

...The Prayers Go Up

Well, good to see you guys. As I mentioned earlier, my name is Kent and I'm one of the pastors here. One of the things we're passionate about at City Church is raising up leaders for our church and for future churches that we might help start. And one way that we do that is through our pastor-in-training program. So today I have up here with me Marcus Williamson—who is one of our pastors-in-training. For the past couple years, Marcus has been learning and growing in his understanding of the church and church leadership for the purpose of becoming a pastor with us eventually. So as part of all that, Marcus is actually gonna teach next Sunday on his own, but I wanted to introduce him to you and have him teach some of this passage today with me.

You guys will get to Marcus more over the years (and many of you already know him well), but there are a few random things I'd like you to know about Marcus before we begin today. And the reason *I'm* going to tell you about them is that in all likelihood these are the things that *he* might would be too embarrassed to tell you. So I am not exaggerating when I tell you that Marcus is one of the more eclectic human beings I've ever met in my life. One of his favorite TV shows is Golden Girls—which I had forgotten ever existed. He also is a die-hard not-pro wrestling fan. I say “not-pro” because it's my personal conviction that in order for something to be “professional” it has to be real. Marcus is a WWE sensai. This is a real true story—he showed up to a dinner party the other night and was wearing a Booty-O's shirt. Which is a fake cereal created by a group of wrestlers. And lastly, Marcus does not like coffee. Which I'll be honest, was almost enough to make us not make him a pastor—we had to do a lot of investigation. He walks into the many fantastic coffee shops around our city...and orders milk. With ice in it. Marcus, did I cover all the important things? I just figure the best way for us all to get to know you is by mercilessly mocking you.

Marcus, why don't you kick us off?

Yah man, thanks for those warm introductions. If you have your bibles, go ahead and turn with me to Ephesians 1. If you don't have a bible with you, there should be some paperback bibles on either side of each row. You can probably just ask someone sitting near those to pass you one and I'm sure they will be happy to if they're nice. If you don't own a bible at all, you're welcome to take that one home with you—that's our gift to you. But if you're a bible collector, please leave our bibles alone and use your own.

So last week, if you were not here, was thick. Paul said a lot of things that were very heady and theological and he did it all in one long run on sentence. He mentioned everything from predestination, to redemption, to the Holy Spirit. Some of you fell asleep, which I couldn't blame you, but we got through it right. Well today Paul is going to venture on the lighter side of things. It'll still have theology, it just won't be as thick. Today Paul is going to essentially write out a prayer of his, that is in response to all these theological ideas he unpacked last week. So let's start reading, beginning in v. 15:

[15] For this reason,

For *what* reason?

because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,
[16] I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

So I'm not sure if you caught this, but Paul prays very differently than what I'm use to. When you and I pray, what are the types of situations we pray from? What are things that drive our prayer lives most? For me I would say I typically pray when things are overwhelming. Or when I feel like I've done all I can and I have no other choice right. Or when I need something selfishly. But here, Paul is praying why? Because he's hearing some great things coming out of the Ephesian church. For Paul, just hearing about their faith stirs him to pray and give thanks to the Lord for them without ceasing.

So now he's going to tell us about the *content* of his prayer...

[17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

So he prays that God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the *knowledge* of God. Now let's hang out for a second on this word "knowledge." Because this is one of those times where the English language really works against us. "Knowing" something or someone can mean all sorts of things in our language. If you ask me if I *know* Josh Dobbs, in one sense, the answer is yes. I know who he is, I know he went to UT, I know he majored in Aerospace Engineering, I know he was a really talented quarterback, and I know that he plays for the Steelers now. So in that sense, yes, I *know* Josh Dobbs. But in another sense, I don't *know* him at all. I've never hung out with him ~~except for one time when my LifeGroup saw him at Blaze Pizza and I was too starstruck to talk to him,~~ I've never gotten to know him, I don't really know what he's like in person, we're not familiar with each other at all. So in one sense I do know him, and in another sense I absolutely don't. To help with this, we sometimes use language like "knowing about someone" rather than "knowing someone." But still, it's problematic that we use the same word to mean two very different things.

