

To Know Him Better Eph. 1:15-23

Intro. Dr. Warren Wiersbe tells a story in his commentary on Ephesians about the late newspaper publisher, William Randolph Hearst. Hearst was known to have amassed a fortune in art which he kept stored in a large private warehouse. One day he read about an incredibly valuable piece of art. Determined to have it for himself, he sent an agent to find it and purchase it for him. Months passed before the agent called to report that he'd found it. When Hearst asked him where it was, he told him he had found it in Hearst's own warehouse. Hearst had purchased it years earlier!

Last Sunday we considered **Eph. 1:1-14** where Paul lists the blessings shared by all who have trusted Jesus Christ to save them from sin. Unlike Hearst who forgot what he owned, Paul understood how important it is for believers to know what we have in Christ. So he described the blessings believers have from God the Father who planned our salvation / blessings from God the Son who purchased our salvation / and blessings from God the Spirit who preserves our salvation. In these verses Paul explained that God the Father **chose us** in Christ / **predestined** us to be holy / and **adopted** us into His family. Then in execution of the Father's plan, God the Son **redeemed** us / **forgave** us / and **made known** to us the mystery of His will. And finally, God the Spirit applies the salvation plan in the lives of believing sinners. The Spirit **included** us in Christ / He **seals** us / and He **secures** our destiny. Working in harmony, each member of the Triune God accomplishes this for every person who will humble themselves and accept God's free and gracious gift. And the grand purpose of this great salvation plan is that God might be praised for the glory of His grace.

Now you may be one among many who feel life has been unfair and perhaps even cruel to you. Things haven't turned out the way you expected or hoped. There have been disappointments and heartaches. You may have questioned why you're here or what value your life has. Let me tell you this...if you believe and embrace the blessings that belong to you in Christ, you will never be unhappy again! You will never complain or question the reason for your existence. You will never feel worthless. Believers in Jesus Christ are like Publisher's Clearing House Sweepstakes winners...only richer. To embrace this first section in Paul's letter is to realize we are overly blessed! That's the assurance and confidence God wants us to have. He wants us to know we're children of the King and the King's banner over us is love. So **vs. 4-14** swing open the warehouse doors to show us what we have in Christ. And we need this because like Hearst, we tend to forget. We get so wrapped up in the affairs of life, that we forget that **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ**. As life comes at us...and sometimes it comes at us very hard, we tend to lose sight of all we have. We fail to bless the Lord who has blessed us so abundantly. But there's more to this chapter and I'm excited to share it with you. If **vs. 4-14** encourages us to know the blessings God has given to us in Christ then **vs.16-23** encourage us to know the giver of these gifts...to really know Him.

1. The Substance of Paul's prayer - vs. 15-18a - For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...

In **vs.15** Paul expressed thankfulness for reports that had come to him about their **faith in the Lord Jesus and love for all the saints**. He then proceeds to explain what he was continually asking God to accomplish in their lives. His prayer is a model of how we should pray for each other. The prayer's substance is stated in **v.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.**

The believers at Ephesus had turned from idols and come to know the true and living God by faith in the Lord Jesus. But it was important for them to know God better. To know God better is to love Him more! Because no one can come to know God on their own, he prayed that God would give these believers **the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.**

The fact God can't be known unless His Spirit reveals Him to us is addressed by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. The Greeks were infatuated with wisdom and knowledge. We might call them the "*know it alls*" of the ancient world. Greece produced Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. But despite all their intellectual inquiry and philosophical speculation, the Greeks had not come to know God. Before the Gospel came to Macedonia, they bowed to shrines and statues dedicated to hundreds of imaginary gods, but they didn't know the true God. **Acts 17:23 - For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.** Athens even had a statue dedicated **to an unknown god**...a nameless god they might have over-looked. (You wouldn't want to offend some cranky deity by not erecting a statue with his/her name on it!)

