

CALLED TO A HOPE

- A. Introduction: In Eph 1:16-23 Paul recorded a prayer he prayed for Christians and we are examining what he prayed. I'm encouraging everyone to begin to pray this prayer for themselves on a daily basis.
1. Paul prayed that God would give insight and revelation in three specific areas. We're looking at the first thing Paul asked for, that Christians would know the hope of His (God's) calling. v18
 - a. The 20th Century translation reads: The hope given by God's call. God has called (or invited) each of us into His plan and purpose. Knowledge of this plan gives us hope or expectation of coming good.
 - b. God's plan and purpose is to have a family of sons and daughters with whom He can live in loving relationship forever on earth, the home He made for His family. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His family. Eph 1:4,5; Isa 45:18; Gen 2:8-25; 3:8,9; Rev 21:3
 1. The plan was taken off track when Adam, the head of the human race and the first steward of the earth, chose independence from God through sin. In doing so he took the race resident in him into the pigpen of sin, corruption and death.
 2. In consequence of his disobedience human nature was fundamentally altered and mankind and the earth became subject to corruption and death. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12,19; Rom 8:20; etc.
 - c. However, God did not abandon His original plan and purpose. He set out to recover what He lost, both His family and the home He made for us, through redemption and salvation. His goal is to transform sinners into holy, righteous sons and daughters (like Jesus in character and power--Rom 8:29,30) and restore the earth to a fit forever home for Himself and His family.
 1. Redemption provides deliverance from sin and all its consequences and effects for man and the earth. Salvation transformations and restores man and earth to what God always intended.
 2. Redemption and salvation are accomplished through the power of the Cross of Christ and the transforming power of the life in God, eternal life.
 2. This information doesn't seem practical when we're dealing with the struggles of life. But when you learn to assess this present life in terms of the over all plan of God it's much easier to deal with the immediate problems we all face.
 - a. Because we don't look at life in terms of the big picture, when we are confronted with life's many challenges, we struggle with thoughts such as: Why is this happening? Is God mad at me? He must not love me. He's punishing me for my sin; etc.
 - b. This is the big picture: Because you're part of God's eternal plan you have a past that precedes the moment of your conception and you have a future that extends beyond the day you die.
 1. God knew you and chose you before you existed to become His son or daughter through faith in Christ. When God made Adam He made a son and a race of sons in Adam. God knows a perfect you. His first comment about you was: Very good! Gen 1:31; Jer 1:5; Heb 7:9; etc.
 - A. The first thing God did to Adam and man in Adam after He created them was bless them (Gen 1:28). This word means, among other things, to make prosperous and happy.
 - B. God's plan from the beginning was and is that His family would flourish with joyful contentment in the home He made for us. Because of sin, corruption and death this has not yet been realized.
 2. Jesus came to seek and save what God lost in the fall. He made it clear that men and women lost in the pigpen of sin, corruption and death have value to God. Luke 19:10; Luke 15:1-32
 - c. If all you know of your past are the failures and disappointments since you were born and if your future looks hopeless because of the circumstances of life, you'll never have victory in this life. But if you know the overall plan of God and how you fit into it, it will not only give you hope for the future, it will energize your faith to deal more effectively with life's trials now.

B. In the last lesson we looked at Paul, a man who viewed himself as a conqueror. We noted that in the

context of the many challenges he faced, Paul made reference to God's love for us (him). He could face anything as a conqueror because he knew God loved him. Rom 8:35-39

1. However, the fact that God loves us is no help to many Christians because they misunderstand some things about His love. They struggle with believing that God loves them because they use the wrong information to determine whether or not He loves them.

a. Some assess God's love based on how they feel in the moment. But feelings are not a consistently reliable source of information about anything. They are subject to change based on many factors completely unrelated to God's love. We often "feel" things are so that aren't true at all.

b. Some of us connect love to achievement: God loves me if I'm good but not if I'm bad. But God's love isn't dependent on us. It comes out of something in Him—it's His nature to love (I John 4:8). His love is unconditional, meaning there's no condition you must meet to have or to lose His love.

c. Some try to assess God's love based on the circumstances of life: If life is good I know He loves me. If not, I doubt He love for me. But good and bad circumstances aren't demonstrations of God's greater or lesser love.