That's why the Greek language, the language Paul is writing in, actually uses different words for those two things. And the word used here is the word *gnosis*. And it's the word used for knowledge gained through *experience or relationship*—not just through being aware of facts about something. People with *gnosis* aren't just good at trivia, they're good at *life*. When I was 13 years old, I *knew* (in one sense) that riding my scooter down our long, steep driveway was a bad idea. But *gnosis* is what I had once I rode that scooter down the driveway, was catapulted off of it, and lost so much blood that I nearly had to go to the hospital. I had knowledge of it already, but once that happened I had *gnosis*. Or put positively, I *knew*, in one sense, that Stock & Barrel had the best burgers in town—countless people had told me that. But *gnosis* is what I had once I tried tons of different burgers, and had nothing better than theirs. I *knew* it already, but then I had *gnosis* of it.

My point is is that **there is a *profound difference* between what we sometimes think of as knowledge, and what Paul is talking about here in this passage. Paul is praying here that we would *know* God—not just in an intellectual sense, but in an *experiential, relational* sense.** So, we might ask, what does that look like? He goes on, in. v. 18 to unpack just that:

[18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,

So he goes on to say that that having gnosis looks like first “having the eyes of our heart enlightened.” Anybody remember that fantastic 90s worship song, “Open the Eyes of my Heart”? No? Tried your best to scrub it from your memory permanently? Fair. Now that’s an insanely cheesy song, but an incredibly beautiful idea. What Paul is praying here is that we would have our *eyes opened* in order to truly *know* and *experience* the realities God has for us. So what are those realities Paul wants us to open our eyes to? Well, he gives three of them: the **hope** to which God has called us, the riches of his glorious **inheritance** in the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of God’s **power** towards those who believe. Let’s take each one of those in turn. **Marcus, why don’t you kick us off?**

Hope

Alright so first up Paul wants us to realize the hope that God has called us. Now I’m not going to stay on this one long because we talked about it during our Easter sermon. But the main idea is that for Paul, hope is not wishful thinking. His hope is different than how we would define hope. When we hope we tend to think more like “Man I sure hope Vols football is relevant this year. Or man, I hope we get to the Final Four in Men’s Basketball next year, it’s sure looking good. Hope for us is really just wishful thinking. For Paul, hope has an altogether different definition. When he says he has hope he means he’s expecting something to happen. To put another way, for Paul, hope is a sure thing—not a maybe thing. **So hope is confidence in something that is certain. We are confident that God is putting things back together.** And one day everything that is wrong with the world, everything that is unjust, will be gone and that’s why we have hope.

Here’s why it’s important to have this kind of hope. **We’ve mentioned before that what you believe about the future shapes how you live in the present. Let me say that again...what you believe about the future shapes how you live in the present.** So imagine this hypothetical scenario with me that there are two men. They are both locked in a room and are each given a pointless task that they have to continually perform each day. But if we rewind a bit, one of them was told that at the end of the week he would be given a million dollars for his efforts while the other man wasn’t told anything. So they’re both in the same situation doing the exact same thing. But who do you think is going to have a pep in his step? And the other guy, well after a while he’s probably going to go insane trying to figure out how to get out of this locked room right? So for these two guys what’s the difference. One has hope and one doesn’t. If you and I operate as if there is nothing to look forward to outside of this life then we will go insane. But if we operate from the notion that we have hope, having gnosis of where our life is headed and who’s running the whole thing, then our mindset should change in how we go about life. **So what we believe about the future shapes how we live in the present.**

Inheritance

Next up, Paul mentions that gnosis means understanding the riches of his glorious inheritance. And if you kind of sped past that really quickly then you might have thought that Paul meant *our* inheritance. Because that *is* what we talked about last week—that we get an inheritance. But *here*, Paul isn’t talking

about *our* inheritance, but quote "*his* inheritance." So who is "he" in this situation? Who's inheritance is this? God's, right? So what on earth would God count as his inheritance, that seems a little odd right? Well according to v. 18 it's the saints, or to say another we are his inheritance. Paul here is trying to make the point that because of what Jesus did on the cross, God gained us in the process. We are his treasured possession. His workmanship. Let that sink in a minute. Treasured possession.

Now if you're like me and you hear you are a treasured possession. You'll probably scoff at that idea right? You just start thinking, "this isn't believable. I mean I'll try and work my way to being a treasure possession, but right now? As is? Treasured possession? Nah cuz. I'm more like whatever the poor man's version of a treasured possession." But Paul is saying, bruh, you right now because of Jesus are God's inheritance.

