

Understanding What God Has Prepared for You

Ephesians 1:18-19

Halifax: 28 October 2007

Introduction

What a tragic thing it is...

- We live in a Province in which over 85% of the residents are baptised...
 - and for the most part, they don't have a clue as to what it means to be baptised:
 - There is a woman with wrinkled brow,
 - overwhelmed with worry because she has been diagnosed with cancer—as if in this life only she has hope...
 - And there is a young man bursting with enthusiasm...
 - But for what?
 - blindly chasing after a business venture that is filling him with the riches of this world, not knowing the vanity of it all.
 - He also thinks that only this life, he has hope.

The lights have never come on for these poor souls.

- Neither of them has ever come to see his own wretched condition before God...
 - You will say—"oh, but the woman has!"
 - Oh no, but she has not!
 - That is her problem.
 - She thinks her wretchedness lies in her physical sickness...
 - That is a part of it, that is a part that everyone can recognise...
 - but baptism shows that our wretchedness lies in our sinfulness...
 - In baptism, water is applied in Jesus' name to show us that the stain of sin is so deep that only Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, can wash it away through His suffering and death.
 - She does not see that she is an idolater, a Sabbath breaker, a murderer and a liar who deserves to burn in Hell...
 - The Bible says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
 - It doesn't matter to what degree you may have sinned—it is that you have sinned against God and that you are a sinner before Him.
 - That is what causes you to be undone...

- This woman needs the light of God's truth to shine into her heart so that she might see wherein her true wretchedness lies...
 - It is not merely the cancer in her body, it is the cancer of her soul...
 - Until she sees that,
 - she will never understand the treasures of God's salvation in Jesus Christ!
- And look at the young man...
 - He thinks he has a precious treasure in his work and he is daily filling himself with it...
 - But there he is, a dying rotting empty soul with a lot of gold!
 - What is his money compared to the treasures of eternal life that are promised to us in Jesus Christ at baptism?
 - If you are baptised and never believe the promise, you will never receive the thing that is promised.
 - You will die in your sin and will never inherit eternal life.
 - By unbelief, the sign given to help you will instead condemn you.

It is tragic that there are so many in our city who, though baptised, are yet in the darkness.

- They really have no interest in heaven as heaven is presented in God's word...
 - Oh yes, they want to be free of their sorrows and to enjoy abundance,
 - but they have no concept of heaven a place where they will at last be free from all their sin to live in perfect communion with God.
 - Instead of a place where we are conformed to live in harmony with the living God,
 - it is a place where He conforms everything else to live in harmony with us!
 - They do not see that their sin that separates them from God is their greatest problem,
 - so the heaven presented in the Bible is not the heaven that they pursue.
 - They do not suppose that there is such a place...
 - Nor do they see the value of such a place...
 - Nor do they believe that it would possible for them to obtain it.
- I tell you, the heaven of the Bible is not something they pursue as their treasure...
 - Think about it...

- You won't expend much energy to pursue a treasure unless you first believe:
 - that the treasure exists!
 - that the treasure is worthwhile!
 - that the treasure is obtainable for you!
- But the more you believe these things about the treasure...
 - The more you will pursue it.
 - John tells us that everyone who has the hope that we will be like Jesus when we see Him purifies himself even as Jesus is pure...
 - It is something you ardently pursue once you have seen it.
 - The cancerous woman would then have a hope...
 - And the young man would have a worthwhile hope...

Brothers and sisters,

- I have reason to believe that most of you who are here this morning have had the lights come on in your hearts...and I thank God for it.
 - I have reason to believe that for you, the greatest thing of all is to be fit to live in communion with God...
 - I have reason to believe that for the same reason Paul had reason to believe it about the Ephesians...
 - because you show that you have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for all His people...
 - When Paul heard that the Ephesians had these things (v. 15),
 - He gave thanks to God because it showed that God had made them recipients of His precious salvation.
 - But you remember that Paul also did something else when he heard about the Ephesians faith and love...
 - He earnestly prayed for them...
 - He prayed that they would grow in the true experiential knowledge of God.
 - He prayed that they would know God better.
 - He prayed for them because he knew that they had only just begun to know God.
 - He knew that in Christ, they would be led from one glory to another as they discovered the tremendous riches of God's grace.
- Oh brothers and sisters,

- We have only just begun to know our God...
 - Paul's prayer is an encouragement for us to press on—to pursue God as our treasure and our exceeding great reward!
- As the description of his prayer continues,
 - there are three things he prays the Ephesians will come to know better—to see with fuller understanding.
 - I told you last week that we would look at these three things in more detail this week...
 - They are things that you ought to earnestly desire for yourself—for your children—and for the people around you.