Education in America is enormous. We know so much about so many things. Al Gore put information at our fingertips by inventing the internet. Yet despite all our learning, most people are in the dark about God. They have ideas, but they don't know God as he is. They don't know Him as a child knows his Father. To the Corinthians Paul wrote, **For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** Since the natural mind is incapable of knowing God, the Bible says the way to know Him is to believe the Gospel and be saved. The way to know God is through Jesus. And may I add...there's no other way to come to know God! In **Jn.14:6** Jesus said, - "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**"

In the next chapter Paul wrote, **For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. - I Cor. 2:11** Notice, the One who alone has the ability to explain God to us is the Holy Spirit. And where is the Spirit today? He resides in all who believe. He is a resident teacher who leads and guides believers into all truth. - **John 16:13**

Since no amount of investigation or education can open our eyes to know God, Paul prayed. He asked God to do what we can't do for ourselves. He asked the Lord to give believers **a Spirit of wisdom and revelation** to this end...**so that you may know Him better.** Do you want to know God? Trust Jesus and be saved. Do you want to know God better? Ask. Ask God to reveal more of Himself to you. Since God wants to be known, this is a prayer He delights to answer. In **Matt. 7:7** Jesus said, "**Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**" In **Jer. 9:23, 24** the Lord put His finger on life's greatest acquisition. **This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord...**

But we need to consider what it means to know God and the Greek language helps us. The Greek term *epignoseos* refers not to abstract theoretical knowledge or objective facts...but to know something firsthand, intimately, and in an experiential way. From my background in Physical Education I could teach you the right way to do the crawl stroke. I spent 3 semesters in the pool. Out of the water, I could teach you the theory. I could show you how to kick your feet, turn your head to one side to breathe, and move your arms the right way. You could imagine yourself beating Michael Phelps to the wall, but you could never say you know the crawl stroke until you get in the water and swim.

Knowing God better includes an intimate awareness of His character / His heart / and His will. His wants us to know Him in theory as we embrace the truth of His Word. But to really know Him, God must teach us about Himself in the laboratory called "life." To be known, God must be brought into our daily experience, not just read about or talked about on Sunday. In **Matt. 11:28, 29** Jesus said, "**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**" Here Jesus invites all who come to Him to walk beside Him in fellowship and service. Jesus said, learn who I am and learn to be like me as we do life together.

What it takes to know God better is amplified in **v.18 - I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...** More than information fed into our brains, the knowledge spoken of here must impact our hearts. True spiritual insight must descend 18" from brain to heart. I think you know the difference. Our brain can absorb and store an incredible amount of information. But our hearts drive what we do. In **Matt. 15:18, 19** Jesus traced the things we say and do to the heart, not the brain.

John's first letter reveals what knowing God involves. **I Jn. 4:8 - Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.** To know God isn't just knowing that **God is love.** That's doctrine and knowing biblical theology is very important. But John insists that knowing facts about God isn't the same as knowing God if we aren't practicing His love. Knowing God in the **Eph. 1:17** way involves an intimacy that changes us to be like Him. This is backed up by **I Jn. 2:3 - We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands.**

It's funny to think that a dog sometimes looks like its master. I've also heard that if a man and wife stay together long enough, they start to look alike. Peggy hopes this isn't true! But that illustrates how we come to know God. Through time and experience, we learn more and more of who God is. And if we've really come to know Him, our lives will be changed to be more like Him. And listen...the more we know God and are changed to be like Him, the more satisfying our lives will be! Socrates said, "*Know thyself.*" But Jesus said, "**Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**" The wisdom of Socrates is buried with him. But Jesus rose from the dead and is alive in heaven today. I recommend Jesus! In the rest of **v.18** and **v.19** Paul listed three specific dimensions of this experiential knowledge.

2. The Specifics of Knowing God - v. 18, 19 - 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, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.

Throughout Paul's writings we find triads of thought. We found that extensively in **vs. 4-14**. And that's the case here. Knowing God better is explained and fleshed out by three phrases. First, Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened in order that we might know...

- **The hope to which He has called you** - Paul prayed that believers would be enlightened to know **the hope to which He has called us.** The fact that God **called us** is staggering. As we reflect back on our salvation, it humbles us to know that He chose us and called us to Himself. We didn't choose Him...He chose us! He initiated our salvation by calling us and drawing us to Himself. But God's effectual call is also the basis for our security. **Rom. 11:29** says **God's gifts and His call are irrevocable.** This means God will never call us and then for some reason change His mind and send us back. No believer is like something ordered from QVC that didn't work out. So Paul prayed that God would enlighten us to know in our experience, the absolute certainty to which God has called us in an irrevocable way. And God called us to possess hope. Peter calls it a living or lively hope because described in a word, our future is all about life. Jesus said, "**Because I live, you too will live.**"

As we've said many times **hope** in the Bible sense isn't mere optimism or wishful thinking. Lance Valentine sincerely hopes he'll catch fish when he launches his boat with clients onboard. But at the end of the day, even professional fishermen are sometimes disappointed. Bible hope is *absolute certainty*. **Rom. 5:5a** says...**hope does not disappoint us**. To know God better strengthens our confidence right now. **Jer. 29:11 - For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.** As we learn God's unfailing faithfulness...as we embrace His promises and rely on them...our hope increases.

