

Ephesians 1:15-21 – Open the Eyes of my Heart Lord!

But wait, there's more!

When I was growing up there was this ad on TV for Demtel stainless steel knives. Tim Shaw would say, 'This amazing collection of knives is priced at \$99 but forget it. You can get it today for just \$49.95. But wait there's more. We'll throw in a cheese knife, a cleaver. And these knives will last forever. Look they cut through leather, wood (just in case you don't have a saw) frozen vegetables, and then a tomato!

But wait, there's more. If you call now, you'll get these steak knives. But there's still more. We'll even throw in a butcher's set, absolutely free!' It just keeps getting better and better. Well today's passage from Ephesians is a bit like that. Paul has already told believers that God chose them before creation to be holy. He has forgiven them and adopted them through Jesus' blood. They are part of his amazing plan to unite all things in Christ. And today's passage is saying, 'but wait, there's still more!'

Today we'll see that on top of all these things, Paul is praying and thanking God for them constantly. He's praying that they know the great hope for the future, and the power of Christ even now. It's just blessing upon blessing. And it's not a buy one get one free deal. It's all given free of charge, by the Spirit of God. So let's pray as we see God's incredible riches and power towards us today...

1. Paul can't stop praying for the Ephesians

First of all Paul thanks God for their faith in Christ and love for God's people:

***Ephesians 1:15-16** For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*

Paul is saying that since he heard of God's work in their lives, he has not stopped giving thanks for them and praying for them. It's amazing to think that the great Apostle of Jesus is praying constantly for this church he has only heard about.

Now at this point it's important to note that this letter might not have originally been written to the Ephesians. In the footnote, it says some of the earliest copies don't say 'To God's holy people *in Ephesus*' in the introduction. They just say, 'to God's holy people, the faithful in Christ Jesus.'

If you read the book of Acts, it says that Paul met some believers in Ephesus and helped to grow the church there. So either Paul wrote to them in the short time before he met them, or the letter was originally written to someone else. And the custom at the time was to copy letters from the Apostle and send them to other churches nearby. But whoever it was first written to, Paul is committed to them.

It's amazing to me that the Apostle committed so much time and energy to praying for this church. They are beloved and chosen by God, and so they are precious to God's Apostle. And the same is true for the church today. If you believe in Jesus, you are extremely valuable to God. He chose you, he gave his Son for you. He is uniting all things in heaven and on earth, including you, under the headship of Christ.

Through this, Paul shows us the pattern for earthly pastors and shepherds too. The two most important things your ministers do for you are teach you the Word of God, and pray for you. If you are a Growth Group, leader that's your job too.

Child of God, know this: your pastors are praying for you. We think and talk about you and pray for you every week. We have limited time, so sometimes we haven't done this perfectly. But if you have a specific need or just want to get in touch, give us a call or send us an email. We'd be more than happy to catch up with you.

And in the end, this letter is from Paul the Apostle. He is sent on behalf of Jesus your great Shepherd. Even if human shepherds fail, Jesus will never fail you. The Bible says that Jesus himself prays, intercedes, for you who believe. He speaks to the Father on your behalf. You are always on his heart and mind. Your name is graven in his wounded hands. For he has given his life to save you. Thank God!

2. Strength for today, bright hope for tomorrow

The classic hymn, 'Great is Your Faithfulness' has the lines, 'Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.' Paul starts by praying that they would know the bright hope for tomorrow they have in Christ:

***Ephesians 1:17-18** I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,*

The hope to which we have been called is the riches of God's glorious inheritance. But what is this rich inheritance? Is it the streets paved with gold? Is it eternal pleasures and a great banquet? Is it the tree of life that we can eat from and live forever? Well, these are all pictures the Bible uses for God's kingdom. But the substance of the inheritance is much greater than that.

We should always read the Bible in context. And notice that the first thing he prays is the Spirit's wisdom and revelation that they may **know God better**. He is our ultimate inheritance. And he is the treasure that we can't see with our natural eyes. We need the Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts so we can see him for all his glory.

See it's so easy to be caught up with earthly treasures, and physical blessings, when God himself is our greatest treasure. When God promised Abraham that he would bless him and give him a great land and descendants like the stars in the sky, he made him wait. Why did he do that?

Well a little while later, he appeared to Abraham and said, 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.'" But Abraham said, 'What can you give me since I remain childless... so a servant in my household will be my heir.' (Genesis 15:1-2) He was still thinking of an earthly inheritance. So God made him wait even longer. And after Isaac was finally, miraculously born, God asked him to sacrifice him.

