

EPHESIANS – “CLAIMING YOUR INHERITANCE”

Ephesians 1:15-23

May 22, 2022

Today we are continuing on this series on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, which was written while Paul was in a Roman prison around AD 60. The city of Ephesus was located on the Aegean Sea in what is now Turkey and was a large prosperous city with a population around 500,000. This city was well known because the pagan temple of the Greek goddess Diana (or Artemis) was located here, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World at that time. Paul spent almost three years here, making such great inroads for Christ that as the Greeks became believers, the influence of the worship of Diana so dramatically declined that the silversmiths demonstrated, causing a riot because they were losing business, with the end result that Paul was forced to leave Ephesus, but the church he established continued to thrive in his absence. What is particularly interesting about this letter is that unlike Paul’s other letter, this letter doesn’t deal with any problems or issues within the church; instead, it is a letter of encouragement, and that is why we are studying this letter.

We all need encouragement in our walk of faith because it isn’t any easier to follow Christ in our current secular culture, that pulls us away from God, than it was back in Paul’s day. The current Canadian church may not be what it should be or could be, but it is God’s only plan for bringing unbelievers to Christ and transforming our society. The church is God’s new humanity untied in Christ, the new temple where God dwells by the Holy Spirit, called to reveal the power and nature of God to those around us by bringing Heaven down to this earth. What is needed today to advance the Gospel is not a new way to present the Gospel message, but believers who come to understand who they are IN CHRIST – how blessed, how privileged, how spiritually wealthy and empowered they are to change the atmosphere around them. So, as we study this letter; hopefully, we will become more committed and passionate about our faith and become the church God has called us to be here in Sombra and wherever God takes us!

Last week we looked at **verses 1-14** – as Paul praised God for all the amazing things, He has done for us by blessing us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing IN CHRIST JESUS, which is our new identity. Once we become a believer, we no longer identify with this world but with Christ, as foreigners and sojourners passing through on our way to our real home. And this can happen because we have been chosen by God since the beginning of time to be holy and blameless in His sight, adopted into God’s family; thereby, gaining a great inheritance as sons and daughters with these spiritual blessings that are available to

every child of God: “***IN HIM we have REDEPTION through his blood, the FORGIVENESS OF SINS, in accordance with the riches of God’s GRACE that he lavished on us***” (Ephesians 1:7-8). And the best part is found in verses 13-14, “***And you also were included IN CHRIST when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked IN HIM with a SEAL, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of his glory.***” Paul reminds us here that once we come to believe, there should never-ever-ever be any doubt that we are saved and heading for eternity, because we have been sealed – permanently stamped and tattooed with God’s mark of ownership – the Holy Spirit – who is our guarantee that one day Christ will return for those of us who are sealed – our hope!

Last week hopefully you got a very clear picture of what Christ has done for you, how He paid for your salvation with His precious blood and redeemed you to live a holy and blameless life. So, regardless of whatever may happen, what tragedy you may be experiencing you can say with confidence: **I AM LOVED – I AM CHOSEN – I AM ADOPTED – I AM A SON/DAUGHTER OF THE MOST HIGH GOD!**

- When I remember that I belong to God – I will serve differently.
- When I remember that I’m loved – I will love differently.
- When I remember who I am IN CHRIST – I will show kindness, mercy, and grace to others.
- When I remember that I am blessed beyond measure – I will live my life to bless others.
- When I remember Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for me – I will worship and praise my Heavenly Father in all circumstances, because “*It is well with my soul.*”

Paul had heard about the love and faith of the Ephesian church while in prison in Rome, which causes Paul to lift up this prayer of thanksgiving recorded for us in **Ephesians 1:15-23**. In the same way, my hope is that when people hear about us here at SCCC, they will also hear about our love for others and our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And that’s why Paul begins his prayer with thanksgiving, “***For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers***” (Ephesians 1:15-16). As your pastor I also give thanks for you and brag about your faithfulness to everyone I meet!

We need to notice I this prayer that Paul did not pray for the Ephesians to be delivered from any and all difficulties; instead, Paul prayed for those things that would help carry the believers through circumstances and difficulties all the way to victory. We have no promises from God that we will never have difficulty in this life, but we do have His promises that He will always be with us, and He will help and strengthen us. There is much more to salvation than knowing where you'll spend eternity, and that's why we must grow and mature in the faith so that we can know Him better as we bring heaven down to earth as His representatives. As believers we have been called to change the atmosphere wherever we go, because we have an obligation and responsibility to share with others what God has given to us and revealed to us through His Word, as we host His presence!

I need to give a caution before we continue on – even though we have been given all of God's promises through His Word, there is a real danger in missing out on receiving His blessings and favour. So, we need to take a lesson from history, from the pages of the Old Testament about God's chosen people, the Israelites – and that is the reason why God gave us the Old Testament, as a warning not to make the same mistakes. In the book of Exodus, we are told that God miraculously rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, gave them His laws and commandments at Mt Sinai, and then set them on course to enter the Promised Land, but they never entered their rest; instead, they ended up wandering the wilderness for forty years until that entire generation that left Egypt had died; thereby, missing out on their rest and receiving God's blessings and favour.

