

\*\*\*\*\*

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of His great might. Ephesians 1:15-19 (ESV)

\*\*\*\*\*

A mother once told her son, in one of their conversations about faith and life, “When I get to heaven and look around I hope to see you there”. At the back of this conversation was a view that she had that people may indeed ‘fall away from the faith’ and could be in the danger of the ‘fires of hell’ (as Jesus also speaks about in the passage on the ‘Temptations to Sin’: Matthew 18:7-9).

We could look at what this mother said from two perspectives, one perhaps of a ‘law perspective’: maybe wanting with a fear of the future and to motivate her son from a sense of ‘fear’, that is, “Don’t lose your faith or you may go to hell”. Or, we could look at this from a ‘Gospel perspective’, that is, “Remember Jesus and what He has done for you. Remember His glory and love for you”.

In our Scripture this day we hear the Apostle Paul praying for the congregation at Ephesus (and others as well) “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him*”.

There is so much packed into this phrase. There is a reference to the Triune God (Father, Son, Spirit). We are to ‘know’ who the God is whom we worship.

There is also a reference that our ‘knowledge’ of God needs to be ‘bigger than our selves’. When Paul spoke of ‘the Father of glory’, this phrase ‘of glory’ point to the God who had been active through the people of old (‘glory’ – Hebrew *shekinah*, that is, the presence of God). God is ‘bigger than us’, and this is Good News. He is the God of power and love. Paul prays for a fuller revelation and a fuller knowledge of God. For the Christian, growth in knowledge *and* in grace is essential.

You see, the righteousness that qualifies us for heaven; the righteousness that presents us perfect and blameless before God is never in us, but is always in Christ (cf. Eph.2:8-9). And this is ‘Good News’.

The reality is that many who have ‘confirmed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ’ have not always remained close to Him. It is true that God never closes Himself off from us, but we can close ourselves off from Him. We may wander from the path of faith. But it is never too late to return to God. No one is ever ‘too bad’ to turn to Him. This does not mean we have ‘permission to stray’, but what it does mean is that if we do, we can always come back to Jesus.

And so Paul wants us to know the riches of God's grace. He prays (Eph.1:18) that *"the eyes of your hearts [may be] enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints."*

There is an interesting mixed metaphor here: the eyes of your heart. Paul uses a great expression when he speaks of *the eyes of your heart* (*heart* is more literal than *understanding*). The word '*heart*' in Scripture signifies the very core and centre of life, where the intelligence has its post of observation, where the stores of experience are laid up, and the thoughts have their fountain. God wants us to 'see' in our 'heart' *the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints*.

Several commentators believe that Paul also spoke of God's inheritance in His people back in Ephesians 1:11. But that is certainly his idea here, with Paul probably drawing his idea from Deuteronomy 32:8-9 : *When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance.*

'Why be a Christian?' some may ask today. We may respond, 'Why not?' ...

There are many things we may 'treasure' in this life. Some may 'treasure' their looks, others their 'sporting ability'. Some may 'treasure' the love of another person', others may 'treasure' their work and abilities. Some may 'treasure' their animals or pets; others may 'treasure' getting out and 'enjoying God's creation'. But the thing about all these is that they can be suddenly taken away from us. But there is one 'treasure' that can never be taken away from us by others, and that is our faith in the Lord Jesus. And our faith is that our Lord Jesus has given us the 'treasure' of the kingdom of heaven – the 'treasure' of God's grace and love. This is our 'glorious inheritance'.

And so we may live life in (Eph.1:19) *the immeasurable greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of His great might.*

There are actually four words here referring to this 'power': there is *dynamis* (Greek word from which we get 'dynamic' and 'dynamite', meaning "power"), *energōs* (Greek word from which we get 'energy', meaning 'working'), and 'mighty strength' (in Greek, *kratos* and *ischus*). And all these point to the importance of knowing God's 'power'. One Christian writer has said, *"I don't believe that people understand what is really fully theirs in Christ. If they did, they would spend more time, much more time, and much more effort cultivating their relationship with Jesus Christ Himself than they do."*

We have a 'power', but a 'power' for what? If we go to 2 Corinthians 12:9 we hear the Apostle Paul say our 'power is made perfect in weakness'. Sometimes as Christians we may say to ourselves "Well I don't know if I'm adequate, I don't know if I can triumph over sin. I don't know if I can be victorious over temptation. I don't know if I can be effective in ministry. I don't know if I can be useful to the Lord. I mean, I mean I don't know if I can..." But there is so much power available to you.

The Apostle Paul pulls up every word he can think of to stack up the comprehension of power. And if that's not enough he adds at the beginning of verse 19, "Thus surpassing greatness of His power." In Colossians 3:11 Paul said, "Christ is all and in all." Christ is everything. And this truth affirms the utter sufficiency of Jesus Christ for every issue in the life. Mighty power is ours. And to illustrate the level of that power, He says (Eph.1:20) "It is the power brought about in Christ when God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." It's resurrection and ascension power. God gives us real life in Jesus...

But there is one more important thing here... It is important to note, however, Paul is not praying that we would *receive* all of these things; rather he is praying that we would know *that which we have already received*. Paul is praying that believers would know who they already are, who and all that they already have received – in and through Christ Jesus our God and Saviour.

These people already knew the Lord, as was indicated by their faith in him; but this is a prayer for the increase of that knowledge (2 Peter 3:18; Philippians 3:10). This knowledge of Christ and its increase can only come by and through the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of wisdom and revelation (John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13).

In order to have any sense of spiritual growth in our lives, we need a knowledge of Christ that comes to us in a personal way. This is not the factual knowledge that we can obtain by taking a course in the life of Christ, but the knowledge that comes to us through the work of God's Spirit in our lives. This is the difference between *knowing about*" and *knowing*" by experience. I knew *about* being a father long before I ever had children. In a sense I had some knowledge of parenting. It was not until my own children were born, however, that I knew parenting in a personal way. And this is not hungering after some 'spiritual-emotional experience'...

These thoughts take us back to one of the central themes in all of scripture namely: God's people live under the power of a divine promise that no matter how long the road may seem or how dark the night may appear to be, God's victory over all unrighteousness is certain.

We live under the promise of the resurrection, the power of God within the community of faith and the affirmation that "all things" have been put under the feet of Christ who is, "head over all things to the church."

The New Testament vision of a church that is healthy and whole, a church where people may discover the fullness of Christ, is a church that is self consciously bound together as the Body of Christ. This is a church where Christ is the head - not in name only - but is evidently the head of the church.

This is not something that comes about because we hang a mission statement in the halls of the church building or open with prayer at church board meeting. This is Christ as head of the church which is evidenced by our openness to God, to each other and to the cries of a broken world.

Outside of Christ we are weak; inside Christ we have a new 'strength' and 'power'. Did you know that the Holy Spirit is in you? There isn't any human being or any human experience that can offer to you the gifts that Christ has. That's why all of us are here.

And, as the Apostle Paul says... *Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. Amen.*