1. God is not behind or responsible for conditions in this earth. This earth and life in this world are not as God created or intended. His plan was to bless men. But the actions of the head of the human race and earth's first steward, Adam, greatly altered life on this planet.

2. Human beings are born into a fallen world with a nature contrary to God and bodies vulnerable to sickness, old age and death. The earth experiences killer storms, earthquakes, famine. This world is populated with sinful people with unrenowned minds who make choices that affect the people around them. All these factors make life in this world quite challenging.

d. Why is there sickness, poverty, war, accidents? Because this is a fallen world. That doesn't mean there's no help or protection for us. But this world is a difficult and cruel place to live.

1. We must understand that God's ultimate goal is not to "fix up" the earth. His goal is complete transformation. In connection with the Second Coming of Jesus, God is going to remove the root problem: sin and the ensuing corruption and death that has infused His creation.

2. The world will be cleansed and made new and become a fit forever home for God and His family of redeemed sons and daughters. Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:10-13; etc.

e. God's number one goal right now is not to fix up the pigpen but to draw men's hearts back to Him through Jesus. The Lord is gathering His family. And He is so great that He can use conditions in the pigpen and cause them to serve this purpose. Luke 15:17

2. Paul experienced trial after trial but never questioned God's love for him because recognized that the ultimate demonstration and proof of God's love for him was and is the Cross of Christ.

a. God expressed His love for us—while we were rebellious sinners wallowing in the pigpen—by sending Jesus to die for our sin. Jesus willingly laid down His life for us, bearing our sins and punishment so we could become sons and daughters of God.

1. I John 4:9,10--In this was the love of God clearly shown toward us, by his sending his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sin. (Montgomery)

2. I John 3:16--This is how we know what real love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. (NIV)

3. Rom 5:8--But God proves his love for us by the fact that Christ died for us when we were still sinners. (Goodspeed)

b. John 3:16--For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He [even] gave up His only-begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish — come to destruction, be lost — but have eternal (everlasting) life (Amp).

1. God prized the world because, even in our fallen condition, men and women are loved by and have value to God. But that value cannot be realized unless they come back to God through faith in Christ.

2. Jesus is the propitiation or satisfaction to Divine Justice for our sins. He is the Door who opens the way back to Father's house. Your circumstances are not God's way of punishing you for sin (it's not enough). Jesus took the punishment due you on Himself.
3. The word "lost" in Luke 19:10 is the same word as perish in John 3:16. It means to destroy utterly with the idea, not of extinction, but ruin. There is no greater ruin than to be lost to our created purpose (sonship and conformity to Christ) because we refuse God's invitation to leave the pigpen and join His family.
3. Paul realized that if God, motivated by love, went to those lengths to help him when he was a rebel against God, there's nothing He wouldn't do for him now. His testimony was: If God is for me (and the Cross proves He is) who or what can be against me? Rom 8:31
 - a. That's why, in the context of life's trials and tribulations, Paul referenced God's love three times. God's love has made me a conqueror through Christ. Rom 8:37
 - b. Paul knew and believed that nothing could separate him from God who in love devised this plan and died for him to carry it out. Paul's confidence was based, not on feelings or sight, but on fact.
 1. Rom 8:32--He did not spare His own Son, but surrendered him for us all; and with this gift how can he fail to lavish upon us all that he has to give. (NEB)
 2. If God helped me on my worst day (any one before I was saved) with my greatest need (salvation from my sin) why would He not help me now?
4. Paul also understood that God's plan and purpose is not a promise to stop all trouble right now. Paul recognized the parameters of life in a sin cursed earth. He penned many of the verses we've used about the curse of corruption and death in this world. Rom 5:12; Rom 8:30; etc.
 - a. Remember, Paul was personally taught the gospel he preached by Jesus who said that we'd have tribulation in this world (Gal 1:11,12; John 16:33). Paul was aware that suffering is a part of life, not because it's the will of God, but because that's life in a fallen world.
 1. But Paul knew that in comparison to eternity the hardships of life are nothing. He knew that what is ahead far outweighs life's challenges. II Cor 4:17,18
 2. Paul knew that God is able to bring genuine good out of bad and cause things to serve His eternal purposes. And that made him confident and fearless in the face of trouble. Rom 8:28
 3. Paul recognized that because God is for me nothing can be against me because everything is temporary and subject to change by His power either in this life or the life to come. Rom 8:18
 - b. Paul understood his inheritance as a son of God (Eph 1:18). Sons have purpose, place, provision, power and authority. We'll deal with our inheritance in later lessons.
 - c. But the point for now is that because Paul had revelation concerning his inheritance he knew he was authorized to utilize the power of God and change certain circumstances. He also knew he some circumstances could be avoided. Others, he had to go through by the grace of God.
 1. Paul faced challenges, troubles and trials throughout most of his life as a Christian until he was finally executed for his faith.
 2. Yet in the Book of Acts and his many epistles there is no hint of him wrestling with: Why did this happen? Is God upset with me? He must not love me anymore. What is trying to say to me or teach me? What door did I leave open to Satan? Maybe I have a generational curse.
5. Instead we see Paul dealing with life's hardships in wisdom, confidence, power and victory.
 - a. Acts 28:1-6--When he was bitten by a poisonous snake Paul shook it off with no harm done because he knew he was authorized to do so as a son of God (Luke 10:19; Mark 16:17,18).
 1. Even though he put Christians to death (Acts 7:58; 26:10,11), he wasn't swayed when those who witnessed the event speculated he was being punished because he was a murder (v4).
 2. Paul looked at his past in terms of the big picture. He was chosen by God for His family in eternity past. God knew a perfect Paul in Adam. Even though he went into the pigpen of sin, God sought him out and paid the price for sin to wipe it out and transform him into a holy, righteous son.

