

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 1:15-23 Knowing God's Power

There's a place in Caesarea Philippi along the coast of Israel where they've uncovered the fortress where Paul stayed. He was in a small prison. And you can go look at the foundation work and know with 100% certainty that the Apostle Paul stayed in one of 3 rooms - they're all attached together. He was there. We know this.

Now imagine we got news that archeologists had done a little more excavation and discovered the prayer journal of the apostle Paul. They've got exact prayers from him. Would you be intrigued or excited? Would you want to know how he prayed?

Well, actually we have something better than that. We don't have a prayer journal, we have Paul telling exactly about his prayer life.

How does an apostle of the Lord Jesus pray? What does he pray for? What motivates his prayer life?

It's said that usually things are more often caught than taught. The idea is that we usually imitate someone rather than understand it from explicit instruction. And I think that's probably true to an extent. People rub off on us and I think that's good.

And if you're like me, you probably need all the encouragement to pray that you can get. For some of you, prayer comes naturally and easily. Praise the Lord for that. For others of us prayer takes discipline and focus and encouragement and I think we get that from Paul this morning.

So the big picture here is that we pray because God is sovereign. Since God is sovereignly in control of all things, then he has to do all the things.

There's a lot of people who get that backwards: they don't pray because God is sovereign. They have a fatalistic view of God where prayer doesn't really matter.

That's not the biblical view, certainly not a Christian view. No, the Bible teaches that because God is almighty and loves us we should pray to him to provide all things.

I mean down to bread: Give us this day our daily what? Bread.

The reason your belly has food in it is because God provided it for you. That's why we thank God for our food, you guys. It's not some abstract theological concept that magically attaches divine significance to food. No, without God's good providence you would have zero to eat.

If you just read the Bible he's in charge of the whole supply chain: good soil, rain, growth, locusts, fire, harvest, production, grinding the grain, fire for the oven, the yeast in the bread.

I remember years ago I was on a restricted diet for health stuff. And I literally had to work through this every time I sat down to my bland plate of food that it was God who gave me this exact plate. I had to imagine that God opened up the heavens and handed this plate of food down to me to sustain me and keep me going.

And if God himself provided it, then we should give thanks. He provides it because he is a good and merciful God.

See, our theology is what will motivate us to pray or not pray. And our theology will influence what we pray for. So let's dive in here. Remember the big picture is that we pray because God is sovereign and I want to show you that in 3 parts.

1) God's sovereignty should motivate us to pray. Read 15

I won't camp here too long but this section of prayer starts with this little phrase: for this reason. For what reason?

Paul is saying that based on everything he's already said in **Vss. 3-14**

He therefore prays to God. It's the old preacher saying: we need to know what the therefore is there for. Well, it's the same thing here.

Based on God's predestining work, based on his sovereign mercy, based on his doing all things according to the counsel of his own will... **Read Vs. 16**

So get this: Paul's theology of predestination motivates him to pray. And specifically it motivates him to thank God for saving the people in this church!

Look back to Rom. 10 for a minute. Remember **Romans 9** is the epic chapter on predestination. That God chose Jacob not Easu, that he chose Isaac not Ishmael. That he hardened Pharaoh's heart. That he'll bring in the Gentiles whom he's chosen. On and on. So what's the result? What effect does that have on Paul? **Read 10:1**

Knowing that God chooses and God hardens what does Paul do? He prays. There's a lot of people who think that since God predestines there's nothing we can do and prayer is worthless and meaningless. That's completely backwards. If salvation is all up to God, then the primary thing we should be doing is praying!

Listen, you and I can't open the eyes of the blind. We can't change out hearts of stone for hearts of flesh. We can't raise the dead. We can't unstop ears.

Who can? God. So if it's God who does all those things then the most important thing we can do is pray. Predestination doesn't make prayer useless. It makes prayer essential. Because what we're recognizing is that although we can preach the message, God has to change the heart.

Paul says in **1 Cor. 3:6**: I planted, Apollos watered, but who gave the growth? God did. We do what we can and what we're called to but ultimately it's God who does the real work. And if it's God who does the real work our most important action is to beg him to work. To plead with him to save his people.

So the sovereignty of God motivates our prayer.

