

Open Our Eyes, Lord!

Ephesians 1:15-23

Introduction

Several weeks ago I told you about a story reported several years ago in my hometown newspaper about an elderly man from my hometown who had passed away and whose body was discovered sometime later at his home. What caused this story to make the front page was not that he had died unexpectedly—for he was pretty far along in years. It was not that he lived in a terribly dilapidated house—for that is hardly a newsworthy story. It was not even his obviously impoverished lifestyle. What put this story on page one was that he had a garbage pail inside his house crammed full of money—totaling well over \$600,000!! When you consider that this happened back in the early 70's, you realize that by current monetary values this man had a net worth of *over* a million dollars. Yet he lived and died hardly any better off than a homeless person! How could a man have *so much* and yet *live so poorly*? What led him to endure such a paradoxical existence? What was he thinking that would have kept him from using his considerable resources to improve his living conditions?

And yet as soon as you and I raise that question, we need to ask ourselves a similar question. “What checks have you written lately on the bank account of heaven?” “When was the last time you made a withdrawal on the treasure that is yours *in Jesus Christ*?” In case you are visiting and are wondering what I am talking about, let me explain. For the past several weeks, we have been looking at the opening verses of Ephesians where Paul is praising God for all that He has done for His people. While this section is actually composed in the form of an ancient praise hymn—it is as if Paul is opening up a treasure chest of all the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and is inviting us to join him in praise to God.

Praise for God what? **[Slide 1]**. For choosing us when we would never been inclined to choose Him. **[Slide 2]**. For adopting us into His family and giving us the same status as our older brother, the Lord Jesus Christ! **[Slide 3]**. For having redeemed us from the condemnation of sin as well as releasing us from sin's enslaving power (Before you were saved, you had to obey sin. Now you have the power in Christ to say “No” to old habits and “Yes” to your new King and Master—the Lord Jesus! **[Slide 4]**. For His amazing plan that involves taking a world shattered by sin and putting it back together again by reconciling sinners to Himself and to each other. **[Slide 5]**. And finally for making *us His treasured possession*. That is, taking us after sin had ruined us—and restoring us to a status that makes us valuable to Him. Not because we are *intrinsically* valuable—but making us valuable by virtue of His gracious work in our lives. I was only able to touch on this briefly last week—so allow me to elaborate a little more on this point. If you are a canvas, and I draw a picture on you, you have no great value. In fact, given my lack of skill in art, I might even devalue you! But if a man named Rembrandt were to paint a portrait on you, you would instantly become priceless. That is precisely what happened when God saved you! He made you *His workmanship* (See Ephesians 2:10). You became *His canvas* upon which He now is working to display *His glory*. And that is not all.

In order to authenticate His work in you, He put His seal, His mark of ownership, His signature on you. And what is that signature? [Slide 6]. Look at Ephesians 1:13 where

Paul writes:

*“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were **marked in him with a seal**, the promised Holy Spirit...”*

In the ancient world, a seal was commonly used to identify ownership of property. That seal might involve a mark on a slave or branding an animal. If it was an important legal document, it might involve a splotch of wax at the bottom of the document with the owner’s ring imprinted on the wax. Unlike these external seals, God’s mark of ownership on His treasured people is not *outward or external*. It is His *Holy Spirit*. If you truly belong to God, you can know it because there will be evidence of His Spirit’s work in your life. He is the Holy Spirit and He unfailingly is at work in those whom He possesses to make them *holy*.

One day His workmanship will be finished. And you will be completely like Christ. The image of God, once marred by Adam’s fall will be completely restored in you and all your brothers and sisters in Christ. Of course, the question arises—how do I know God’s workmanship in me won’t be sabotaged by sin? [Slide 7] And so Paul encourages you in verse 14 with this further explanation of the Holy Spirit’s work in you:

“...who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”

God’s Spirit is not only your seal or signature of authenticity, He is your guarantee! He is God’s down payment, the first installment on the salvation that He will most certainly finish in you. His *present* work in you is a foretaste of His *finished* work in you.

