

Ephesians 1:15-23  
Recognizing Our Riches in Christ  
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William Randolph Hearst, the wealthy newspaper magnate, once read of an extremely valuable piece of art. He decided that he just had to add this particular piece of art to his already large art collection. He instructed his agent to search the galleries of the world to find this masterpiece because he was determined to have it regardless of the price. After many months of painstaking search, the agent reported that he had at last tracked down the sought after piece of art. It was located in the private collection of Mr. William Randolph Hearst. It had been stored away in one of Mr. Hearst's warehouses for many years. Mr. Hearst already owned the piece of art he so desired; he simply was not aware of it.

In today's passage, Paul is praying that something analogous to this will not happen to the Christians at Ephesus. They have the riches of salvation in Christ. Paul prays that they will become aware of the greatness of that salvation, that they will become aware of what they already possess in Christ Jesus. Are they longing for that which puts them in touch with the eternal and gives their lives real and lasting significance? Are they desirous of a hope that will sustain them through difficulties and give them a sense of purpose? Do they want some lasting inheritance which will not pass away, an inheritance which moths and rust cannot corrupt and which thieves cannot break in and steal? Paul's message is that they already have this and more in Christ

Jesus. They already own the Pearl of Great Price. They already possess the great Treasure which was hidden in a field. Paul comes as a spiritual appraiser to inform them of the surpassing worth of these great riches.

Perhaps an illustration you can better identify with is marriage. On your wedding day, you get married. The moment you take those vows before God and men, you are 100% married. You can't get any more married. It is like a light switch; it is either on or off. Either you are married or you are not. You are married the moment you say your vows and the preacher makes the pronouncement. The marriage switch is flipped to on. Yet you will spend the rest of your married life probing the riches of that relationship. In that sense, you are getting more and more married all the time.

That's the way it is with our salvation. Once we are saved, there is a sense in which we are completely saved. We are totally forgiven. We are entirely reconciled to God. We are clothed in a legal sense with the perfect righteousness of Christ. In terms of our legal status before God and our place in God's family, we are completely saved, as saved as we can be, as saved as we ever will be.

And yet there is another sense in which we grow in our salvation. We grow in terms of our spiritual condition and our spiritual deliverance. We increasingly experience the transforming power of our faith relationship with Jesus. We increasingly experience the life changing influence of our faith relationship with Jesus. We become progressively more aware

of our salvation's richness, our salvation's grandeur, our salvation's depth, our salvation's power. And that is what Paul is talking about in today's passage.

Ephesians is one of Paul's prison epistles. He probably wrote this during his two year house arrest in Rome which we read about in Acts 28. This imprisonment began about four years after his three year ministry at Ephesus. Our passage indicates that there at Rome Paul had heard a report about the faith of the Ephesian Christians. Some years had passed, and the Ephesian Christians were holding firm. They had not returned to idolatry or to the occult. They were not those temporary professors which Peter refers to in 2 Peter. They have proven not to be washed pigs who eventually return to wallowing in the mire. Their very nature had indeed been changed through Word and Spirit. As a result, they have persevered in their profession of faith in Christ in spite of all opposition. What wonderful news!

But beyond that, Paul has heard about their love for the saints, their special bond with all others who share their love for Jesus regardless of their nationality or race or economic status. This further confirms that their faith is genuine and that their faith is real. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, but that faith which saves is never alone. It must bear the fruit of repentance and new obedience. We are saved by grace through faith unto good works. The faith which saves is our experience of our covenant union with Jesus, and Jesus transforms all who are truly in union with Him, all who are truly in a personal faith relationship with Him. Therefore Paul is now as sure of their salvation as it is humanly possible to be. From all appearances,

the gospel seed has fallen on the good ground of regenerate hearts and taken deep root, and is now bearing good fruit.

Because salvation is all of grace, because salvation is first and foremost a gift of God and not a human work, Paul's first response to this good news is to thank God. In verses 1-14, Paul praises God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit for their distinctive roles in salvation. The Father planned our salvation in eternity past. The Son accomplished it in the fullness of time on a Roman cross. The Spirit applies it to our lives in the here and now.

After this psalm of praise, Paul then prays a prayer of supplication for the Ephesian Christians. He prays that God will open their eyes to the greatness of their salvation and to the inestimable worth of their spiritual riches in Christ Jesus.

Paul addresses his prayer to the Father of glory; that is, to God the Father who has revealed His glory through the work of salvation. Our prayers are normally addressed to God the Father through the priestly ministry of God the Son in the enabling power of God the Spirit. Paul's prayer is that God the Father will give the Ephesian Christians the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, the eyes of their hearts being enlightened. I believe the word "Spirit" here should be capitalized. I believe Paul is here referring to the Holy Spirit and not to the human spirit. The key is the word "revelation." The revelation of divine truth comes through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth who inspires the writers of Scripture so that they can record divine truth and who illuminates us so that we can

understand the Scriptures when we read them and thus learn divine truth. The Holy Spirit in this way reveals divine truth to us and then gives us the wisdom to apply that truth skillfully and appropriately to life.