2) Sovereignty of God motivates thankfulness. Read 15-16

So we've seen that the sovereignty of God should motivate us to prayer in general. But specifically here, we see that Paul **thanks** God for his sovereign work in the lives of these believers.

That's the specific connection: because of what God has done in his work of choosing these saints he continually gives thanks to God for them.

When God saves a people what he's doing is bringing them into an eternal plan that he began before creation and will finish in the New Heavens and the New Earth. And we're often thankful for what he's done in our lives and the lives of those around us. But the point I want to make is we should be thankful for everyone God has called into the Kingdom. **Turn to 1 Thess 1:1-5**

The simple point I want to make here is that we should be thankful for God's working in predestining and saving other people through the gospel. **1 Thessalonians** is the most clear connection between God's work of choosing people and our response of thanks. **Read 1-5**

So every time Paul remembers the Thessalonians he thanks God. They're on his mind a lot and he's just so thankful. Why? **Read 4**

He's thankful because God chose them for salvation. How does he know that they were chosen? Because they believed the message of the gospel, their lives were changed, and they imitated Paul. **Read 4-5**

He was thankful that they were part of this sovereign plan of God.

Most of you know this but one of the reasons we pray for churches in our region is because we're truly thankful that God is doing a work in other congregations. These are our brothers and sisters in the Lord and they have been brought into the eternal promises of God in Christ just like we have. And some we agree with more, some less, but all are bearing fruit in the gospel of Jesus. And because they are brothers we should be thankful for them and thankful for what God is doing in them.

Now, I want you to notice something here. He knows the Thessalonians are elect because they believed and because their lives were changed. **Turn back to Eph 1. Read 15-16**

Why does Paul give thanks for the Ephesians? He knows all the truths about God's sovereign work in their lives is true because they have not only believed in the gospel, but their lives have been transformed as well: He's heard of their love for all the saints.

John 13:33-34: A new commandment I give you, that you should love one another. As I have loved you, so you also are to love one another. By this all people will know you are my disciples: if you have love for one another.

1 John 3:14: We know that we have passed out of death and into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

One of the dead giveaways that someone is a believer, that they've been chosen by God, and been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is that they love other believers. That's why John says if you don't love you're abiding in death. You remain in spiritual death. Because the only possible response someone could have to God pouring out his saving love on them is to turn around and love others.

So Paul is thankful for God's saving work in their lives and he knows they're saved because they love the brothers.

So the sovereignty of God motivates prayer, motivates thankfulness.

3) The Sovereignty of God in Sanctification. Now, I'm going to read this section and it can seem complicated. But let me summarize it and then we'll read.

When Paul thinks of the church in Ephesus, he instinctively thanks God and instinctively asks for God to help the Ephesians to understand 3 things: the hope they have, riches they have, and the power they have.

And then right after he talks about the power that they have he riffs on the power of God when he raised Jesus from the dead. So watch this. **Read 16-23**

So let's break this down slowly. Paul thanked God and now he prays that God helps them understand. They need God to open their minds. Look at this: **Read 16-18a**

What's he praying for? He's praying that God the Father - the glorious and powerful Father - would give the Ephesians wisdom and knowledge about Jesus. He wants these Christians to have a better understanding of the promises they've been brought into.

Imagine that you could take a Time Machine and you travel back to 1927 New York City. And someone tells you, "Hey listen you've been drafted by the Yankees." And you're like, "Alright, the Yankees. They're good right? The Yankees have always been good." Yeah, that's the understatement of the century. You know you're on a good team, but you're on the '27 Yankees - Murderer's Row: Babe Ruth, Lou Gherig, Earle Combs, Mark Koenig, Bob Muesel.

You are on the most famous baseball team in the history of baseball teams with the guys who will be legends. And if you're not into baseball it's hard to comprehend just how amazing being drafted onto that team would be.

You guys, we haven't been drafted onto the 1927 Yankees. We've been brought into the eternal counsel of the Triune God where the Father blesses the Son in eternity past and the Son sacrifices for his people to bless them for all eternity future.

When it comes to understanding the things of God, we're often like that time traveler who's like "Yeah, I guess the 27 Yankees are a good team." Yes, we know that God has blessed us. Yes we know we're getting heaven and it's going to be good. But what Paul wants is for the Ephesians and for us to better comprehend exactly what we've been brought into.