I. That you would know the hope of salvation

II. That you would know the value of salvation

III. That you would know the power exerted to obtain salvation

TRANS> Let's look at each of them, beginning with the first:

I. That you would know the hope of salvation

- This is described by Paul in the middle of the verse 18...
 - v. 18: “that you would know the hope of His calling.”

A. What does that mean? “the hope of His calling”?

1. First, what is a calling?
 - a. A calling is a path that leads to something...
 - If you are called to go to court, then you are on a path that leads to the courthouse...
 - If you are called to be a doctor, then you are on a path that will lead you to that career.
 - If you are a soldier and you are called to go to Afghanistan, then you are set on the path to Afghanistan.
 - You get the idea...
 - You are set in the way to do something or to obtain something...
 - b. The calling Paul refers to is God's calling (“His calling”).
 - In the context, he is using it to refer (as he so often does) to God's call of salvation.

- 1) The idea of God’s calling for salvation takes us back to Abraham...
 - a) God called Him just after He had divided the nations or families of the earth at Babel...
 - You will remember, these nations had a calling that was not from God—they called themselves together and said,
 - “Let us make a great name for ourselves lest we be scattered.”
 - They were like so many people today who are trying to ban together for security and to make a great life for themselves.
 - They were trying to make a heaven that would conform to them.
 - b) God gave Abraham a call that was just the opposite...
 - It was God’s call...to become God’s...
 - He called Abraham and his family to be His own people...
 - He said, “I will be your God, and you shall be my people.”
 - He promised that He would make Abraham’s name great and would be His exceeding great reward,
 - and through his seed, blessing would come to all the other nations of the earth (that had just been scattered).
 - c) It was a call to come to the LORD and to be conformed by the Lord to live with God...
 - A call to leave sin behind and to come and be God’s own.
 - How this would be accomplished was yet to be discovered—
 - but that it would be accomplished was God’s own promise.
 - This is what He called Abraham to.
- 2) The descendents of Abraham were named after his grandson, Israel, and so were the people who were called to be God’s own...
 - Step by step, the Lord led them to Himself...
 - He brought them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land...
 - And then at the appointed time, He sent Christ to redeem them...
 - And that was when He began to call the nations of the earth to come to Him also...
 - And all those who truly hear the call come—
 - I don’t mean those who hear with their ears,

- but those whose hearts are opened to receive the call...
- Those are the ones that God truly has called.

2. It is easy to tell if you are among the called of God...

- You are among the called of God if your eyes have been opened to see that you are vile and undone because you are out of harmony with God...
 - and if you have seen that you must leave what you are and come to Christ to be redeemed...
 - and that redemption involves setting you free from the condemnation of sin as well as from sin itself!
 - and if like Abraham, you have left all to follow the call of God...
 - If that is what you have done, then you are among the called.

B. The prayer of Paul is that you would know the hope of God's calling!

1. Hope means future certainty!

- It speaks of assurance.
- Paul is praying that you will have the certainty that because God has called you, you will get to the place He has called you to come.
 - That you will indeed be His people and that He will indeed be your God in the very fullest sense!
 - You will be like Him.
 - Your hope will be realised—it is not a false hope, but a true hope.

2. You see, there are many hopes that are far from certain...but you must not think heaven is one of them...

a. The people at Babel hoped that they would make a name for themselves and find security...

- But instead they found confusion—
 - The word Babel means confusion.

b. That's what happens when you pursue any calling other than "his calling"

1) In the end, it leads to confusion and disappointment.

- your hope is lost—it withers and perishes.
- All that you had set your heart on is lost unless you are in pursuit of His calling.

