

## FUTURE HOPE GIVES PRESENT STRENGTH

- A. Introduction: Eph 1:16-23 records a prayer Paul prayed for Christians. We're going to examine what Paul prayed in some detail. I encourage each of you to pray this prayer for yourself daily.
1. Paul prayed that God would give these people (Christians living in the city of Ephesus) revelation and insight in three specific areas as they grew to know Him more and more.
    - a. Paul prayed that they would know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward them.
    - b. Paul knew that if believers learn to walk in these truths they'll have victory in every area of life.
  2. Last week we began our study with the first thing Paul prayed: That they would know the hope of His calling or, as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century translation reads: The hope given by God's call. Let's briefly review.
    - a. Hope pertains to the future. It is confident expectation of coming good. God has called believers to something which, if we know it, will inspire hope or expectation of good in us.
    - b. To appreciate the future God has for you, you must understand some things about your past and God's purpose. In eternity past, God purposed to have a family and He chose us to be part of it.
      1. Eph 1:4,5--Chosen means choose out and carries the idea of kindness, favor and love. Motivated by love, God predestined or decided beforehand to make us sons and daughters.
      2. He chose us as His own in Christ before the world began (Weymouth) to become his holy blameless children living within his constant care (Phillips). He destined us in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ (RSV).
    - c. When God made Adam, He made a son and a race of sins in Adam (Luke 3:38; Heb 7:9). When Adam and man in Adam went into the pigpen of sin, corruption and death, God lost His family.
      1. Jesus came to seek and save God's lost family and restore it to what He always intended it to be (Luke 19:10). Even in our lost and fallen condition we have value to God.
        - A. In the context of Heaven's response to lost men Jesus told a parable about a lost sheep and a lost coin. Neither ceased to be valuable while lost. Because they were valuable, the owners of both searched diligently until they found them and then rejoiced. Luke 15:1-10
- B. Next Jesus talked about a lost son who was fully restored to his position as a son because His father loved him. Luke 15:11-32
- d. God knows a perfect you, the you He created in Adam before sin was ever an issue. In His first comment about you, God declared you to be very good. Gen 1:31
    1. Although men and women are lost in the pigpen of sin, they are created and loved by God and have the potential to be transformed in to holy, righteous sons and daughters through salvation. Even in our fallen condition we still bear the image of God. James 3:9; Gen 9:6
    2. Jesus went to the Cross to die for our sins so they can be removed and we can be fully restored to our created purpose—sonship and relationship with God. Salvation is supernatural transformation and restoration by the power of God.
  3. When you understand the overall plan of God and your part in it, it's a source of tremendous hope. God has called or invited all men to come back to Him through faith in Christ.
    - a. You have a past that precedes this life and a future that will outlast this life. Your past is filled with promise and potential and your future holds the full realization of that promise and potential.
    - b. In this lesson we're going to look further at what Paul said about the hope to which we are called.
- B. The epistle to the Romans was written to believers in the city of Rome. Paul had never been to the city but was planning to go. Romans laid the groundwork for his visit and is his longest letter and his most systematic presentation of the gospel.
1. Rom 8:29,30--Paul told the Romans what he said to the Ephesians: God knew us and decided before He formed the earth that we should become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ.
    - a. He further revealed that Jesus is the pattern for the family. God wants sons and daughters who are like Jesus in character and power, holiness and love.