Because the more you understand the more you will be humbled and thankful and filled with praise to God. These Ephesians need God to open their eyes more to just how much he's blessed them.

He asks for God to give them a "spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God." He's not asking for some weird charismatic experience. He's not asking for some weird spiritual gift. He's just saying I want God to open your eyes a little more - the eyes of your heart. He wants all the Ephesians to have this understanding.

We call this the doctrine of illumination. The doctrine of illumination is that although we can read our Bibles, read good theology books, listen to sermons, God has to open our eyes to understand more and more truth.

I had lunch with a group of pastor friends this week. And it's funny because we'll occasionally talk about how someone will come to our church for years and we'll be preaching about something and then they go off to a conference and come back and they're like "Pastor I just learned this amazing thing about the Bible." And we're thinking "The thing I preached on 3 weeks ago and 3 months before that?"

Have you ever had that? You listen to some sermon or go to some conference and all of a sudden something totally gels for you that's never quite made sense? That's the Holy Spirit in you illuminating His Word for your sanctification.

That's what Paul wants. And so he specifically asks the Father to open the eyes of the hearts of the Ephesians to 3 things.

A) Know the Hope to which he's called us. **Read 18**

What is the Christian hope? The Christian hope is resurrection. One day the Lord Jesus will return and he will raise our mortal bodies into glorious bodies.

The Christian hope is not just that we die and go to be with Jesus on a cloud forever and ever. No. Our hope is that just like Jesus was raised, so too we will be raised. And just like he has a glorious body so too we will have a glorious body. And not only will our bodies be resurrected and glorified but all creation will be renewed and glorified as well. We will live in a brand new Garden of Eden.

Paul says in **Rom 8** we are groaning for the return of Jesus alongside of creation. We long to put off these weak and sinful bodies and put on righteous, glorious bodies.

Jesus not only saved our soul, but he will also redeem our bodies as well just as his body was raised.

And we need the Lord to open our eyes to understand that. It's usually a big mind shift for people to stop thinking that when they die they just go float around heaven forever and instead realize that we will have some version of this body 2 million years from now in glory. And that body will be imperishable glorious, powerful, and fully powered by the Spirit.

Everything you see around you is tainted with sin and decay. Even on the best and most beautiful spring day here, will pale in comparison to what we will experience in the resurrection. But only God can help us comprehend that.

B) Know the inheritance to which he's called us. **Read 16-18**

So he wants us to fully comprehend our inheritance. What's an inheritance? It's the stuff you get when someone dies. So we get stuff as a result of a death. Who died? Jesus died. He also rose, but his blood is the new covenant - New Testament. Because Jesus died we get an inheritance.

What do we get? We'll it's not all made fully known to us. We know some. We're going to see God face to face. Somehow the power and glory of the unseen God will be made known to us. We will stare at the face of God.

Blessed are the pure in heart, Jesus says, because they shall see God. The unmitigated, fullness of the infinite God in full glory, full majesty - face to face as with a friend.

We will enjoy perfect fellowship with all the saints of all the ages. We'll talk to David, Abraham, Moses, Benaiah, the loved ones in the Lord you've lost along the way. We'll talk to Augustine, Calvin, CS Lewis, martyrs.

All the saints that you've lost touch with or gone separate ways for whatever reason. Or the ones who have hurt you. You'll rejoice together as best friends in the Lord. There will be no bitterness or envy or angst or shame.

We'll live in mansions, outside of streets of gold in the Garden of God where trees make their fruit in their season forever. The Garden is in the New Jerusalem which is the heavenly city with the most amazing walls and the most massive gates you've ever seen. But the gates never close because there are no enemies. You'll have a mansion but but no keys because you'll never lock the door. There won't be any crime, no fear, no tears, no tragedy. Because God has wiped all the tragedy away.

In heaven there will be times of corporate worship, of course. We see scenes where all the saints fall down and worship God. It will be the height of pleasure in the New Earth that we worship God together. Imagine the greatest pleasure you can in this life - usually expressed in sexual pleasure - and that pleasure will pale in comparison to what we will experience in heaven basking in the fullness of the glory of God.

Because in his presence is the fullness of joy and at his right hand are pleasures forevermore.