2) Of course I don't mean that you are not to pursue a certain career or marriage or whatever else in this world...

- But your pursuit of these is to be a branch or artery of your pursuit of God's call to be His own through Christ.
- In other words,
 - you take a job or you marry or you go on a journey for the sake of serving God and knowing God and not as an end in itself.
 - Everything is to be in pursuit of the hope of being perfectly conformed to God...
- That means that if you marry, you marry with a view to pleasing God in your marriage—not as a way of avoiding Him.
 - It means that you will seek to be husband or wife that honours God by the way you husband or wife...
 - You are in the marriage, no matter what, for Him.
 - Even if your spouse turns out to be a great disappointment and abandons you,
 - your purpose in it all will be to honour God and to know God...
 - And if that is your hope,
 - your hope will not fail because your hope is not in the marriage, but in honouring God through the marriage.

TRANS> The point is,

- Every calling that is not attached to God's call is a calling that is without hope...
3. But your Christian calling is one that is certain—it is a sure hope.
- a. You need to **know** the hope of your calling so that you will not grow weary and fall into despair in hard times.
 - b. Christian, the more you grow in the knowledge of God, the more certain your hope will become...
 - 1) It will be certain because it is grounded in God's promise and God cannot lie.
 - As you get to know His character better and better as you move along with Him,
 - your confidence will increase—you will become more and more sure of Him!
 - 2) You will see so many times when it looked like everything was lost—
 - as when Sarah became too old to conceive—

- or as when you thought sickness would ruin your life—or that sorry marriage partner—or those parents...
 - And you will see that it did not end life, but that God used it to give you greater life in Him...
 - and you will realise that in the end, even death itself cannot keep God from fulfilling His promise.
 - You will realise that your hope in God's call is certain and unshakable!
- c. And when you realise the hope of His calling,
- It will encourage you to abandon yourself all the more to His service...
 - You will know that you are not wasting your time to serve Him!
 - You will know that your labour, in the Lord, is not in vain!
 - And then as you abandon yourself all the more to His service, you will grow yet more confident in your hope...
 - and then, being confident, you will abandon yourself all the more to Him...
 - and then you will grow all the more confident... and so on and so on.

TRANS> That is what Paul is praying for the Ephesians when he prays that they would know the hope of their calling, and that is what you need too...

- Now is a great thing to have this hope—to know that your salvation is certain...
 - but that is not all...
- As I said in the introduction,
 - Before you pursue a treasure, you not only need to know that it is real...
 - you also need to know that it is precious...
 - You know that heaven is precious already if you are a believer—you need to know it even better...
- That brings us to our second heading...

II. That you would know the value of salvation

- This idea is expressed at the end of verse 18 where Paul informs the Ephesians that he prays that they would know:
 - “what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”

- A. Let me explain what this is talking about...
- In short, it's talking about heaven—the same as our hope...
 - that we would be fully God's and that He would be fully ours...
 - that we would be fully conformed to Him.
1. Once again, let me illustrate with Abraham what is meant by God's inheritance...
- a. When God first called Abraham,
- He gave him an ultimate promise together with a typological promise...
 - By a typological promise, I mean a promise of something temporal that represents the ultimate promise.
- 1) The ultimate promise was that He Himself would be Abraham's shield and reward—
- that, as we have seen, God would be His God and Abraham and his seed would be His people.
 - That is the promise that is not completely fulfilled until we get to heaven...
 - when every last sin is extricated from us and there is no more curse for us at all and we live continually before the glory of God.
 - That is the ultimate promise—the ultimate inheritance.
- 2) But there was also a typological promise that very helpfully illustrates the ultimate promise for us...
- And that was the promise that Abraham and His descendents would inherit the Promised Land...
 - and that the Lord would reveal Himself to them as their God and dwell among them in that land...
 - that He would make His laws known to them and command them to walk in His ways as His people...
 - and that He would be near to them to protect them and to help them and to conquer their enemies.
 - And this is what He did in a most conspicuous way...
 - Yet, not in a final way, for they continued to rebel as He told them all along that they would...
 - He kept on having to chasten them and at last to turn them over into their enemies' hands...
 - Yet, when they returned to Him,