Now I know this is hard right. To imagine that you right now, as is, are God's treasured possession. I mean we talked about it last week, we are not God's inheritance because of how awesome we are. There's not a NFL style draft that goes on in heaven with God on the clock and he's looking down saying. "Should we draft Julie in the next round? She's really great at discipleship. And her theology is on point. What you think Jesus?? Holy Spirit? We good." No, he's not doing that at all. God didn't inherit you because you were awesome. He inherited you and I because of how awesome Jesus was in our place. He went to the cross to redeem, rescue, and adopt us into his fam. And by him doing that we became God's inheritance.

So let me step in here and try and help you see why this is so important to grasp as a follower of Jesus. Imagine with me two different hypothetical days this week. Let's say tomorrow morning—Monday—you wake up, and things just start off good. You wake up exactly 15 seconds before your alarm goes off, feeling completely rested, with Ephesians 1:3-14 just marinating in your mind. You get up, you go make a cup of coffee and you sit down to spend time in the Scriptures and as you read it's just like the words are coming alive on the page for you. You feel so in tune with the Holy Spirit and because of that you launch into an extended prayer time with God where your prayers just fill the room like incense before God. Then you hop in your car, which of course has a "In Knoxville as it is in Heaven" sticker on the back, and while you're sitting at a red light someone sees it and pulls up beside you going—"hey what's that sticker all about?" And the red light lasts just long enough for you to tell them about how God is putting things back together and how your church is doing a sermon series on it, and you throw them a City Church invite card and it glides effortlessly into their window. Then you get to work, and when you get ready to go to lunch, a coworker approaches you and goes "you know I've just been watching you and I'm so amazing at how loving and compassionate you are...can I have lunch with you and let you tell me perhaps about a God that you believe in who makes all of that possible?" So you do, and it goes great. You get home from work that day feeling so encouraged and full of life, and before you go to bed you decide you just feel so grateful to God and so aware of him that you watch a Chris Tomlin worship song video on your phone and have your own little worship session before you go to sleep. Then you lay your head down on the pillow and drift immediately off to sleep, right after thinking to yourself, "man, I'm pretty much nailing this following Jesus thing. I think I'm really getting the hang of this."

And then you wake up the next morning...and it's *Tuesday*. And turns out you had messed with the volume while you watched the video and because of that you don't even hear your alarm going off until it's been ringing for like 15 minutes straight. You rush out the door, no time for coffee *or* the bible. On your way to work you angrily pass and then cut off someone going too slow in front of you, you shoot

them the bird, but then you immediately get stuck in traffic so they have plenty of time to see that that sticker on the back of your car saying you go to City Church. And you're thinking, "great. For all they know, every person at City Church flips people birds for no reason." Then you get to work and you're so stressed out that the first person who talks to you about something just catches your pure, unbridled fury. And because of that interaction, they come by and go "hey, just so you know, I've just decided I will never become a Christian because of the way you just treated me." Everybody mostly avoids you at lunch because of that interaction, and then at the end of the day, you head home and you think about reading the bible since you didn't get to this morning but instead you watch the next episode of *Wild Wild Country*—so you go to bed feeling weirded and creeped out and with the image of crazy people jumping up and down, spazzing out. And as you go to sleep you just think to yourself, "I don't really want to talk to God tonight, and I bet he sure doesn't want to talk to me." And you just go to bed feeling like an utter failure as a follower of Jesus.

Monday and Tuesday. Two very different days. But here's what I want you to know and I want you to look straight at me when I say this: **through what Jesus accomplished on the cross, God's love for you is exactly the same for you on Tuesday as it was on Monday.** Exactly the same. He does not—listen, *does not*, love you any less on Tuesday than he did on Monday. If you are a follower of Jesus, if you belong to him, you are just as loved, and just as valued, and just as approved of—on Tuesday as you were on Monday. **On days like Monday, and on days like Tuesday, and all the types of days in between, you are God's inheritance, God's treasured possession.** As followers of Jesus, can we just do ourselves a favor and let that reality sink into your soul? Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, this is always true of you. That's what God's love towards us is like. That's what it means that we are his "inheritance."