The difference between a hope-less person and a person hope-filled person is like night and day. Who would you rather hang out with? Somebody who is all doom and gloom, complaints and bad news?...or, somebody excited to be alive and looking forward to tomorrow. My dad used to say, "*I can't wait until tomorrow!* When we asked him why, he'd say, "*Because I get better looking every day!*" God's children are called to possess an amazing hope. We know the best is yet to come and we prove we know God by our optimism and the smile on our kisser. Do you know why it's so important for a Christian to be hope-filled instead of a gloomy Gus? **I Pet. 3:15 - But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** The purest and most effective way to reach an unsaved person is for them to ask you to explain the reason for the hope you have. Has anyone asked you lately? Has anyone noticed the hope that sets you apart from the crowd? Next Paul prayed that God would enlighten us to know the supreme value God sees in us.

- **The riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints** - Paul referred to our inheritance in **Eph. 1:11**, but here God's inheritance is in view. This is amazing. God's people are His inheritance! Dr. Wiersbe writes, "*Just as a man's wealth brings glory to His name, so God will get glory from the church because of what He has invested in us.*" The same was true concerning Israel in the OT. In **Deut. 4:20** Moses said, **But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of His inheritance, as you now are.** Again, **Deut. 9:29** says, **But they are Your people, Your inheritance that You brought out by Your great power and Your outstretched arm.**" I can't explain how the God who needs nothing and owns everything would be made rich by the likes of us. I feel more like a liability than an asset. From where I'm seated, the church seems more like a consolation prize. But here it is. We, who have been saved are **His inheritance**. Our worth can only be explained by the grace God invested in us. Unlike the lava lamp, Aunt Gertrude left us, we have enormous value to God. We're more like the abandoned and rusted out Chevy a guy bought, over-hauled, and restored. That old Chevy is now worth a fortune and admirers are amazed at the workmanship of its owner.

The fact that we are God's inheritance should inspire us to live today in the future tense. Our lives should be influenced by what we will be when Jesus returns / glorifies us / and takes us home. Listen to **I Jn. 3:2, 3 - Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.** Once again, knowing God in an experiential way infuses our lives with hope and value. We are God's children! At the moment, our worth isn't apparent. We still have issues and imperfections. In many things we all stumble. But when Jesus appears and we see Him face to face, we'll be changed to be **like Him**. In the meantime, we must endeavor by His grace to be pure even as He is pure. Then finally, Paul prayed that God would enlighten us to know His incomparably great power for us who believe.

- **The incomparably great power for us who believe** - John Stott observes that "*while God's call points to something in the past and the hope looks to the future, the power referenced here spans the interim between.*" Christianity isn't just "*pie in the sky by and by.*" Faith in Christ provides us with everything we need here and now...it's "*ham where I am in this jam.*"

This all-sufficient provision of God is declared in **II Pet. 1:3 - His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.** So just as Paul prayed that we who believe might know the hope of His calling and the riches of His inheritance in us, He prayed that we might know God's power in our experience right now.

This power is described as **incomparably great.** The word **great** translates the Greek word *megathos* from which we get the word mega. Today the prefix mega describes everything from enormous burgers to lottery jackpots to the world's largest shark called megaladon. In the original language of **v.19**, Paul used every word for **power** he could think of. **..His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength...**The word **power** comes from *dunamis* from which we get dynamite. This is inherent power...power that resides in God. **Working** is the Greek word *energia* from which we get energy. This is operative power or energy at work. **Mighty** is the Greek word *kratos* which refers to ultimate power. It's often associated with dominion. Finally, **strength** is *Ischus* which is endowed power. So Paul used every power word in his vocabulary to convince us God is really, really, really powerful...He really is! If we were to transliterate these Greek words we might say our God and Savior has *mega - dynamic - energizing - dominion establishing - super power...*and this power is **for us who believe.** Isn't it good to know this *mega - dynamic - energizing - dominion establishing - super power* is for us, not against us! Amen?