- He continually showed that He was Lord by defeating nations that were much greater and much mightier than they were.
- b. He used all this in order to make Himself know to them,
- and in order to make known the fullness of his promise...
 - that the day would come when He would so work in them that they would not depart from Him and that He would remember their sins no more...
 - The day would come when they would meet all of His requirements perfectly and would dwell in perfect peace with Him in full and open communion with Him.
 - In other words, heaven would come!
2. And you can see in Ephesians that the glory of our inheritance is even more fully revealed to us now in Jesus Christ...
- a. In verses 3-14, Paul describes our inheritance... you have seen these things before...
- 1) That we should be holy and without blame!
- Now that Jesus has come, we know what that means!
 - Now we have seen someone who is holy and without blame!
 - We have seen what it is to be perfectly conformed to God!
 - It means that we would be those who are so full of love for the Father that would obey Him to the point of death on the cross if He called us to it...
 - It means that we would be those who are so full of love for one another that we would go to the cross for each other...
 - Truly a people of God! Holy and undefiled!
 - That is the inheritance He is bringing us to...

TRANS> And not only that...

- 2) It is also revealed to us now that we are predestined to adoption as sons in Jesus Christ—
- having our sins washed away by His redemptive act, and receiving the full inheritance of sons with Him in heaven!
 - That is an amazing inheritance—an inheritance with the Son of God in heaven!
 - A life forever in God's house, not as servants (which would be marvellous), but as sons! beholding His glory!

- b. And you will notice that Paul refers to this inheritance as our inheritance “in the saints” when he speaks of it in verse 18...
 - These words “in the saints” can best be understood as “among the saints.”
 - You must never think of your inheritance as a private thing...
 - It is a corporate thing.
 - The glory is enhanced in that we will share glory together with all our brothers and sisters who have loved Jesus Christ.
 - Together we will live in the house of God with that same love that Jesus has for us for each other!
 - Can you imagine living in a place where everybody loves God like Jesus does,
 - and where everybody loves each other like He loves us?

B. The prayer is that you will see how glorious this is!

1. Paul speaks of it as knowing the riches of the glory of our inheritance!
 - This is a high way of speaking!
 - Not just that we will know the glory of our inheritance—which seems as high as you can go...
 - but that we will know the *riches* of the glory of this inheritance that God has for us!
2. But you see, we are yet so dull about all this glory, aren't we?
 - a. How excited we ought to be about such a glorious inheritance!
 - But our view of it is dim and our hearts are dull.
 - b. Paul is praying that the Ephesians will gain a good fresh view of it!
 - 1) They will only do that as they come to know God better!
 - He is the glory of heaven, and we can only begin to know the riches of that glory as we come to know the glory of His person...
 - And we behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the One who reveals Him to us.
 - 2) The glory of God, as I have told you almost every week lately, is revealed in Christ—
 - a) LOOK AT HIM brothers and sisters!
 - Get tired of this world's charms and LOOK AT HIM!

- (i) He is the Lily of the Valley, He is the fairest of ten thousand, He is the bright and morning star,
 - He is God's love and God's peace and God's holiness and God's righteousness and God's majesty!
 - In His healing ministry and service you see the compassion of our God...
 - In His teaching you see how great his wisdom...
 - In His suffering on the cross, you see how great God's wrath and judgement are...
- (ii) Look at Him my brothers and sisters!
 - In Him you see the glory of heaven.
- b) You will say, "But how do we look at Him?"
 - (i) "How can we look at Him in this fallen world?"
 - And I will tell you how!
 - God has put you in this fallen world for now on purpose so that you can look at Him in a way that can only be done in a fallen world...
 - Paul is not praying that they will see the riches of the glory their inheritance when they get to heaven...
 - of course they will see it then...
 - But he is praying that they will see it now—in this fallen world...
 - You don't have very long here, so make the most of it.
 - (ii) And I tell, you can look at Him best when temptation comes knocking.
 - The world and the Devil can make temptation look so beautiful, so attractive, so appealing!
 - And in a fallen world, sometimes it really is attractive...
 - as when Jesus was enticed to avoid facing the curse of God—in itself, that was an attractive, heavenly thing—for there will be no curse in heaven.
 - But what did Jesus do when that temptation came?
 - He compared it to the joy of what God had promised Him—of His inheritance...

