

EPHESIANS 1:15-23 (Matthew 28:15-20) – Our hope in Christ

QUIZ – 2012 Top 10 resolutions in order

Reflect: lack of overtly spiritual. But grouping together:

(Physical fitness); Wisdom – Read more, poss experiences, travel; Hope – out of rut, poss new job; Financial - riches (save/spend, poss new job); Empowerment – physical fitness, new job, out of rut

(Come back to wisdom)

News stories – ‘Super rich and us’ – aspirational lifestyle (vs poorest 10% don’t get enough calories)

Prayer guide on North Korea – leaders with absolute power

Hope – Christmas truce in trenches – ‘In the middle of war: a moment of peace, a moment of hope.’

Hope, riches and power – 3 fundamental aspirations of us all – lie at heart of this passage – and at heart of Christian message. But as we’ll see today – very different to world’s aspirations.

But first – pick up on last week... RECAP – ‘every spiritual blessing’ – chosen, adopted, set free. Part of a plan, sealed by Spirit. Extraordinary promises – what’s outcome, what happens next? Rest of letter, but first – READ v15-16.

Naturally turns to prayer. Lot of prayer comes down to basic question: what is God like?

If God a tyrant – hide, and plead

If God a Father who blesses us so richly – natural to want to spend time with him to talk with him.

What child doesn’t crave time with their Dad? Prayer becomes less about results than relationship. (Results matter – but secondary).

Think about our prayer life – shopping list? A resort only in times of trouble. Maybe heavily focused on pastoral prayer needs – and that’s good. But I find Paul’s priorities challenging – there are two:

THANKS! – always a good way to start

Gratitude to God is the foundation of a solid Christian life and faith

John Stott: “Our favourite attitude should be gratitude!”

KNOWING GOD – wisdom that we picked up on earlier – but where located? In knowing God.

That is wisdom: Quote TS Eliot – lots of info and some knowledge – let’s not forget where true wisdom is. Note too where its impact is best felt:

- God to transform our **minds** (v17)
- God to transform our **hearts** (v18-20)



**WE NEED
BOTH!**

(My dad – old school preacher) “So many people miss heaven by 18 inches. Jesus is in their head, but He never reaches their heart.”

What in particular do we need to know more about?

Those 3 basic human aspirations – hope, riches and power. Who wouldn't want that? But look at how each is defined:

1. **THE HOPE TO WHICH GOD HAS CALLED US (v18)**

In sermon before Christmas as Ctk, I confessed that of all the virtues, I find hope the hardest to get my head around. It seems so *intangible*. At its root, hope is the expectation that things are going to be better in the future than they are now. But so often we can't quite pin down what that looks like. And in some senses, that's right – this side of grave, there will always be something that is yet to be fully realised, that remains just out of reach. That's partly what keeps us pushing on towards heaven – that's our future hope (more on that in a moment).

But in another sense, there is something much more concrete:

“It is a call to an altogether new life” (John Stott) – what does that look like?

Hope to which we were 'called' – what does NT tell us about our calling? Actually quite a lot (use as many as time for) – worth getting a bible dictionary or concordance and looking them up:

- Called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:6, 1 Corinthians 1:9)
- Called to be holy (Romans 1:7, 1 Peter 1:15-16)
- Called to freedom (Galatians 5:1,13)
- Called to one body (Ephesians 4:4)
- Called to peace (Colossians 3:15)
- Called to suffer for Christ (Mark 8:34, Romans 8:17)
- Called to glory! (Romans 8:17-18)

That is the hope to which we are called. Not something airy fairy, or wishy washy, not just a vague wish or aspiration: 'Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.'

2. **THE RICHES OF GOD'S INHERITANCE (v18)**

Not the sort of riches the world craves after. Here, Paul means our final inheritance – HEAVEN! But what will heaven be like? Again, worth reading up – some snippets

- We'll see God and worship him
- We'll reign with Him – WOW!
- Our bodies will be transformed
- Our relationships will be healed
- Jesus himself describes it as a great banquet



A GREAT PARTY
FOR EVER!

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ... He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:1,3-5)

SO IT'S WORTH GETTING EXCITED ABOUT!

3. THE POWER OF GOD FOR HIS BELIEVERS (v19)

Again, totally different from worldly power – to coerce and get own way. Power of God – note:

- it's the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (v20) – note how language runs out (v21) – maybe just easier to say 'Great Big God'! Good to reflect in hymns we use – e.g. Ye watchers – previous generations used much richer language than we do, though some songs come close e.g. King of kings.
- it's the power that Jesus now uses for his church (v19 – for us who believe – then v22)
- we need this power in our lives! – it's the only thing that has the power to change the human heart
- it's also our 'guarantee' that we'll get to our inheritance, because God, who makes the promises, has the power to fulfil them – note how this section ends as last one by focusing on power of God available for us believers – written to small, persecuted church – need to know that God can do it – and so do we.

As wrap up, so much to chew on:

Challenge to our prayer life – do we pray enough for the sorts of things Paul prays for?

Priority of wisdom – are we still praying and striving to know God better – many of you have lived a long life with God, but gently say that always more of God to learn and grasp, we can still learn fresh things and know him better.

God is offering what world seeks – they're just looking for it in wrong place. Not wrong to desire hope, riches and power – but we'll find them in *hope to which we're called, riches of our heavenly inheritance and power of God which raised Jesus from the dead.*