So when I ask if you have written any checks lately on your bank account in heaven, I am asking if you have been living this week in light of these great truths? Or are you like that man with all the money—stuffed in a garbage can—and unspent. Or perhaps you do make a weekly ATM withdrawal when you come to church on Sundays. You look forward to the teaching here on Sundays and you try to see to it that you are here regularly each week—but beyond that, you don’t think a great deal about these truths. You have an account with God in the name of Jesus Christ, but you are not writing checks on your account during the week. If that is at all true, then this next section is for you. **Let’s read Ephesians 1:15-23:**

¹⁵ *For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,* ¹⁶ *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.* ¹⁷ *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit^a of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.* ¹⁸ *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,* ¹⁹ *and his*

incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ *which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,* ²¹ *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.* ²² *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,* ²³ *which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. [PRAY]*

Transition: Paul follows up his exuberant *hymn of praise* with an equally passionate *prayer of petition*. Look with me again at the beginning of his prayer because there is so much we can learn from Paul's prayer sheet. Notice what is there and what is not there. First of all in verses 15-16, he spends some time praising God for what He has already done in the lives of the Ephesian believers. We would do well to learn from that. How many times do we overlook what God is doing *already* in our lives? One way to appreciate God's blessings is to take the time to count what He already has done. That is why praise and thanksgiving is such an important element of prayer. Not only does it recognize the glory that already belongs to God—but it provides us with a perspective to see what He is already doing instead of getting absorbed by disappointment in what He seemingly has not yet done! But then look at his request in verses 17-19a. Look again at what he prays for. And as you do, notice what is not only there—but what is not there on his prayer sheet. There is no prayer for *new* blessings. No asking for power to evangelize or power to do God's will in a difficult situation. Not even a laundry list of physical needs for God to heal—which would be more typical of our prayer sheets. By the way, I am not suggesting that it is wrong to pray for physical needs. It's just that when you look at the New Testament prayers, they tend to focus on deeper issues. Like how the person is responding and how that might make a difference in the way a watching world thinks about God. But back to the point here. Do you see why Paul is not begging God to bless them anew and afresh? Because God has *already* blessed them—and us! We already have the power to evangelize—because the Gospel itself is the power of God to salvation! We already have the power to do God's will because God is working in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure! So what does he pray for? He prays for God to give them eyes to see what they *already* have! Verses 17-19a are loaded with some powerful implications that you need to consider and act on. You don't need more in your spiritual account, you need to find your spiritual checkbook so you can start writing checks on the account you have in Christ. You need to ask God to remove any blinders that are keeping you from understanding who you are in Christ and what He already has done, is doing, and will ultimately do in your life. How do you do that? There are two important truths in these three short verses. First of all...

- I. "Writing checks" on your spiritual account requires knowing *the God* of your resources (Read vs. 17).

You cannot even begin to find the checkbook to write a check if you are not growing in the knowledge of God. If you are not growing in the knowledge of God, you really can't figure out why you are here—or what you are supposed to be doing. By default you will write out your own script and your own agenda for

life. And you will seek to ask God to bless your agenda. But as we saw last week, he doesn't bless any other agenda besides the one He made. In fact, all other agendas for life rival His—and God does not bless His competition. Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. Later on this book has a lot to say about how we are to live life—doesn't it? It has plenty to say about marriage. Parenting. The workplace. Church relationships. But if you are not growing in the knowledge of God, you won't see His goal or purpose. Your desires will blind you and you will only see what you want to see. I have seen husbands read Ephesians 5:25-32 and totally miss the point. They come to me and say: God says I am supposed to be the head of my home. But my wife won't submit to me and my kids won't respect me!! And they come in with their Bibles practically jumping open to this text and want me to be an attack dog that will coax and unruly household back into line so they can be King of their homes. How do you write a check out of your spiritual resources for a goal like that?! God says: That is an unauthorized use of that account!! So what is going on? Is this man understanding the riches he has in Christ? Or is he trying to embezzle funds for his own illegal activities? Look at Ezekiel 14:3. Here God warns us that when our desires become idols of our hearts, when we desire them more than we desire to know God and His ways, they become a “*stumbling block*” before our faces!

(Explain how they distort our vision and why we can't really live out Ephesians 4-6 until we understand the riches we have in Christ in 1-3).

So what do you do when you can't find the checkbook? You pull out the credit card of your own resources. Man might seek to control or manipulate his family in different ways to get the desired behavior he wants. Might be nice. Might be demanding. Might try to buy what he wants. Might use harsh retaliation. Problem with credit cards! Idols charge an exorbitant rate of interest! You end up paying through the nose with all sorts of unintended consequences.

So how can you avoid that? How can you read Eph. 4-6 in a way that enables you to write checks on the Bank of Heaven? Two ways:

- A. Knowing God is a *practical* knowledge (“Spirit of wisdom and revelation”).

Paul asks that God's Spirit would give the Ephesians *wisdom* and revelation” in knowing God better. He is not asking God for new knowledge. The word “revelation” literally means “unveiling.” It is taking the knowledge already available to me in Scripture and removing the veil off my eyes so I can see truth as God intended—not as I want to re-script it. The word wisdom doesn't mean some deeper, mystical sort of knowledge of God—like a Word of Wisdom as some call it today. But rather understanding the practical implications of the truth I already know in my head. For a controlling husband, it is knowing a crucified Christ that shows me how to die to my own desires so I can really live for Christ and

my family. So when Paul says to husbands in Ephesians 5:25: Love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, what does he mean? *How* did Christ do that? It is a reference to the cross. Practically speaking, the cross becomes a model of self-sacrifice for the husband to love his wife as Christ loves the Church!