b. II Cor 12:7-9--Paul was harassed by a messenger of Satan (a being) who tried to stop Paul's preaching, stirring up trouble wherever the apostle went. When Paul asked the Lord to remove this "thorn" he was asking for something God has not promised in this life, namely to stop the devil's activities.

1. Instead, the Lord gave Paul wisdom and direction: My grace is more than enough to enable you to deal with what comes your way at the hands of this being. Paul got the message. He was able to boldly proclaim: God's strength in me makes me strong. I can do this through Christ who strengthens me.

2. Notice, that Paul's first instinct in these circumstances was to ask his Father for help. There was no wondering: Why is God allowing this, doesn't he love me, etc. Paul's response was: Father, help me deal with this.

c. Paul was finally executed for his faith in Christ. Shortly before he died he wrote a final letter to his son in the faith, Timothy. We get insight into Paul's view of reality at this point in his life as well as the hope which God's call inspired in him.

1. II Tim 3:11,12--He reminded Timothy of the persecutions he had endured (including being stoned and left for dead) and how God had delivered him from them all, reiterating that persecutions are part of life in a sin cursed earth.

2. II Tim 4:6-8--He referred to his impending death as a departure because he knew he had a future beyond this life that included restoration and compensation for all he had endured.

3. II Tim 4:16-18--He had several hearings before receiving the death sentence. Even though all deserted him, the Lord did not. Paul had an awareness of the Lord's presence and God strengthened him to deal with his circumstances. Paul knew God would deliver him from his impending death. v18--He will bring me safe to His heavenly Kingdom (Weymouth).

C. Conclusion: We have a lot more to say. But consider one thought as we close. Because we don't understand God's plan and purpose (the big picture) we deal with the present in fear rather than faith.

1. But if you know the overall plan of God and how you fit into it, it will not only give you hope for the future, it will energize your faith to deal more effectively with life's trials now.

a. Bad things are going to happen in this world. That's just the way it is right now. One of the big fears we all face is: What if things don't turn out like I want them to? But if you understand that there's more to life than just this life you can wipe away that fear.

b. No matter what you're looking at, it's not bigger than God. It is temporary and subject to change by His power either in this life or the life to come. He will get you through until He gets you out. He's going to bring maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible as He brings genuine good out of really bad stuff.

2. You've been called to a hope. Your past is filled with promise and potential and your future includes the realization of both. Therefore, you can deal with whatever comes your way by God's grace.