

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 9

The Fullness Of Him Who Fills All In All

June 30th, 2013

Ephesians 1:19-23

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:19-23. Last Sunday Pastor Evan dealt with the entirety of the Apostle Paul's prayer of thanksgiving and I had originally planned to deal with that in two parts – the first part being the general overview and application, which we heard about last week and the second part being a deeper look at the theological assumptions that allowed Paul to pray the way he did. That's what I want to drill deeper on this morning. Let me read to you from God's holy, inspired and inerrant word. In verse 18 Paul has been praying that they may know more and understand more fully the hope that is theirs in Christ and in verse 19 now:

¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:19-23. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

As Pastor Evan explained last week Paul's prayer has three parts to it: an opening thanksgiving, a middle set of petitions and a closing foundation. The first two are based upon the last. Paul can pray the way he prays because he believes what he believes. That's why Pastor Evan ended his message by challenging us to KNOW MORE so that we can PRAY BETTER. Theology is not to be divorced from prayer and worship. When we know more we can worship more authentically

and pray more powerfully. That's where this message comes in. I want to show you what Paul believed that allowed him to pray the way he did. There are three theological assumptions that undergird Paul's persistence and power in prayer. Let me show them to you.

Paul's Theological Foundation:

First of all, the Apostle Paul believed that:

1. The power of God was on the move

Look again at verse 19

¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of **his power toward us** who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰**that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead** (ESV)

Paul is saying that the same power of God that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is not being stored in a trophy case somewhere – it has not been put into storage – NO! That same power is now moving TOWARD US, it is moving IN US who believe. The power of God is on the move, Paul says. First it raised Jesus Christ from the dead – but this was not the end it was just the beginning of a fresh creative move of God. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:

²⁰But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, **the first fruits** of those who have died. (1 Corinthians 15:20. NRSV)

First fruits do two things in the Bible. They make the whole crop holy to the Lord and they promise that more is coming. That Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as first fruits means that his death and resurrection makes the whole batch of God's chosen people HOLY and it promises that there is more YET TO COME. More power, more re-creation, this is just the start! The re-creative power of God exploded into the world inside the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea – it entered death and spoke a word of LIFE and it raised Jesus Christ from the dead and now – that power is coming for us, Paul says. It is at work in us. That power in stage 2 of its operation is going to raise sinners from the pit, its going to set slaves and addicts free, it is going to breathe life into lifeless dust and its going to make a people those who were no people. Stage 2 of that

power is going to make a new creation among the children of men. That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:

¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God (2 Corinthians 5:17-18a. ESV)

The power of God, his RE-CREATING power is on the move! Stage 1 was raising Christ from the dead, stage 2 is in making dead men and women live again through the power of the new birth and the indwelling Spirit and stage 3 is the renewal of all things, things in heaven and on the earth; we see that in Romans 8:

¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Romans 8:19-22. ESV)

The creation itself longs to be re-born, it groans as a woman in childbirth, it agonizes and convulses WAITING for the revealing of the sons of God. Creation cannot be reborn until there are new children of God to rule over it. This is why you have to read the whole Bible my friends. What is the relationship between humanity and creation? We find it way back in Genesis 1:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Genesis 1:26. ESV)

God created humanity to represent his likeness and to exercise dominion over all creation. In our fallen state we cannot do either of those things and so all creation groans in eager longing, yearning for the day when she will be set free from futility and decay. And that day, Paul knows, is coming. Because IF the power of God has raised Christ from the dead and IF that power is now at work in us transforming us by one degree of glory to the next into the same image as Jesus Christ THEN SURELY God will complete his purpose in the renewal of all things. That was the trajectory presented in the very first sermon preached in the Christian church:

¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive **until the time for restoring all the things** about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (Acts 3:19-21. ESV)

In the very first sermon preached in the Christian church the logic went like this: God raised Jesus from the dead. That was the opening salvo in God's new creative work. That same power is bringing about life and health to those dead and dying and it will do so until that power brings about the long awaited restoration of ALL THINGS. That has been the hope of Scripture ever since Genesis 3! The hope that one day, sin would be overcome, humanity set free from bondage to bear the image of God in all its beauty and perfection before and over all creation, that God would provide comfort for Zion and make the wilderness like the garden of Eden and the desert like the garden of the Lord – Isaiah 51:3. That's where this is going and Paul knows it and knowing it changes the way he prays for his people.