Example: Sacrifice nights out to know her, love her.

Personal example: Sacrificing imposing “my way” of doing the house so Kellie and I could pursue greater oneness. It took me a few years. No more interest on exorbitant credit cards of my own desires!

Same is true of wives. Submission is a hard thing in a sin-cursed world with sin-cursed husbands. Yet when you look at Peter’s commentary in I Peter 3 on Paul’s instructions to wives with unsaved husbands, Peter takes wives back to **I Peter 2:21-24 (Read)**.

Do you see how the practical knowledge of Christ and the cross begins to open our eyes to a whole new opportunity? Can you write a check on that request?! Absolutely!

Transition: But knowing God is not only a practical knowledge. It involves a

- B. Knowing God is a *personal* knowledge (“so that you may know *Him* better”).

Paul isn’t asking for more information. He is asking God to turn the *revealed* knowledge of God into a *personal knowledge* of God. In essence he is saying: God, don’t let them be satisfied with knowing *about* you. Help them know you in a deeply personal, intimate way. There is a difference you know. The religious leaders of Jesus day knew about Messiah. They knew about all the prophecies concerning his birth, his ministry etc. Yet they completely missed Him! (Read John 5:39-40).

You can study the Bible for years and miss Jesus. You can go to Bible College and Seminary and not have a very intimate knowledge of God. Only God can open your eyes to and help you to see His beauty in the face of Christ Jesus. Now that is something to beg God for—isn’t it? You ask God for that—and you keep on asking, you keep on seeking, you keep on knocking—and I guarantee you God will open your eyes and you will be able to find your checkbook and begin writing checks out of your checkbook.

When you see Jesus and you fall in love with Him and you long to see His image reproduced in your life, the Bank of Heaven stands behind every

check you write! Which leads us to the second main point in these verses...

II. “Writing checks” on your spiritual account requires knowing *the resources* of your God (18-19a).

Christian, what’s in your wallet? What currency backs up your spiritual debit card? Three phrase that we will look at briefly—and then come back to next month in more detail. First of all there is...

A. The hope of God’s *call* (vs. 18a).

What does Paul mean by the phrase: “the hope to which He has called you?” Let’s try to break down the key words in this phrase. According to Ephesians 1:1, we are saints. Holy ones. The word “*called*” is practically synonymous with the word, “*chose*.” And so in verse 4, we read that God *chose or elected us to be holy and blameless*.

The other critical word is the word, “hope.” This word at first presents a bit of a problem—not because it is a poor choice of words, but because of the way we have come to use it on our own English language. Most people use the word hope in very tenuous, iffy, hope-so sort of way. I *hope* it doesn’t snow anymore this month. That hope has no bearing on reality. But the hope Paul refers to is quite different. In fact, it is nearly opposite in meaning. It carries the idea of *certainty*. Of a *confident expectation*. It is what Paul is referring to in Philippians 3:14. It is the certain outcome for all who are in Christ. It is as John calls it: the Blessed Hope. That Christ will come and when He does, God will finish the good work He began in us at salvation. For we will not only see Him—WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM!

Once you know who God is, once you begin to see the outcome of His salvation in your life—you are free to quit serving your paltry idols and begin to write checks from the bank of heaven. You are free to pursue God’s agenda of pleasing Him as you cooperate with His work to make you like His Son! That is the Hope to which He has called you! And Paul prays that our eyes will be opened to see it!

B. The glory of God’s *inheritance* (18b).

If God’s call points back to the beginning of our lives when He called us to faith in Him, then the glory of His inheritance points to the end. But what is this inheritance? Are we God’s inheritance—or is He ours? Answer: Yes! But rather than try to explain it in theological detail, let me let you glimpse a description of what this will look like from heaven’s point of view:

See Paul Tripp, Instruments In The Redeemer's Hands, pages 4-5.

C. The greatness of God's *power* (19a).

Can God really do all this to a sinner with problems like me? Can God change me from the inside out? Can he free me from the enslavement of my desires by convincing me of His greater beauty and worthiness to be worshipped and adored? Yes. He has invested infinite power to accomplish it.

All other treasures are pipe dreams that will keep you from drawing on the true riches you have in Christ. Don't be like that man who died with a garbage can full of money—yet who lived like a homeless person. May God be pleased to open the eyes of your heart to the God of your resources and the resources of your God this week!