You might ask why Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians to receive the Holy Spirit when the Holy Spirit already indwells them. That is a very good question. When we were saved, Jesus poured out His Holy Spirit upon us, and the Holy Spirit immersed us into a covenant union with Jesus, a union with Jesus that is the very essence and basis of our salvation. This is both something which happened in the past at the time of our conversion, and also something which continues. Jesus continues to pour out His Spirit upon us moment by moment, and the Spirit maintains our union with Christ moment by moment. To develop further this metaphor of pouring, the flow is not constant. The flow can increase or decrease. When Christ pours out the Spirit upon us in such volume that we are filled to overflowing, that is what it means to be filled with the Spirit. We experience this increased flow as a stronger faith and a greater participation in Jesus' saving power. God has begun a good work in us. Now He must complete it. God has given us salvation. Now we must work it out in fear and trembling. Our responsibility is to abound more and more in the spiritual graces. Thus Paul prays that God will give the Ephesian Christians more and more of that which they already have, the outpoured Holy Spirit.

Notice that this spiritual knowledge which we have through the Holy Spirit is the knowledge of Jesus. All of the Scriptures point

to Jesus. The Old Testament scriptures look forward to the Messiah to come through prophecies and types. The New Testament scriptures look back on the Messiah who came, the historical Jesus. He is God's greatest revelation of Himself. He is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of the Father's person. As we read in John 1:18:

18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

Paul prays that the Ephesians would receive knowledge in three specific areas: the hope of Christ's calling, the riches of Christ's inheritance, and the greatness of Christ's power.

Let us look first at the hope of Christ's calling. This is referring to that irresistible call when Christ uses both Word and Spirit to call us unto Himself. He sends to us the gospel message, and through the Holy Spirit enables us to hear it and respond to it. We would be deaf to the gospel call if the Holy Spirit did not persuade us of our sin and misery, enlighten our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renew our wills. When the Holy Spirit does this work in our hearts, then we experience a miracle like unto the miracle when Jesus cried out to the dead Lazarus, "Lazarus, come forth!" and Lazarus obeyed. The Good Shepherd calls for His sheep, and the Holy Spirit enables His sheep to hear the call, to know Him, to recognize Him as the Good Shepherd, and to follow Him as He leads them to green pastures and still waters.

Our passage says that Jesus calls us to a hope. That hope is the full application of salvation. We have been given the Spirit as an earnest payment, a down payment of full salvation. We look to that full salvation in hope.

We should live each moment in that hope. This enables us to endure the miseries and difficulties of this life. Because of this hope, we know that the miseries and difficulties of this life are temporary. They are a passing experience. They have no future. They are a part of this world, the form of which is passing away.

True torment is misery that is endless and meaningless. Because of the hope that is in us, we know our miseries in this life are neither endless nor meaningless. They are temporary. Compared to eternity, they are short lived. And they have a purpose. God is using them for our spiritual benefit.

Also, because of the hope in us, we know that every truly good thing which we experience in this life is but the foretaste of greater good to come. The truly good experiences of this life are but the beginning. The way of the wicked will perish, but God knows the way of the righteous. Because every truly good experience in this life is also a reminder of greater blessings to come, we can daily rejoice in the Lord and give thanks in everything.

Contrast this with the hopelessness of the world as understood by today's secularist. The modern secularist believes that this world in all its complex intricacy just happened by chance. It is a meaningless, impersonal world. In that system, one has no

hope of any continuing existence after death except that he will live on in the memory of others.

You are familiar with the traditional committal used at the graveside:

Unto the mercy of Almighty God, we commend the soul of our sister departed and we commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I saw an episode of "Star Trek: the Next Generation" which began with a graveside service on a planet patterned after Scotland. The minister was an alien dressed like a Scottish Presbyterian. He said,

Unto the mercy of Almighty God, we commend the soul of our sister departed and we commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope that she will continue to live in our memories. Amen.

Now, I ask you, what sort of hope is that?

Beyond that, in the secular understanding, there is coming a day when humanity will become extinct. There is coming a day when the sun will grow cold and all life will cease to exist. There is coming a day when entropy will have completed its work, and the entire universe will be a dead system at a uniform



temperature. I ask you, who will remember us then? What kind of hope is that?

As Paul would later say in Ephesians 2:12, before they knew Christ, the Ephesians had no hope and were without God in the world.