Secondly, Paul knows that:

2. Jesus Christ has begun to reign

Look at the second half of verse 20; the power that raised Christ from the dead also:

seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. (ESV)

We talk a lot about the meaning of the resurrection but we talk very little about the meaning of Christ's session. The early church talked about it all the time. We tend to think of them as more or less the same thing as though sitting at the right hand of God is just what people do when they've been raised from the dead but its more than where you sit when you are no longer dead! That Jesus Christ is SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD is the most significant fact in all the universe and it is DISTINCT in meaning from the equally significant fact of the resurrection.

The New Testament scholar M.J. Harris puts it this way: "The resurrection proclaims – HE LIVES – and that for ever; the exaltation proclaims – He reigns – and that for ever."¹ Paul understood that if Jesus is SEATED at the right hand of God it means two things – it means that his work is done and it means he is in charge. There is nothing left to do to ensure the success of God's plan of cosmic redemption – all the work has been done and Jesus is in charge as head

¹ M.J. Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 85.

over all things for the church – we’ll get to that bit in a minute. Jesus is DONE and he has DOMINION. He has begun to reign.

Now Paul is not blowing fantasies at us here, he is not unaware of the fact that it sometimes doesn’t look like Jesus is in charge. Bad things are going down, evil is on the loose, bodies are failing, babies are dying, good people are hurting and bad people are prospering. It doesn’t look like Jesus is finished his work and it doesn’t look like Jesus is in charge. How come Paul sees things that we don’t always see? The answer is perspective. I would imagine that if you were a foot soldier in World War 2 about 2 months after D-Day facing the desperate German soldiers as they dug in their heels all across France and Holland and Belgium it would not feel to you like the war was over. But it was. For all intents and purposes W.W. 2 was over as soon as the tanks secured a landing on Normandy beach. D-Day was the end of the war, every military historian will tell you that. June 6th 1944 was effectively the end of the Nazis; it was the end of Hitler and his reign of terror over Europe and yet V-Day – the end of the war in Europe didn’t actually happen for another 10 months. Almost a year of hard slugging had to be done on the ground by our grandfathers before Hitler took his own life in April of 1945. There were 10 months between D-Day and V-Day when blood was spilled, lives were lost and a price was paid even though the war was over. We live in times such as those. The cross of Jesus Christ and the empty tomb – that was D-Day. That was when everything that had to be done WAS DONE. ITS OVER. Death is defeated, the grave has been plundered, sin has lost its power and dominion and men and women are waking up and being born again all over the world every day because of THAT DAY – OUR D-DAY. And yet. There is still some bleeding to be done. God could drop the nuclear bomb on the enemy at any time and complete his purpose but he delays. The delay is not POWERLESSNESS – it is PATIENCE. God is patient and desires none to perish and so he has delayed the final coup de grace so that many more can cross over from death to life.

That’s where we live and Paul KNEW IT. He knew that Jesus Christ had won the victory. He understood what that meant. Listen, if you were a general on either side of World War 2 you KNEW the war was over in June of 1944. All of Hitler’s generals knew the war was over when the Allies took the beaches of Normandy. Did the foot soldiers know it? Probably not. But those in the know KNEW. The Apostle Paul is in the know. He understands the significance of the empty tomb and he wants us to grow in our understanding of the empty tomb. He wants us to grow up and to begin to think like generals. Its over and knowing it changes everything.