1. Salvation is about God reclaiming what He lost to sin and restoring us to what He always intended: Sons and daughters who are free from all trace of sin, corruption and death, and fully glorifying to God in every part of our being.
2. To accomplish His purpose, God calls us, justifies us (makes us as though we never sinned through the power of the Cross) and glorifies us (transforms every part of our being with eternal life). (Lessons for another day)
- b. Paul used the same word here as he did in Eph 1:18. The word call means to invite to a banquet. You may have been a surprise or a mistake to your parents, but God knew you and chose you before He made the earth. He wants you in His family. He has called or invited you to it.
  1. Paul wanted Christians to know that they are part of something bigger than this life. This perspective helps us in the midst of life's struggles.
  2. If you know your past is filled with promise and potential and your future includes realization of both, you'll deal more effectively with whatever comes your way in this present life.
2. This world is not as it should be or as God intended because of sin. Adam's sin unleashed a curse of corruption and death in both the human race and the earth. Gen 3:17-19; Rom 5:12; Rom 8:20; etc.
  - a. Life in a sin cursed earth is filled with challenges, struggles and frustration. Because people don't understand what is going on, they sometimes struggle with: How could a loving God let life be so difficult? How can He allow so much suffering? We could do entire series on this subject, but consider several thoughts:
    1. God gave mankind free will. With free will comes not only the choices but the consequences of those choices. We must daily deal with choices and their consequences going all the way back to Adam. I'm not saying your sin caused your trouble. I'm saying you live in a world that has been badly damaged by sin and its effects making life difficult for everyone.
    2. When Jesus comes again He will restore the earth to a fit forever home for God and His family. However, His primary purpose right now is not to fix up the pigpen but to draw men's hearts back to Him so He can begin the process of conforming us to the image of Christ.
  - b. We get insight into this from the parable of the lost (prodigal) son. The son made a freewill choice that landed him in the pigpen. Note, the prodigal's father didn't fix up the pigpen for his son. Rather, he wanted his son to come home.
    1. Although the father didn't orchestrate the conditions in the pigpen, they played into his purpose. The harsh realities of life in a pigsty separated from his father woke the son up and brought his back home. Luke 15:17
    2. God is not behind the hardships of life in this fallen world. However He uses the realities of life in the pigpen to further His purposes as gather His lost family.
      - A. The Bible is filled with examples of people who made poor, even sinful choices, choices of which God did not approve, in which He had no hand. Yet He was able to use those choices and cause them to serve His purposes. Joseph's experience is an example.
      - B. Rom 8:28--Paul began this passage in Romans with the Bible's concluding statement about Joseph's circumstances: What was meant for evil God worked for good. Gen 50:20
    3. God's promise to those who are called or invited (same word as Eph 1:18 and Rom 8:30) into His purpose (sonship) is that He is so great He can cause everything to work for ultimate good. This is a tremendous promise to people who live in a sin damaged world.
  - c. Current preaching often gives the false impression that God's number one goal is to make your present life happy and prosperous. Of course God wants you to have as good a life as possible because He loves you. But there is no such thing as a problem free life in this life. John 16:33
    1. We must understand the parameters of life in a sin cursed earth. Some things you can change by the power of God. Some you can avoid through the wisdom of God. Some you have to go through and deal with. Knowing which is which comes out of understanding your inheritance in Christ, one of the things Paul prayed for believers. (topics for later lessons)

