

Open Our Eyes

Eph 1:15-23

2013 is going to bring us many challenges as a church. We are going to be talking about practical things associated with the church over coming weeks. In dealing with the practical, it is easy to forget that we have as our head the Lord Jesus Christ and it is in His name that we do what we do. My vision for the church as Pastor this year is nicely summed up in Paul's prayer here in Ephesians 1. If this prayer becomes a reality in our lives, then it will temper our attitudes and actions in relation to our faith and witness as God's people.

What Paul was praying for in relation to the Ephesians is significant and powerful. When he was writing these words, they had been in existence as a church for some time. They had experienced his teaching personally, they had known the deliverance from the riot that came at the end of his ministry. Now he was an "ambassador in chains" - Eph 6:20 – writing to them.

They had been heady days, but now they were going through the hunky dory of being church. It's important to realise that as we look at this prayer. It was not for new Christians, but for people who had been around a while and had picked up experience – and some form. Being a Christian for some time often leaves enthusiasm dimmed. The pressures and distractions of life can lower our expectations of God. In the routine of being church we can become forgetful of just what God has done and what He can do.

Paul knew that, which is why the first half of the Ephesians letter focusses so greatly on just what God has done for us in Christ, and why he prays this prayer for them.

So what is the prayer about? It consists of Him asking God for two things. The first ask is

17 and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, to give you the Spirit, who will make you wise and reveal God to you, so that you will know him. (TEV) Other translations put it much more accurately:

17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: (KJV)

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. (NIV)

17 asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. (NLT)

17 For I always pray to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, that he may grant you a spirit of wisdom [of insight into mysteries and secrets] on the [deep and intimate] knowledge of him. (AMP)

The Good News is probably most wide of the mark. The KJV is the most literally accurate but the Amplified picks up the facets of what it means. Paul wanted God to give them something. Notice the words he uses here. Paul describes Him as the glorious Father. A good father makes sure that all the values that are really important to him get transmitted to his children. Likewise a good father makes sure that his children are equipped to face their future and end up with an inheritance. Paul describes Him as the glorious Father. As we'll see hopefully is that all that is imparted to us reflects that glory and helps us to understand and appreciate that glory.

So, firstly Paul wanted God to give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation. By wisdom the angle is here that they would have an insight into the mysteries and secrets of God. I mentioned this the other week. God has made known to us things which are a mystery to those who do not know Him. How do we know then? By the fact God has revealed Himself to us and given us the understanding. And the purpose – that we may grow in the knowledge of Him. The knowledge of God isn't just knowing about Him, but knowing Him – a deepened relationship with Him.

As we start another year, my prayer for us is that we will know God better, that our whole insight of God may become more vast and that we may be more closely drawn to Him.

But Paul has a second ask:

18 I ask that your minds may be opened to see his light, so that you will know what is the hope to which he has called you, how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people, 19 and how very great is his power at work in us who believe. (TEV)

Again, other translations develop this better:

18-19 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe (KJV)

18-19 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called--his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. (NLT)

18-19 By having the eyes of your heart flooded with light, so that you can know and understand the hope to which He has called you, and how rich is His glorious inheritance in the saints. And [so that you can know and understand what is the immeasurable and unlimited and unsurpassing greatness of His power in and for us who believe. (AMP)

Again the Amplified drags the meaning out very well here. Paul asks for open eyes. He uses eyes figuratively in terms of the eyes of our heart – minds opened to the truth. When we did not know Christ we were as the world is – blind to the things of God. Now Paul asks for enlightenment that we can truly see that which is really important. When people are blind, what they perceive is what their other senses give them. They miss all the details and nuances of colour and detail. I like most of us suffer the decline of eyesight with age. I should wear glasses all of the time, but I also suffer the other problem of age – remembering where I've put them! I always keep a pair in the car for driving. What's interesting, particularly at night, is how much more detail wearing glasses gives me.

Spiritually we may not be blind, but we do need glasses. We need God to open our eyes to see what's there – in all of its spiritual technicolor detail. What are those things Paul wants us to particularly see clearly?

- understand the hope to which we have been called
- the richness of our glorious inheritance
- the unsurpassing greatness of His power

Why these three? The first two relate to what we've come into and the third, just how powerful God is. These three things in themselves should completely colour or lives and if we truly understand them, will shape our lives and attitudes on ways that will make a difference to us and in all the people whose lives we touch. Let's look at them in a little more detail.

- understand the hope to which we have been called. I've done quite a few sermons on hope. The hope of glory isn't something that we hope might happen, like winning the lottery. Hope in this context is always what will happen. Our hope is what we expect from God. He's called us to be His people – we know we are going to spend eternity with Him. In my job and my age, you get to think about ageing and death a lot. Our hope means that age and death are not things we should fear and live in denial of, but advantages. The more we walk with God, the better our knowledge of Him should be and the stronger our hope. But I know even in this church that this is not so. There are those that hate the thought of growing old and then dying. I'm sure that Paul had people like this in mind in his prayer. Because when we know God, when our minds and hearts are opened, then we will have that hope. And that changes our whole attitude to life, ageing and death.
- the richness of our inheritance. But there's much more than just having an eternal calling. Read earlier in the chapter and you find that God has made us rich. In fact it's a key theme in Ephesians. Our gracious, loving God doesn't just save us by the skin of our teeth, but He has given us an inheritance and we get it when we come into His glory. Amazing. We have a God who does nothing by halves! We are His children – adopted into the royal family! What's more, it is a glorious inheritance because it's given by a glorious God.
- the unsurpassing greatness of His power. Finally we have the key item here which Paul goes on to fully expand in the following verses. That our eyes may be opened to see and understand the unsurpassing greatness of His power. The first two items are realised in our future, but His power is realised now. We have already experienced it when we first believed. We may have experienced it at some or many points in our lives. Paul prays that his readers may know it now. The eyes of our understanding should always be open to a powerful God because in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we should realise where God is and who God is. God is powerful. When His power is displayed, things happened. The blind see, the lame walk, the sick healed, the captive made free, lives transformed. God wants that to be our portion today, just as it was in the past, just as it is in many parts of the world today.

I'm sure that each of us can see how this information, if taken seriously should temper our Christian lives and service. Paul prayed for opened eyes, for God-given understanding and knowledge so that people wouldn't just know about it, but know God and see the reality of the presence of God and His power in their lives. That I believe should be the prayer for ourselves in this new year. We need it, our church needs it, our town needs it, our country needs it, our world needs it. But for us, this prayer of Paul starts here:

I ask God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God.

Next time I'll explore just what the power of God is all about from the following verses and we'll see how power and glory go together and how it's reflected in the person of Jesus Christ. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called--his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.