

PRAYING FOR THE SAINTS

Ephesians 1:15-23

Introduction:

One of the things that often troubles me as a believer is the subject of prayer. Not because the idea of prayer is troubling, but because I feel so inadequate and often feel that I have so far to go in this area. Yet, my desire is that I will continue to learn more and more about how to pray. One very valuable way of learning about prayer is to study the prayers that are recorded in the Scripture.

The Apostle Paul was a great man of prayer. In his letter to the Ephesian church he has recorded the content of his prayers for us in two places. The first is here in chapter 1, the other is in Chapter 3.

Paul does not hesitate to tell his readers that he is praying for them, nor is he reluctant to tell them what he is praying for. It establishes a standard for prayer which few of our prayers meet (at least my prayers). I believe that if these verses were taken seriously as a model for our prayers, our prayer life could be radically transformed.

As we look at the text this morning, I am going to come at this from three angles – three aspects to the nature of prayer. The first is...

I. The Personal Nature of Prayer vv. 15-16

Read vv. 15-16 – these verses give us the reasons for Paul's prayer for the people of this church. First, He prays for the Ephesian church "for this reason" (verse 15). In verses 3-14, Paul has stressed the sovereign purposes of God for His church. It is clear from these verses that the church is "from Him," "through him," and "unto him". Paul makes his petitions to God because God is sovereignly working in and through His church. God gives life to the church, directs its growth, and controls its destiny. And so Paul prays to God on behalf of the church.

There is another reason, though, for his prayers for this church. Paul prayed for them because of his relationship with them and his personal concern for them.

He is talking to and praying for people he knew (not necessarily every individual in the church). He had a burden for them because he had a relationship with them and cared about them.

Paul knows these believers and gives thanks for them. He says, I have been hearing about your faith in Christ, and about your love for the saints, and I thank God for you and keep praying for you because of that.

Prayer is a very personal thing. Prayer is most effective when it is a response to a burden that God has placed on someone's heart.

Discuss the mistaken idea: that somehow prayer will be more powerful, or God is more likely to respond if we can just get more people praying.

God answers prayer. I think we all believe that. But can you say, God answers me. God hears when I pray. I think Paul believed that.

The personal nature of prayer – prayer is built on a foundation of relationships. When our heart is burdened for those we know and love, God responds to our heart cry.

Let's move on to...

II. The Practical Nature of Prayer vv. 17-19a

Here we are looking at the content of Paul's prayer. What is it that he is asking for these believers in Ephesus? Paul tells this church in Ephesus clearly what he is asking God for in their lives. There are essentially two requests; the first in v. 17 – that "... God ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him..."; the second expands on the first, v. 18 – "...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened..." He then goes on to give the reasons for the request—the result which will come from it.

1. "...a spirit of wisdom and revelation..." The text is not clear as to whether Paul is referring to the Holy Spirit. But it is certain that without the Holy Spirit of God, we cannot understand the things of God. So Paul's desire for all believers is that the Holy Spirit will be free to work in them to reveal to them the truth of God's Word. He has a specific purpose in mind—so that they will know Him (that is,

God) better. It is only by the ministry of the Spirit that we can ever know God as we ought. (*Read 1 Cor. 2:1-13, Comment briefly.*)

2. Back to Ephesians - "...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened..." This is very much an expansion of the first request. Paul prays that their spiritual eyes will be open to see spiritual truth. (*refer back to 1 Cor. 2*) Here Paul gives three results of this spiritual sight that he would like to see in these people. He wants them to have a real grasp of these three things.

- The hope to which he has called you. The Apostle Peter speaks quite a bit about the glory of our calling. Listen to a couple of verses:

1 Peter 3:9 – "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing;"

1 Peter 5:10 – "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."

Do you understand the hope we have as believers?

- The riches of his inheritance in the saints. We talked about our inheritance in Christ – see vv. 13-14. But I am not sure if that is what Paul is speaking of here. Have you ever considered the truth that you and I are Christ's inheritance? That seems to be what Paul is saying here. Again let me refer you to a couple of verses:

(*Look up and read Titus 2:11-14*)

1 Peter 2:9 – "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

The church is the glorious bride of Christ, which is now being prepared, and which will someday be presented to Him at the heavenly marriage feast (Revelation 19:7-9). What a glorious privilege, to be God's own possession—to be His inheritance!

- The power that we have available to us as believers. The third great, unfathomable truth that Paul prays is that we will grasp the immensity of the power that God has directed toward His church—his people.

That truth leads us into the third aspect regarding the nature of prayer...

III. The Powerful Nature of Prayer

The Lord Jesus Christ has all power and authority at his disposal, and when we come to Him, that power is available to us as well. Listen as I read these verses again. (*read vv. 19b-23*)

It is no small coincidence that Paul refers to the resurrection of Christ as the source and indication of the power of God. There is no event so critical, and no act which so exemplifies the power of God as the raising of Jesus from the dead and lifting him up to be seated at the right hand of the Father. His resurrection and ascension assure us of his infinite power and authority.

Refer again to vv. 22-23. God has placed everything under him. He has authority over everything for the church. So when we pray, we are praying in the name of the one who has been given all power and all authority. He is absolutely sovereign.

Conclusion

So what does all this mean for us? I would like to conclude by giving some summary statements found in an exposition of this passage by Bob Deffinbaugh:

First, the power of God is not a blank check, which we fill in with prayer. The power of God is linked with His eternal purposes. God's power assures the saints that what God has purposed and promised, He is able to accomplish.

Second, prayer should not be viewed as an opportunity for finite men to bend the will and the power of God to serve their own selfish purposes, but as a time to submit our will to God's will and to His purposes. How quickly we pervert and distort the truth of God's word, especially in relation to God's power and our prayers. We speak of "the power of prayer," an expression which is not found, and which is without sanction in the Bible. It is not our prayer which is powerful; it is God who is all-powerful. But His power is restricted to those things which accomplish His purposes.

Finally, we should be reminded that the power of God is not grasped by men who are strong, but cling to by those who are weak. It is in the recognition of our weakness and of His strength that we must turn to Him who has all power. It is not our power which matters, but His.

Let us look to Him, who has all power, and who freely employs it to fulfill all His purposes, for His glory and for our good.