It's not all corporate worship in heaven, of course. It also appears that we will have jobs. Jesus says if you have been faithful with little, you'll be what? Faithful with much. So in heaven we are entrusted with things. We're entrusted to judge holy angels for their service. Somehow, as the sons of God, we will determine the reward for angels who we will now see for the first time ever, but who have ministered to us thousands of times without us even knowing it.

It also appears that at least some in the Kingdom will rule. Jesus talks about people who inherit cities in the Kingdom - some 1, some 5, some 10.

That shouldn't surprise us because Paul talks about God rewarding us for the good we've done for the Kingdom at the judgement. He'll reward the gold, silver, bronze, and burn off the wood, hay and stubble.

Every good deed you've ever done will be rewarded. That's just some of your inheritance. And the more you understand it the more praise to God you'll give.

C) Know the power that God works in us. Read 16-19

When God brought you in the Kingdom he brought you in **by** his power and **into** his power. And we don't often realize this.

When kids are little we usually put little outlet covers on the electrical outlets throughout the house. Why? Because they can't comprehend the power surging inside that little receptacle.

When it comes to God we're like those little children. We really have no idea about the power of God. But we're different than the kids. They don't know and so they try to tap in. Our problem is that we don't know so we don't tap in at all.

We have no idea the power available to us to live the life God has called us to live. And so Paul says he prays that we would understand that power.

What power do we need, specifically? Power to kill sin. It's hard to kill sin isn't it? I just heard about a guy who claims to be a Christian who spent several hundred thousands dollars and gambled it all away. He had no power to say no. He had no power of self control.

We have no idea the power of God for obedience. We have the power of God for prayer, for spiritual disciplines, love, humility. How do we tap into that power? Usually through the means of grace: the Word, the sacraments, fellowship, corporate fellowship.

It's like there's a 220 outlet right there and we just need to charge our phone. And we often don't tap in.

How do we know that God is powerful? How do we know that we have God's power available to us? Paul says just look at the gospel. He connects the power that God has in us, with the power that God worked in Jesus. What did God do for Jesus? **Read 19-23**

How was God's power shown in Jesus? He raised him from the dead. That's power, you guys. No one else does that - only God. The God who raised Jesus from the dead is in us and working in us.

God also seated Jesus at his right hand in the heavenly places. So Jesus ascended into heaven. Only 2 other people did that and only because God took them. But God brought Jesus up to heaven and placed him on his own throne. How can he do that? Because he's God.

And where Jesus is is above all demonic spiritual beings. **Read 21**

What's he talking about? Demons. Jesus has been super elevated over every spiritual force ever created. Far above all of those things. The same powerful God who placed Jesus far above all that, is inside of you right now.

Think of the craziest miracles in the Bible - sun stand still, Red Sea part, Jordan river stop, 185,000 Assyrian troops die, walls fall down - all by the power of God which is inside of you.

And we are connected to the powerful Jesus by God's working. **Read 22-23**

So yes, Jesus is the head of the church - that's us, every believer of every age. And we are his body.

Think about a human body. The head directs things, but no one would ever say the rest of the body has no power. My hands and arms and legs and back are all connected in some way to my head. What's going on with my head inevitably affects my body.

So get this: the same power Jesus who is our head, his power flows through his body, the church. And fullness that fills all in all is the his divine fullness.

We don't become God when we become Christian, but we are filled with God.

Jesus says to the disciples in **John 14:23** that he and the Father will make their home in his disciples. How does he do that? Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

The divine nature of the Triune God lives in us. That is the power that is inside of you.

That's why no Christian can ever say "well I just can't stop sinning." Yes you can. You just don't want to. They can't ever say "I just can't obey." Yes you can, you just don't want to. The power is there, the divine nature lives in us like he lived in the Temple. We just don't tap into it.

If I gave you \$1 million for every time you read your Bible for an hour would you do it? Happily. Why don't we? Because we don't think it's valuable or has power in our life. We don't trust that it's the power of God.

If I gave you \$1 million dollars every day you were kind to your family and never got irritated at them could you do it? Of course. Why don't we? Because we don't find it valuable. God does, but we don't. Because we don't understand the power in us.

You guys, God has blessed us in amazing ways. He's blessed us with hope. He's blessed us with an inheritance. And he's blessed us with power.

May he open our eyes to know it more.

Pray