Thirdly, Paul knew that:

3. In Christ, by Christ and under Christ humanity is being restored to rule

Look at verse 22:

²²And **he put all things under his feet** and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:19-23. ESV)

In verse 22 Paul is quoting from Psalm 8. Let me show you. Speaking of mankind the Psalmist says:

⁶ You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under his feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,

whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (Psalm 8:6-8. ESV)

Psalm 8 is a reflection upon God's original design and his ultimate intention to have humanity exercise dominion over all creation. In the first Adam we had and lost our exalted position over all creation, in the last Adam Jesus Christ we shall have it again. In Adam humanity fell, in Jesus humanity RISES AGAIN! Jesus did for us what we could never do and he paid for what we did do in his body on the cross. Christ the Son of God kept the whole law for his people and suffered the punishment their sins deserved, our propitiation – that is the heart of the Christian Gospel; and here, Paul is fleshing that out to its ultimate implication. What was lost in Adam – dominion over all creation – is restored in Christ. Do you understand this? Adam whose name means human was created by God to rule over all the cosmos. He started in the garden and he never got beyond it because of sin. The rule of humankind over creation died in the cradle because of sin. But now in Jesus Christ – the NEW ADAM, the NEW HUMANITY – the GOD MAN Jesus Christ has taken his seat – his probation is finished, his work is done and God is moving all things under his feet – now here comes the big news – FOR THE CHURCH. Do you see that? This is being done FOR US – the ESV has TO THE CHURCH or UNTO THE BENEFIT of the church either is fine. The point that all translations agree on is that this power of God that is moving in and through Christ is ultimately FOR OUR BENEFIT! I know that sounds too good

to be true and so you may think I'm making that up so let me quote the New Testament scholar Peter O'Brian who says: "His supremacy over the cosmos is seen to be for the benefit of his people."² The power of God is doing in and through Jesus what we could never do for ourselves. He is bringing all creation back under the dominion of humanity. But not all humanity – the church. The body of Christ over whom Christ is head and Lord.

The last little phrase in this chapter is very hard to translate into English. God is putting all things under the feet of Christ who is:

head over all things to the church, ²³which is his body, **the fullness of him who fills all in all**. (Ephesians 1:19-23. ESV)

That last bit is tough to make sense of in English I grant you. Here is what it means. God has displayed the FULLNESS of his glory in Jesus Christ, we know that, now Paul says that fullness keeps moving and the fullness of Christ is likewise filling the church and this same fullness of Christ will fill all things. Paul is saying something very similar to what he said back in verse 20. The re-creative power of God exploded into the world in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It moved from there to the regeneration of the church, God's chosen people. It moves further from there towards the renewal of all things in heaven and on earth. Here Paul is saying, the glory of God was fully displayed in Jesus Christ but it does not stop there. The glory of Jesus Christ will FILL THE CHURCH and from there and I think the text suggests THROUGH THE CHURCH, will in fact fill all things in heaven and on the earth.

Can you see the picture this text is painting? The glory of God is on the move. It was fully on display in the person of Jesus Christ and it will be fully displayed in the church. The church will not always look poor and downtrodden. She will be glorious. She will look like Jesus and she will take his glory and the fullness of it to the end of the cosmos and all will be full of the glory of God as in the face of Jesus Christ.

Are you seeing this? If you are in JESUS CHRIST you will be GLORIOUS. As you look at him and he looks at you, you will be changed by ONE DEGREE OF GLORY TO THE NEXT and one day you will see him and you will BE LIKE HIM for you will see him as he is. And if you

² Peter O'Brian, *Ephesians*, 152.

are in Christ and if you are under the Lordship of Christ then everything in the universe will be put under you through Christ. You will reign with Christ over all things. Are you seeing this? It should never cease to amaze us that wrapped up in the glory of God is found the good of God's people. When God is glorified in Christ – when Jesus is raised up and everything is brought back into orbit around his sole, benevolent headship – we as God's children abundantly and eternally benefit. God's glory is for our good always.

Paul knew that and knowing it changed everything. Pastor Evan told you last week how it changed his prayer life and I want to end our time this morning by suggesting some other things that ought to change when you know what Paul knew. These are BIG TRUTHS. Taking these verses into your mind is like bringing a 20 pound cinder block inside your head – EVERYTHING NEEDS TO MOVE OR BE CRUSHED. These are big rock truths and I want to suggest 5 ways that everything ought to be different once you know what Paul knew and see what Paul saw.

