kendrick that we used to sing?

Now my heart's desire is to know you more. To be found in you and known as yours. To possess by faith what I could not earn. That all-surpassing gift of righteousness.

And in the chorus, let me finish with this. Knowing you, Jesus. Knowing you, there is no greater thing. You're my all. You're the best.

[24 : 56] You're my joy. My righteousness. And I love you, Lord. Friends, may that be our experience this week as we journey on with Jesus. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this time together today.

And Father, I do pray for whoever is tuning in here. Maybe watching this online or whoever is here today. Father, that your spirit would be at work in each of our lives.

Lord, bringing that understanding of who Jesus is. Lord, his incomparably great power for us. And the hope that we have in him for the future.

Oh, Lord, thank you that you love us. Father, where would we be without your great love for us? And we commit ourselves to you, Lord. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.