- He looked at the promise good and square and came away ready to God and do the Father's will, as hard as it was!
- So when you are called to do something for Christ that is hard in this fallen world...
 - (and there will be many things)...
 - that is when you have the opportunity to look at the beauty of Christ and to see how much better He is than giving way to that old temptation!
 - Look at what the temptation promises—then look at what God promises...
 - There is really no comparison, is there!
 - The time to see what God promises best is in the heat of the temptation!

(iii) Do you have a lot of temptations and difficulties in this world?

- Well then, all the more opportunity to meditate on your Lord and find Him to be the fairest of ten thousand!
 - And to consider what it will be like to be with Him forever without sin and without a veil to separate us from His beauty.
 - In this way, you will come to know more and more of the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints for you!

TRANS> So now we have seen that Paul prays not only that the Ephesian believers would know the certainty of God's salvation,

- but also that they would know the riches of the glory of His salvation...
- But if you are going to pursue hard after a treasure, there is yet one more thing you need to know...
 - You need to know that the treasure is something that you can attain...
 - that you have the strength and the resources to obtain it.

And so the third thing this morning is:

III. That you would know the power exerted by God to obtain salvation

- Paul refers to this in verse 19—
 - Actually, he keeps talking about it until the end of the chapter, but we are going to wait to look at verse 20-23 next time...

- In verse 19, he simply expresses what it is that He prays the Ephesians should know:
 - v. 19 “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power...”

A. Paul has in view here a terrific power!

1. He can't seem to find enough words to describe it...
 - “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us.”
 - It is the great power wrought for us to bring about our salvation.
2. I want you to consider what kind of power is required for that...
 - a. First, there is the power required for the first resurrection or the new birth.
 - 1) This is when God transforms you from your core—
 - when His Spirit takes away the stony heart and gives you a heart of flesh that responds to God.
 - This is when you are so radically changed that you turn from sin and self and come to Christ to be conformed to God.
 - 2) It is such a radical change that the Lord refers to us as life from the dead.
 - He says that we can no more pull off this change than a leopard can change his spots...
 - It is a radical, powerful work of God's grace that only the Spirit of God can accomplish.
 - And that is just to set us in the right direction!
 - b. Then there is the daily power required to enable us to serve God and overcome temptation from day to day.
 - 1) Peter says that we are, in this way, kept by the power of God through faith for salvation.
 - You need to understand that if God did not keep you,
 - even after you have been born again,
 - your corruption would swallow you up.
 - 2) When Paul speaks of the good things he did for the kingdom of God,
 - he says, “not I, but the grace of God that was in me.”
 - He makes it clear that it is not by our might or power, but by God's Spirit that we serve and go on for the Lord.

- c. Third, there is the power that will be required at last to raise us from the dead and to perfect us so that we no longer have sin.
 - For our salvation to be complete, we must have this marvellous work accomplished...
 - This corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.
 - It is obviously not something we can do by our own strength.
 - It is something God does.
 - Jesus Christ will call us forth from the grave and appoint all who have trusted in Him for this blessing,
 - And the Holy Spirit will powerfully bring this about in us.
- d. In addition to this, there is the conquering of all our enemies which is done by Jesus Christ...
 - We are told that He must reign until He has brought all of His enemies under His feet.
 - Heaven would not be heaven if God's enemies were there to molest us and tempt us...
 - But they will not be there...
 - Jesus by His powerful judgement will consign them to the Lake of Fire.
- e. And, there was also the power that God expended to deal with sin's penalty and release us from guilt...
 - This is something that none of us could even begin to accomplish...
 - For the penalty is measured by the greatness of the Lord against whom we sinned...
 - Therefore, the penalty was eternal and only the eternal Son of God was able to pay it by His sufferings on the cross.

TRANS> No wonder Paul speaks of this power in such terms as:

- the exceeding greatness of His power toward us!
 - The power that is required to save one sinner is immense.
- B. You only gain an appreciation for this power as you go on in the Christian life—and as you get to know God better.
1. And once again, the best way to discover it is in the daily grind of this fallen world.