2. We overcome in life through faith (I John 5:4). But so much of what we call faith is nothing more than fear masquerading as faith. Example: Just don't say you're sick and you won't die of cancer. That's nothing more than keeping a rabbit's foot in your pocket for luck.
  - A. Strong faith comes out of understanding that there is more to life than just this life. It removes the fear that comes from: What if this doesn't work out like I want it to.
  - B. Old Testament saints did great exploits for God. But all of them had the mindset: We are only passing through this life as it is. Heb 11:33; v13-16
3. Paul knew he was part of and had a purpose and a place in God's eternal plan. This knowledge gave him faith, confidence and courage in the face of life's hardships.
  - a. Rom 8:37--Paul saw himself as a conqueror in life's trials. In v35-39 he gave a comprehensive list of physical, emotional and spiritual issues that arise in life. (See NLT)
    1. Notice that Paul refers to God's love three times in this passage stating that nothing can separate us from the love of God (v35,37,39). Remember, as Paul revealed many details about God's plan to have a family, he said the motive behind it was love.
    2. This is an important detail because when troubles come our way the first thought that comes to us is often: If God loves me, why is this happening?
      - A. To rightly answer this question we have to learn to look higher than the present moment, beyond the present trouble to the past and the future.
      - B. You must recognize that there is more to life than just this life. Nothing can separate you from God's plan and purpose for you—to have you as His son or daughter, fully transformed and living with Him in a perfect world, this earth made new.
  - b. v31,32--Notice also that Paul knew if God is for you nothing can be against you. Perhaps you're thinking: Paul, would you like to see the list of what has come against me? What does he mean?
    1. All kinds of things come against us in a fallen world, but all of it is temporary and subject to change by the power of God either in this life or the life to come.
    2. None of it is bigger than God. He'll get us through until He gets us out, as He causes it all to serve His purposes of maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many as possible.
  - c. Knowledge of the big picture (God's overall plan) is what gave Paul this hope. That's the context in which he made the statement: If God be for us nothing can be against us.
    1. v29,30--Paul stated the plan and outlined how God accomplishes it. Then he says: If God is for us who can be against us (v31)? He answers his question by citing proof that God is with us to help us in this life.
    2. v32--What's the proof? God's love met your greatest need which is salvation from you sins. If He helped you on your worst day (any day before you were saved ) with your greatest need (salvation from your sins) why would He not help you now that you've come back home?
4. Paul saw himself as a conqueror in life's hardships because he knew nothing could separate him from God who in love devised this wonderful plan for him. That knowledge not only gave him hope for the future and confidence in the present, it enabled Paul to deal with his past.
  - a. If you don't know your past with God began before you were born, before you committed your first sin, your past since you were born can haunt you and undermine your confidence in God's love and care for you.
  - b. Paul recognized that his past, which included persecuting Christians, couldn't stop his future from coming to pass. And that information helped him deal with the present. Note what else he wrote as he lined out God's plan to the Roman Christians.
    1. Rom 8:33,34--Who dares accuse us when God has chosen us for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? Will Christ Jesus? No, for he is the one who died for us and was raised to life for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, (praying) for us. (NLT)
    2. Phil 3:13--Paul wrote of forgetting what was behind him and moving forward. He was able to

do that because he understood there is more to life than just this life. Paul knew God chose him in Christ before the world began, well aware that he would be an ardent persecutor of Christians, imprisoning and killing them.

A. But God planned to transform Paul into His holy, blameless son. God apprehended (the Greek means: eagerly seize, possess) Paul for that purpose, to make him His son and conform him to the image of Christ. v12

B. Paul's desire was to see that purpose realized in his life. v13--But I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. (ASV)

C. v14--Paul said he pressed on to reach the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, sonship and conformity to Christ. There's a lot in his statement. But consider one point.

1. The highest calling on our lives is sonship and conformity to the image of Christ.

Paul's greatest desire was to become more and more Christ-like, to know Him more fully and show Him more accurately. He knew that would happen. Phil 1:6

2. God is much more interested in us developing Christ-like character and conduct than He is where we work or what kind of car we drive. As we show Jesus to the world around us, men and women are drawn out of the pigpen back to Father's house.

5. Rom 8:38--Note that Paul didn't instantly walk in this kind of confidence: For I have come through a process of persuasion to a settled conclusion (Wuest) that nothing can separate me from God and His loving plan and purpose for me. We too can go through a process of persuasion as we feed on God's Word about the connection between our past, future and present.

C. Conclusion: One more thought as we close. Paul knew there is more to life than just this life. He knew he was part of something bigger than himself, something that would outlast this life and that gave him hope.

1. He knew he had a past that preceded the moment of his conception. He knew was chosen and invited to become God's son through faith in Christ. This gave him a future that goes beyond the day he died.

a. He recognized that in comparison to what is ahead, the troubles of life are nothing. As a result he had victory in the present and was able to call his many difficulties momentary and light. Rom 8:18; II Cor 4:17,18

b. Paul spoke of rejoicing in hope in the face of trouble (Rom 12:12; II Cor 6:10). The Greek word rejoice (CHAIRO) means to cheer and encourage yourself with the reasons you have hope.

2. Knowing the hope to which you are called and encouraging yourself with it can help you keep this life in perspective and help you prioritize what is most important.

a. If you see life's troubles as momentary and working for good they won't weigh you down. In the life to come, I'm not going to care that today was a terrible day.

b. Ask God to help you see more clearly the hope to which you are called and be strengthened by that knowledge. More next week!!