Knowing What Paul Knew Ought To Make Us:

1. Effusive in thanksgiving

Its hard to imagine how anything other than praise and thanksgiving could come out of the mouth of someone who really understood these truths. How could a person complain about lower back pain or interpersonal struggles at work when they see what Paul saw? One day you will RULE OVER ALL CREATION in a glorified body and you will give commands to angels and they will follow your instructions to the letter. Seeing what Paul saw and knowing what Paul knew ought to make you EFFUSIVE and OVERFLOWING in near CONSTANT thanksgiving to God.

Secondly, knowing what Paul knows ought to make us:

2. Diligent in study

Let me suggest two reasons for that. I heard a few weeks ago on the radio that depression and anxiety are quickly becoming the number one health concern among American young people. I was at a meeting last week here in Orillia where some city health officials told us that depression

will be the #1 diagnosed ailment here in Canada by 2020. The cost to the health care system is likely to be past finding out. People in North America are depressed and anxious and they don't even know why but if you know God and you understand what he is doing then you will sleep really well and you will be content in all circumstances.

The second reason we need to be diligent in study is because the Bible actually says that it is our contemplation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus that is the medium of our change and transformation. You've heard me quote this verse multiple times in this sermon already:

¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18. NASB)

Paul goes on to say in 2 Corinthians:

⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6. ESV)

It is SEEING – BEHOLDING the glory of God in the face of Jesus that is the context of our transformation. Study so as to change. Study so as to shine. This is how we participate in the plan of God for the filling of all things with the glory of Jesus Christ. Salvation is a one handed work but sanctification is a two handed work and our part is looking at Jesus and telling other people to look at Jesus and God does the rest. I know that sounds simple but that's how it works.

Thirdly, knowing what Paul knows ought to make us:

3. Generous in giving

When we understand what has been given to us it ought to change the value of the material things we now possess. It ought to be very easy to live with a little less now to increase our share in the things to come. It ought to make sense to us; it ought to feel like a very good deal. I give now what I cannot keep to gain then what I cannot lose? Sign me up! That's the best deal in the universe! People who get this are generous givers.

Fourthly, knowing what Paul knows ought to make us:

4. Patient in suffering

When you know that victory is assured you can swallow a few setbacks and you can endure with patience the suffering that is required because of the long-suffering of God. First of all, you can do it because you know it is only temporary. Whatever you are dealing with now it will not go with you into eternity. Back pain is not insignificant but it is not permanent. Poverty is not easy but it too is not permanent. It will pass away at the renewal of all things. We can also be patient in suffering because we know that our suffering serves the salvation of other people. People who are always praying: “O Lord come and rescue me from my troubles” are really saying “O Lord, I think enough people have become Christians and I’m ready for you to come and make everything right even if it means billions of people will go to hell.” God is more patient than that and we must, by his grace, and knowing what we know be so as well.

Fifthly and lastly, knowing what Paul knows ought to make us:

5. Bold in proclamation

Later in this letter Paul will ask the Ephesians for prayer – he has prayed for them and now he wants prayer in return and do you know what he asks for? Do you know what his prayer request is? In Ephesians 6 he says pray for me:

that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:19-20. ESV)

He asks for boldness in proclamation. I want to leave you with a challenge. Every week in the prayer register we get numerous requests for prayer for loved ones to be saved – I put some of those in there, so I am not condemning that; I’m just refining that. I want to challenge you to ask for something slightly different. I want to challenge you to ask for prayer that YOU might be bold in proclamation. That YOU might have words given to you to speak and that you might declare those words BOLDLY as you ought to do. You ought to do that because of what Christ HAS DONE for you. Christ has secured the victory for you. What he has done can never be taken from you if you are in Christ through faith. God is bringing all things under Christ for his

own glory and FOR YOUR GOOD. All of that is set in stone, it is decreed and accomplished, it is a finished FACT. Therefore, what do you have to lose? You literally can't lose anything. Knowing these things changes everything for you and if you declare these things boldly as you ought to then by God's grace they can change everything for the people you love and live among.

Christ is risen, Christ is seated, Christ has begun to reign and God is bringing all things under his feet for the church. He is the fullness of God and he is filling all things with his glory. This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.