Likewise, today – when a person becomes a believer, they become one of God's chosen people, and His promises found throughout the Bible are also for them. The writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews makes this very plain in **Hebrews 4:1-2**, "*Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest (HIS PEACE) still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have the good news proclaimed to us, just as they (ISRAEL) did; but the message they heard was of no value to them* (missing out on God's blessing and favour), *because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.*" The danger for us is that we can become ONLY hearers of the word and NOT doers of the word. We can sit under the teaching of someone and never change, never be transformed by the Good News of the Gospel, and miss out, like Israel did, on all that God has promised us. There is always an obligation to take what we have received from God and do something with it; thereby, bringing Him glory, and we do that most effectively by bringing a bit of heaven down to this earth, as we live out the faith and change the atmosphere wherever we go.

So that we don't miss out on that rest that God has for us – Paul asks two things for us in his prayer. The first thing Paul asks for us is found in **verse 17**, "*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.*"

Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would open their eyes to the truth of God's Word, giving them spiritual wisdom and divine insight (that the light bulb would come on) so that they would know God and His purposes more fully. What Paul is saying here is that we need to be serious students of the Bible! We need to be hungry for gaining knowledge and understanding and seek God with all of our being so that we would know Him better and serve Him more obediently.

Whenever we are in that tough spot, we don't always need God to come to the rescue, but give us divine revelation, to understand His truth in how to deal with our current situation, so whenever we're in that tough spot again we would know what to do. We need to be like sponges continuously soaking up the Word of God, never satisfied where we are!

The second thing that Paul prayed for is found in **verse 18-19** – "*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the HOPE to which he had called you, the RICHES of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great POWER for us who believe.*" Once again these are things that we already have available to us as believers for our good purposes and His kingdom plan. So we need to keep in mind that God is always working things out for us to succeed! God is always up to something good for us! There is hope for your future, which is something we need to know, especially when we are going through those difficulties that always come along. Paul knew how valuable spiritual strength is and understood that when we are strong spiritually and when we know who we are IN CHRIST, it carries us through those circumstantial difficulties all the way to victory. Although our first impulse would be to pray for no pain or trouble, it would be far better to pray for spiritual strength to endure whatever comes and do it with a good attitude. We have no promise from God that we will never have difficulty in this life, but we do have His promises that He will always be with us and will strengthen us to go through it!

What is the eyes of the heart? God has given us two sets of eyes – our first set of eyes are our visible eyes of sight – to see the physical world around us. However, that is only one way of seeing, what Paul is referring to here is another way of seeing, which takes another set of eyes, "*the eyes of the heart,*" the eyes within. In order to see the spiritual world around us, we need to use the invisible eyes created by God for us to see invisible things that will enlighten us to the glorious inheritance that we already have. The Greek word used for "*enlightened*" is

“*phōtizō*” – which is used in the Bible to identify God’s “*light*” or “*illumination*. ” This Greek word is the bases of our English word “*photo*. ” So, whenever the Holy Spirit enlightens the eyes of our heart – it results in a picture that gets imprinted on our mind, and on our imagination, much like a photograph. This photograph gives us a glimpse or picture of the unseen spiritual world around us, giving us insight into the things of heaven, which helps us to focus on our divine purpose. Every believer needs this spiritual photograph to be imprinted on their mind for three purposes according to Paul:

1. **“That you may know the HOPE to which he has called you” (verse 18)** – our spiritual eyes help us to see our divine purpose as a believer, so that we would have the assurance and confidence to live by faith not by sight. When the Spirit of wisdom and revelation are being conveyed to us, we begin to see the bigger picture, the great story of God that is being told that He is redeeming all that was lost back to Himself. And the Spirit of wisdom and revelation helps us to also see His goodness towards all of mankind – that He wants none to be lost, but all come to salvation before Christ’s return, calling us to have a burden for the lost. So, our message to the unbelieving world is about God’s goodness – He is not the cause of wars or natural disasters, or our health issues and problems, or the untimely death of our loved ones. God is good all of the time, as we read **Psalm 34:8**, “*Taste and see that the LORD is good.*”
2. **“That you may know...the RICHES of his glorious inheritance in his holy people”** (verse 18) – God’s photograph on our mind helps us to know God has great riches that are His to give out, and the beautiful thing about God is that He is generous towards His kids. So, when the Spirit of wisdom and revelation are being conveyed to us, we get a glimpse into the great things God has for us – not only the eternal inheritance that is waiting for us in heaven, but also the gifts that we can have right now, here on this earth. So, you are richer than you think, having an unlimited supply of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – the fruit of the Spirit is there for the taking!
3. **“That you may know...his incomparably great POWER for us who believe”** (verse 19) – God’s photograph on our mind helps us to know God is powerful, and His power is towards us, not against us, and God’s desire is to empower His people to live a victorious life. The power of God is the Holy Spirit which we receive as a gift when we come to believe; however, we have to keep asking Him to fill us to overflowing, so that we can do what Jesus did and even greater things. Paul’s prayer for us here is that we would

know the immeasurable and unlimited power that is available to us who believe. Regardless how great our need may be, there's power available to match that need. No matter how weak we may feel or how great the temptation that comes against us, there's power available to overcome any obstacle or situation we may face – to make the impossible, possible. Power is available to you right now! You don't need to live in weakness and defeat!