So having this knowledge of who God is means knowing the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his inheritance in his saints, and lastly, Marcus is gonna tell you about God's *power*.

Power

So lastly, Paul says that gnosis means knowing personally the immeasurable greatness of God's power. Now power can be a little tricky for us I feel. On one hand power can be a really evil and corrupt thing, think Frank Underwood or (insert someone else) or it can be this magical mystical type thing, think Harry Potter or Chronicles of Narnia. **But what Paul here is saying that this type of power is tangible and accessible to anyone who believes.**

And Paul is really passionate about this idea of power. To point that's he's just about to go **off** on it. He can't even contain it. It's found throughout the letter to the Ephesians. Check it, let's start with v 19.

according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

So Paul just said a lot of things, but in a nutshell Paul is saying this power is legit. Paul is about that power right. Let's check out these qualifiers together. He says that 1) it's the power that raised Christ from the dead, 2) it's the power that seated him at the right hand in the heavenly places, 3) that it

is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, in this age and the one to come. And I can almost hear Paul say, did I leave anything out? To say the least God has the power.

Right. But while it is legit, it still might be a little hard for us to grasp conceptually. So **I want to read you a story that I think puts some flesh on what this power is, and also helps explain why Paul is so passionate about it.** This story, which we'll put on the screen, is from Acts 19. As background, this is actually a story *about* Paul from his early days *in Ephesus*, back when the church was just getting started. And we're gonna read about a somewhat bizarre thing that happens there with a man possessed by a demon. And I think **this gives us a picture of what Paul means when he mentions "power" in Ephesians.** So take a look with me at Acts 19, starting in v. 11:

[11] And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul [nerdy but helpful fact: that word "miracles" is the exact same root word as the word "power" in our passage from Ephesians. So Paul is in Ephesus, doing miracles, by the power of God...] [12] so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

Now that's legit. If even the Kleenex you use has God's power coming out of it, you're doing something right. Now that being said, if today, a person offers to sell you a hanky that has healing powers, I want you to first look and see if they own a Mercedes Benz and a private jet. If they do, you might want to re-evaluate who's *actually* benefiting from that transaction. Because **Paul's power, more often than not, landed him in jail—not in a Benz.** If they're driving a Benz, that's a little different than what Paul is doing here. But that's a whole other teaching for another day. **Paul's gaining a reputation for the insane amount of Holy Spirit power he's walking in, and some people take notice of that,** v. 13:

*[13] Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists [because apparently that's a job you can have] undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you **by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.**" [14] Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.*

So apparently it's a slow month in the exorcism business, so these guys notice Paul's success in casting out demons and think, *this guy's obviously doing something right—let's just try and do what he's doing.* So they start trying to cast out demons by just saying "*by the Jesus Paul proclaims.*" They just walk up to the demon and essentially say, "ditto." This has got to be the *laziest* exorcism strategy in the history of the world. But look at what happens, v. 15:

[15] But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"

Bahahaha. So they attempt to use Paul's methods to cast out an evil spirit, but the spirit responds with a "hold up, guys. I know of Jesus, and that dude Paul is legit, but who exactly are *you* guys? What are you trying to pull here?" Just, as an aside, if you're casting out demons (you know, like ya do) and the demon stops to lecture you on the right and wrong way to do it, you may want to find a new profession. You know, if any of you today are in the game and you're wondering. Now, believe it or not, things get even *crazier* in this story, v. 16:

[16] And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

I can't say I have ever personally seen a person lose a fight so bad that they left without clothes on. That I think is what we call getting "whooped" in Tennessee vernacular. So ridiculous story, I know. But I **show you that story mainly so you can see what happens as a result of all this.** Look at v. 17:

[17] And this [meaning, this story about the Jewish exorcists getting utterly embarrassed] became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled [or magnified, made great—you might say it became "above every other name" in the city]. [18] Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. [19] And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. [if you do the math, that would be the equivalent of roughly \$5 million today. No small book burning.] [20] So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. [or, as some translations say, "grew in power."]