- As you go on with the Lord, you begin to see just how deep the sin problem in you really goes...
 - You see how ready you are to turn against your brother, to become irritated and bitter...
 - You see how you are already to push in front of others and to consider yourself more important than they are.
 - You see the covetousness that wells up in your soul and that does not see Jesus as the fairest of ten thousand when the least little temptation comes knocking at your door.
 - You see how reluctant you are to sacrifice for your Lord...
 - The hard thoughts you have toward Him when you are called to suffer.
 - The lack of perseverance you have in caring for others—even for your own children...
 - The reluctance to discipline them rooted in a reluctance to discipline yourself.

2. And when you see all this as you walk with your Lord,

- you begin to get an idea of the power that had to be unfurled to take away your stony heart!
 - You realise how very dead you were and what a miracle the new birth is that brought you to God...
 - You realise it more now—as you go on with the Lord—than you did when you were first converted.
 - That is what Paul is praying for—that you will see how great God’s saving power expended for you really is!

C. Now of course it is very very helpful to begin to see the greatness of God’s power...

1. First, because it helps you give more glory to God.

- You glorify God when you see just how great He is...and you see it in the times of temptation and struggle...
 - In our sin and weakness, we question if He is even able to prepare a table in the wilderness—
 - you know—that’s what it says that Israel did...
 - We doubt that He is even able to care for our basic needs...
 - and then He proves Himself again and again...
 - He delivers us from the helpless place and then we glorify Him!

2. Secondly, because it helps us in our service to God to see His power...

- a. You will remember what Israel did when they were called to go and take the Promised Land the first time...
 - They looked at *themselves* and they saw that they were not up to the job.
 - and they were right—*they* were not up to the job...
 - But they failed to take into account the power of God and the promise of God...
 - So they did not obey Him.
 - Instead of going forward, they made excuses...
 - Their service was hindered by their unbelief.

- b. How often we fail to do what God has called us to do because we think it is too hard!
 - I tell you, there is nothing that He has called you to do that He is not able to give you the grace to perform!
 - If you but knew His power, you would not hesitate to venture forth for Him...
 - to go to that brother that you need to go to...
 - to deal with that sin you keep trying to ignore...
 - to witness to that neighbour that you fear...

- 3. Thirdly, it is helpful to know His power because it gives us confidence that God is fully able to complete the work that He has begun in us...
 - That we who believe will be made holy and without blame before God—
 - That sin will be completely rooted out of us and that we will be given a new body that will be completely incorruptible.
 - That we will be conformed to Him.
 - And believing this will make us excited to pursue it...
 - To know that we will be like Him when we see Him will help us to purify ourselves even as He is pure...
 - We will get to work now...
 - We will tap into the resources of God's power and of the Spirit He has given us to live for Him.

We will look more at this great power that God works for our salvation next week...

- But for now, let us add it to the list of things that Paul's prayer teaches us to seek in our quest to know God better...

Conclusion

My brothers and sisters, you who know Jesus, you know all these things—

- You know the hope of God's calling...
- You know the glory of your inheritance...
- You know the power that is directed toward us...

You know all this, but you need to know it better!

- You need God's Spirit to enlighten you so that you will see just how great all this is.
- You need the Lord to reveal to you the glory He has prepared for you...

If you could only see how wonderful His salvation is, you would be a different person!

- Just think of Abraham!
 - He started out as man who left all to follow the Lord because the Lord called him...
 - but how he vacillated when famine came, when he felt threatened by Pharaoh, when Sarah did not conceive...
 - But all this was only that at last he might have such confidence in God's promise that he was prepared to offer Isaac on the altar to God...
 - believing that the Lord was able to raise him up!
- That is the kind of change Paul is praying for in these Ephesian believers...
 - That is the kind of change we all need—a growing change over our whole life...
 - That is the kind of change that will enable us to have an even greater delight in our God for all eternity!
 - You are not here in this fallen world for nothing...
 - It is here that you learn of the glory of the God who saves you...
 - of His faithfulness...compared to our failings
 - of His riches... compared to our poverty
 - of His power... in our weakness