Like many super powers in OT history, God's people often learned about God's power the hard way. Because the people grumbled and complained, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, **"For forty years--one year for each of the forty days you explored the land--you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have Me against you."** - Num. 14:25 No one fares well when God is against them! In light of His power to punish and destroy, its beyond wonderful to read **Rom. 8:31 - What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?** So let me say it again, Praise the Lord this **incomparably great power is for us who believe**, not against us.

But what does God's power do for us? What does the working of divine energy accomplish? For one thing, our salvation involved a miracle accomplished by God's power. It took incomparable power to release us from Satan and the curse of sin and death that held us. Remember what Paul said about the Gospel? He said, **I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.** - Rom. 1:16 To the Corinthians Paul wrote, **For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.** - I Cor. 1:18. Every time a sinner turns from their sin to trust Christ, God's power is unleashed.

Last week I spoke with a man who had been in bondage to alcohol for many years. He was miserable, his marriage was in trouble. He quit drinking 100 times. At rock bottom, God got his attention. In desperation he prayed, *"Lord help me...save me."* That was almost a decade ago. Though he was addicted and powerless, the Lord intervened and delivered him. He's a new man. He's happy in the Lord. His marriage is stronger and better than ever. God's miracle working power accomplished what no philosophy or humanistic formula could hope to accomplish. You see, **...the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.** - I Cor. 4:20

Having saved us, God's work is far from finished. His sanctifying power is unleashed within... power that changes us from the inside out. **Col. 1:10-12 - And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.**

Listed here are some of the many things God's power can accomplish in a believer's life. A life that is worthy of the Lord / a life that pleases Him in every way / fruitfulness in every good work / growth in the knowledge of God / great endurance and patience / joyfulness / thankfulness...these are possible only as we are **strengthened with all power according to His glorious might!** The fact that God is so powerful is the basis for **Eph. 6:10 - ...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.**

Do you sense God's power at work in your life? Is God changing you? Are you overcoming when tempted? Are you enduring life's difficulties with patience, joy and thankfulness? Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord? Is there power in your witness...power in your teaching...power in your parenting...power in your married life? Change in the direction of godliness only happens by the power of God. So Paul prayed that we would know this incomparably great power in our experience. But having exhausted his vocabulary, Paul still wasn't finished. He couldn't get over the mega power of God. I think he felt his description of God's power hadn't yet done it justice. I felt that way when I tried to describe the scenery we'd seen in Alaska. So Paul continued to elaborate on the power and authority of God in Christ.

3. The supremacy of God's power in Christ - vs. 19b-23 - That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him 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 title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 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.

This final section of **chap.1** begs a separate message and I may do that when I return from our sabbatical. Beyond the outstanding miraculous displays of power recorded in the OT, Paul says the power that works for us is **like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...** That's what it's like. Every evil power in the universe was deployed against Jesus when He was here. Evil men inspired by Satan did their worst. They abused and crucified the Lord of glory. But that wasn't the end of the story. On the third day, God raised His Son from the dead by the working of his mighty strength. Sin and death couldn't claim Jesus. The grave couldn't hold Him. Guards couldn't detain Him. A giant stone couldn't stop His departure. But more than all of this...Satan and His evil empire could not defeat the Son of God who happens to be our Savior and friend! Today we stand in His triumph and that same power that raised Jesus raised us from death to life. That's **Eph. 2:1-6**. It's no wonder the devil shudders when Christians pray in Jesus' name. Jesus isn't just **above all rule and authority, power, and dominion**. He is **far above** them. They aren't in His league. It's unfair to name them in the same sentence with the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ!

So we need to wrap this up. In **vs.4-14** Paul threw open the warehouse doors and listed blessings God has freely given to those who trust His Son. Now in **vs.15-23** he prays that God would give us what we need to know Him better. From the example of Paul, we learn how we should pray for each other. He prayed we would know the hope of His calling / the riches of His inheritance in the saints / and His incomparably great power for us who believe. Hope / awareness of our worth to God / and power. As we come to know our God better, these qualities will impact our lives. God wants us to have a hope that overshadows present disappointments and begs the question...what makes you smile? He wants to have a sense of value and purpose that overcomes despair and feelings of worthlessness. And He wants us to know His power...a power that eliminates the word "impossible." Power that changes us and **does immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. - Eph. 3:20** Perhaps more tragic than being so blessed and not realizing it...is to have such a wonderful Heavenly Father and not know Him as He is. Do you know God? Will you ask God to help you know Him better?