Let's go on to our second point, the riches of our inheritance in Christ. God's grace is a rich grace. As Paul says in Romans, God's grace is greater than all our sins. We could no more exhaust the vast supplies of God's grace than a mouse could empty in his short lifetime the granaries of Egypt which Joseph filled to overflowing during the seven years of abundance. We could no more exhaust the vast supplies of God's grace than a man standing on a windy point could deplete the air of oxygen through breathing. We could no more exhaust the vast supplies of God's grace than a child with a pail standing on a sandy beach could empty the ocean.

The riches of God's grace are vast, and our salvation is free, but it was bought with a price, an infinitely high price.

1 Peter 1:18-19

- 18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers,  
19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

As a result of these riches of grace, the saints now have an inheritance. The language here reminds us of the experience of Abraham. We have here in the text calling and inheritance. God called Abraham to the land of Canaan and promised it to Him as his inheritance. That little piece of land which God gave to Abraham was a picture and pledge of our coming inheritance. The final and ultimate inheritance of the saints is the new earth. Our physical bodies will one day be resurrected. They will be freed from their current susceptibility to sickness and death, which are fruits of Adam's fall into sin. They will be raised to a higher, glorified state of existence. We will be made perfect in holiness and freed from even the presence of indwelling sin. And something similar will happen to the world system as well. It will be cleansed as by fire. The curse will be removed. There will be no more earthquakes or tsunamis or hurricanes or tornadoes. There will be no more dangerous animals or annoying pests. The planet itself will be raised to a higher level of existence like unto our glorified bodies. On the new earth, we will enjoy a heightened fellowship with the saints and with Christ and with our God. That will be our eternal inheritance, the ultimate land promise.

Our third point is the greatness of Christ's power. You might remember that ancient Ephesus had been a center of occult power, but Jesus possesses the power above all powers. He has been seated in the place of all authority high above all earthly powers, all angelic powers and all demonic powers. He has the name which is above every name not only in this age but in the age to come, not only now but for all eternity.

The power behind Christ's resurrection is both a picture of and the basis for the power of God in our salvation. When Jesus was raised from the dead, His physical body was not only brought to life but also raised to a new glorified level of physical existence. Jesus' physical body is the only material substance in all the universe which has so far been raised to this glorified state, and his glorification is the beginning of what is to come. As I have already said, at His return our resurrected bodies will be glorified and so will the new earth. We also experience the power of the Christ's resurrection and the beginning of the new creation in the here and now when we are regenerated, when we are brought to spiritual life. We experience the power of Christ's resurrection now in regeneration, and we will experience the power of Christ's resurrection in the future when our physical bodies are resurrected and glorified.

To describe the greatness of the power of Christ in salvation, Paul piles adjective upon adjective upon adjective. Paul wants us to understand "what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."

Paul prays that we will have a growing understanding of and appreciation for the greatness of our salvation in Christ. He wants us to be increasingly awed by the wonder of it all. Paul finishes with one last effort to try to drive home this point. He

says that Christ has saved us to become the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Let me repeat that: Christ has saved us so that we become the fullness of Him who fills all in all. What a mysterious and wonderful statement!

Jesus is the one who fills all in all. This is referring to the universe's complete dependence upon Jesus. The universe is like an empty balloon, and Jesus is like the little boy who takes that limp balloon and fills it with air. Jesus is the one who fills all in all. In His divinity, Jesus created the world and sustains the world. As the resurrected, glorified and ascended Christ, Jesus is now governing the world and directing history toward its final goal and purpose. All of creation is absolutely dependent upon Him, and He is dependent upon no one.

Jesus is the one who fills all in all. Yet Jesus paradoxically and marvelously has chosen to be completed by His church. We are in some mysterious way His fullness, that which fills and completes Him. What in the world could that mean? Here is what it means: He is a Bridegroom, and we are His bride. He is a Vine, and we are His branches. He is a Shepherd, and we are His sheep. He is a Head, and we are His body. He is the firstborn among many brethren, and we are His many brethren. What a mystery and what a blessing!

Christ is not dependent upon us in the sense of having any real needs or deficiencies, but He has chosen to use us for His glory in His grand program of cosmic redemption. He has honored us to become His people, His own special possession. This is an honor indeed. Comparing this to the material wealth and social

prestige and political power which this world offers is like comparing a genuine flawless diamond with costume jewelry made from cheap paste. There simply is no comparison.

Are you like William Randolph Hearst? Are you searching for what you already possess? Are you plagued with discontent and dissatisfaction? If you are a Christian, you need to open your eyes to the greatness of your salvation, to the hope of Christ's calling, to the riches of Christ's inheritance among us, to the greatness of Christ's saving power. How could you truly understand these things and be anything but overwhelmed with gratitude?