So this story about the demon gets out and makes its way around Ephesus. People start hearing about 1) how legit Paul is and 2) how *not* legit other folks who *claim* to have that type of power are. And as a result, **people just start worshipping Jesus.** And part of how they do it is by bringing their books, their dark arts, their Ouija boards, their Cardi B albums—you know, all the demonic stuff—everything representative of the dark spiritual things they were wrapped up in up until this point, and they put them in a pile and burned them. **They were so convinced of the power that Paul walked in, that the stuff they were wrapped up in seemed useless to them by comparison. So apparently, the power from God that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 1 isn't a bad power, and it certainly isn't a magical, make-believe power—it's the type of power that alters the trajectory of entire cities of people for the better.**

Paul, simply by his presence in Ephesus and God's power at work in and through him, prompted hundreds of people to come forward and switch from where they *thought* power lied, to where *Paul said* power lies. So if there's a guy out there familiar with where *true power* comes from, it's Paul. When Paul says "here's where true power is found," seems like it'd be a good idea to listen. Because by all appearances, *he would know.*

Alright, so let's see how Paul wraps up his thought back in Ephesians 1, v. 22:

[22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Yah, so Paul rounds everything out by talking about that power again. How Jesus is over all things, and then by saying that Jesus and this power that he offers us was given to the church. Now we say this here often but when Paul says church he doesn't mean a building, or even a once-a-week event. He means for us to think of a group of people that follow after Jesus.

And that group of people are considered "the body" of Jesus. "The fullness" of who Jesus is. Meaning that you and I, and those who know and follow Jesus, **are the physical representation of Jesus in the**

world. So this means that as the Holy Spirit continues to open our eyes to the various things in this passage, we will grow more and more into that reality. And when people in Knoxville see us, when they see us interact and love one another, when they see us serve those around us, they will be seeing a picture of Jesus. One of my favorite verses in 1 John talks about how, even though no one has ever seen God, if they see how we love one another, they will get a picture of what he's like. Which is pretty cool to participate in.

So that's Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. He prays that the followers of Jesus in Ephesus would have the eyes of their hearts opened, so that they might know 1) the hope they've been called to, 2) the inheritance that they *are* to God himself, and 3) the power that they now walk in. And that through all that, they would become the *physical representation of Jesus* to those around them, that God would make himself known in Ephesus *through* the Ephesians.

Now, upon knowing all of that, you may think "yeah that sounds great. So how do I do that? What do I need to do to make all that happen? How do I begin to open my eyes to all of that?" But here's the thing—I think the entire point of this passage is that this *isn't* something we can do. **This *isn't* something we can will into existence. It's something that God has to will into existence.** That's why it's a prayer. If it were something that you and I could do on our own, Paul wouldn't have made it a prayer—he would've made it a list of instructions. But as it is, Paul prays that *God* would accomplish this in them.

And so here's what I want us to do. Instead of spending this time drilling all this stuff down into a three-step process and pretending it's something we can do on our own, I want us to spend a few minutes, like Paul does, *asking God* to accomplish these things in us. So if you want, go ahead and put your stuff away, Eric and Sara are gonna come up, and let's just spend some time praying together to close. If you're here and you wouldn't really say you're a follower of Jesus, feel free to just close your eyes and listen, or if you want, try asking God to generate this in you for the very first time.

- First, for those of us who follow Jesus, let's just ask for God to continue doing this in us...Paul writes to followers of Jesus in this letter. So this apparently isn't a one-time thing, but a continual process of having your eyes opened. Let's ask God for that...
- For others of us, maybe we need to pray that God would do this in us for the very first time. Maybe you grew up in and around church, but never walked in this stuff, it's never taken root in your heart. If that's you, maybe try asking God to accomplish that in you for the first time today. If he already has, try praying that for others in this room, for others *not* in this room...that God would do that in them for the first time.
- Then I'll wrap up by just praying this prayer over all of us:

Father, for this reason, because I get to know and see our faith in King Jesus and our love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for this community and what you are doing in us, remembering it in my prayers, that you, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give all of us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the gnosis of who you are, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened, that we may know what is the hope to which you have called us, what are the riches of your glorious inheritance in us, the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of your power toward us who believe, according to the working of your great might that you worked in Christ when you raised him from the dead and seated him at your right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And you put all things under

Jesus' feet and gave him as head over all things to us, the church. We are the body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all in all. We ask this in your name, the name and power above all others. Amen.