Then, to make sure we grasp what is possible in our walk of faith – Paul continues on in **verses 19-21** to show us how great that power is, “*That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 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,*” reminding us that the power available to us who believe is the very same power that God used to raise Christ from the dead – resurrection power. And then Paul continues to the end of this chapter to remind us that God raised Christ to a place of divine favour and power in the heavenly realms, seating Him at the right hand of God. And in His current position of favour at God's right hand, Jesus has been raised above every other power, on earth and in heaven for all of eternity. So, Christ's resurrection resulted in everything being placed under His authority, including the church. Which means everything on earth and everything in heaven is under Christ's complete rule and authority, all because of Jesus' obedience to go to the cross, as our Passover Lamb, to bear the sins of the world and defeat Satan!

If resurrection power and authority is available to us, then why do we so often falter and fail and live in weakness and defeat? We fail because we don't take advantage of what God has given us, or because we don't truly believe all His power and authority is available to us, or because we don't ask for it and take the time to wait to receive it. And then some may ask, “*What authority, and when did Jesus give us that authority?*” Just before Jesus ascended back to heaven, He said this to His disciples, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:18-20).

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them dominion to subdue all things on earth. In other words, God gave them the authority to act as His stewards and custodians of His creation. God owned everything, but He gave mankind the great

privilege to rule and oversee His good creation. Yet, we know that Adam and Eve failed and chose to disobey God, and by their disobedience they lost their privilege as stewards of His creation; thereby, handing over their God-given authority to God's enemy. What happened that day is that Adam and Eve turned the keys of God's creation over to Satan, and as a result God's good creation was cursed and continues to be cursed. Animals became dangerous! Nature became violent! Mankind started spilling blood! God's good creation was cursed under Satan's rule, waiting for us to get our act together and step into our authority according to Romans 8:19!

We know that the authority of this earth was turned over to Satan – because of the words Satan used when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness after His baptism in the Jordan River. **Luke 4:5-7**, “*The devil led him to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me it will all be yours.’*” Jesus didn't dispute Satan's claim, but answered him, “***It is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.***” The good news of the Gospel is that God had put a plan in place to get the authority of His creation (the keys) back from the devil, and the authority was transferred back to Jesus the day He paid the ransom price for sinful mankind on the cross. With His own sinless life, Jesus bought back the authority that was lost in the Garden due to sin, and that is why Jesus could say to His disciples, right before His ascension, “***All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me***” (Luke 28:18). On that day, Jesus triumphed over Satan, disarmed the powers of evil, and regained the authority that had been handed over to the enemy by Adam and Eve's sin.

And what did Jesus do with the authority He recovered that day? When Jesus ascended back to heaven He gave it back to His followers – to those in whom His Holy Spirit would dwell. So, this is the spiritual reality we currently live in, but we can't see this reality with our physical eyes – we must see this spiritual reality with the eyes of our heart, and that is why Paul prayed for his Ephesian believers, “***that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened***” (Ephesians 1:18). It is only once enlightenment takes place within us that our discernment and decisions will align with Christ's, so that we would understand the spiritual reality that we live in and step up to claim the power and authority that we have been given to make this world a better place to live, bringing heaven to earth!

Since we have the keys back – we are God's instruments in reclaiming everything that has been stolen and lost to Satan, with the authority that comes from Jesus'

powerful Name. Everywhere we go, Jesus' Spirit goes with us, and according to the promise found in **1 John 4:4** we can overcome this world all because of John's words, "*You dear children are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.*" Therefore, we have nothing to fear as we walk in the faith, because Jesus has overcome this world and lives within us. God wins, and if we belong to Him, then we win!

So according to these verses of encouragement to the church – we can live by these four Godly core values, but only if the eyes of our heart are open to see the spiritual reality around us. And then we can come to believe that:

1. God is good all the time.
2. Nothing is impossible with God.
3. Everything that needed to be accomplished was completed at Calvary, nothing else needs to be done.
4. As ambassadors of Christ, we have the keys back, so according to our Lord's words to us in **Matthew 10:8**, as He sends us out, we carry His delegated, divine authority to "*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.*"

Our enemy knows very well the power and authority that has been given to the church, to the body of Christ – and he has done a good job in preventing us from carrying out the purposes of God by placing discouragement, doubt and ungodly beliefs into our minds, but the Holy Spirit helps us to uncover those lies and negative thoughts, and with the help of the Holy Spirit we can start having positive attitudes, seeing the great possibilities available to us, seeing heaven come down to this earth!

In closing – let's grasp the importance of Paul's encouraging words in **verses 22-23**, "*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*" So, as believers we need to claim this truth on a daily basis: we do not fight *TOWARDS* victory – we fight *FROM* victory! ALL BECAUSE: Jesus has already won the battle! AND Jesus has overcome the world!

So, what are you going to do with all this power and authority that's yours – live out of abundance or lack? Live with riches or continue on in poverty! Live in hope or hopelessness!