Get him to sacrifice his only heir? See God was getting Abraham to see that he could even raise Isaac from the dead. He was showing him that he has an eternal, heavenly inheritance. And that inheritance was God himself, the one who has the power to raise us from the dead. Every earthly pleasure comes from him.

The most beautiful sunset or mountain landscape; the most joyful relationship; the best sex; the tastiest banquet are just shadows of the One from whom all life and love and joy find their source and fulfilment. And one day God himself will be with us and wipe every tear from our eyes.

Friends, if you are listening to this and don't feel like you know God, or are close to God, turn to him today. Jesus says, 'behold I stand at the door and knock. If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.' Jesus is waiting to start a relationship with you. So talk to him today.

And that brings us back to our hymn. Some of those old hymns have the best theology. Because just before we sing about bright hope for tomorrow, we sing of fellowship with God: 'Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, **thine own dear presence** to cheer and to guide...' As Jesus prays: 'Now this is eternal life; that they **know you** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.' (John 17:3)

Our great life's journey is to find in his presence, our joy and rich inheritance. I pray that God would open all our eyes to know God better, for he is our life. So that's the bright hope for tomorrow. But what about the strength for today?

Paul says that God's great power in Christian believers, is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead!! I don't know about you, but I feel pretty weak sometimes. Sometimes I feel like I just don't have the energy to serve God, to love others, to fight my sin. It's easy to lose motivation when you feel powerless. But look at what Paul prays: that believers might know the hope to which God has called us...

***Ephesians 1:19** and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,*

The same power that he worked in Christ, he is now working in us, no matter how weak or powerless we feel. If God can raise a dead man to life, then he can give new life to my weak lifeless body. Praise God! His power is incomparably greater than my weakness.

As one commentator put it, 'The most important application of this verse is that we should know that the devil, death, sin, hell, damnation and the world have all been overcome as far as we are concerned and are unable to harm us, because we know that God is protecting, guarding and defending us.'

So I pray for the Spirit's work in our lives, so we know God's power, raising us from death to life, from weakness to Christ's strength, from apathy to zeal for Christ, from selfishness to love by the power of Christ. Because Christ is victorious over the grave, nothing can stop God from working his powerful purpose in our lives, to make us more like Jesus! Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow. Blessings all mine and 10,000 beside!

3. Christ's great power for the church!

Here Paul goes into more detail about just how much power and authority Christ has been given. Christ has been raised to God's right hand,

Ephesians 1:21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

He has authority over kings, prime ministers and presidents, over every being, every angel, every demon, even the archangels, every cosmic force. Not even the infinity stones are more powerful than Jesus.

And that's not just a far-off cosmic reality. We have access to that great power, because we who believe are part of Him. Christ is the head, and we are his body. Just as a husband and wife become one flesh, or a child is adopted into their father's family, so we are united with Christ.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The one who fills the whole universe and the highest heavens, also fills us, his church. The one who is head of all rule and authority is also the head of the church. We listen to him, obey him, follow him, love him and are nourished and controlled by him. Without him, we can do nothing.

That's why it's so important that when we gather together, we listen to his Word. The church who does not listen and obey Jesus' Word does not have Him as their head, and so are not a true church. But the main emphasis here is on how precious the church is. Not only is Jesus the transcendent, spiritual ruler of the whole universe. But he is also the one who took on flesh, so that he could be our head, and we could be his precious body.

There are actually no imperatives in this passage. In other words, no commands to obey, or instructions to follow. Paul is simply thanking God for their faith and love. So we could apply this by saying, keep trusting Jesus and loving one another. But the main application I think is one of spiritual understanding.

The great reformer, John Calvin wrote,

'The gifts of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation are not endowments of nature. ... Until we have been taught by the Spirit, everything we know is folly and ignorance. Until the Spirit of God makes it clear to us by an inner revelation, the knowledge of our divine election is beyond the understanding of our minds.'

May God's Spirit show you how blessed you really are. Don't trust your natural eyes that say, I'm not free. I can't go more than 5km from my house. I can't see my friends and family. I'm poor. May the eyes of your heart be enlightened, to see your bright hope for tomorrow; the riches of God's glorious inheritance. How you will be with him and enjoy him forever, in perfect relationship with God and all His people.

May you know his strength for today, his incomparably great power towards you, raising you to life as he raised Christ from the dead. And how precious you are that Christ the GOAT, the greatest of all time, is also your head, and you are part of his body. May we walk in confidence and say: 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (Romans 8:31).