

Pastoral Prayer

O Lord, today we think of all the miracles you have performed throughout the world's history. Peter and John once said to a lame man at the city gate, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth rise up and walk" and he did. ... Instantly you healed him.

And Lord, that is exactly how we were before we came to you ... lame and helpless.

Just as You gave life to that man's legs you have given life to our souls and when we think of it we also want to leap and shout and praise God.

Lord you have done such great things for us and proven to us time and time again that you have loved us with an everlasting love.

You have drawn us with your lovingkindness, and today we would venture to ask more ... that you would draw us even closer.

We have endured too many powerless songs, sermons, and seasons. Even our best moments have only been a faint hint of something immeasurably better.

Lord we long to slip through the curtain and stand in the holy of holies and bask in the pure, undiluted glory of God.

Draw us nearer ... Give us grace to behold your glory and walk in deep communion.

Lord the truth is that we tend to get cold and our prayers become stale ... would you come and help us Lord?

If you would cause your face to shine upon us we would not only be saved our spirits would be brightened and our joy would be full ...

... our hearts would be filled with laughter and our tongues with singing.

And yet at the same time we would worship You for who you are because you have loved us, and because you have lavished upon us the unspeakable gift of salvation.

Lord the seasons may be getting colder but don't let our hearts!

Send us true revival and new life.

Restore to us sound doctrine and holy living.

Fill these pews with people who mean to do business with you and walk in your precepts.

... Draw people to this place and save great sinners from their great sins.

Lord, give us the joy of a bountiful harvest.

O Lord we pray for America, our country, for all of those in authority as you have commanded us.

Save our nation! Let your light and your truth go forth to every corner of this land and from there to every nation of the world!

We should be judged for our sins but O God, in your wrath remember mercy!

In time of spiritual famine give us heavenly refreshment.

For a fresh move of your Holy Spirit, we pray.

... brood over us, move among us, and tear us away from our lethargic moorings.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven."

... and Lord would you have mercy on us and start here?

"Let the whole earth be filled with a knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

... but Lord would you have mercy on us and start here?

Bless every Sunday School teacher, every deacon, every committee member, and every choir member, and every church member of Mt Zion Baptist Church.

Yes, Lord heal our feeble legs and make us to walk again ... even to leap and run and praise your name.

You have we have not because we ask not ... Well, Lord today we have asked, and we ask it in the name of our precious savior Jesus Christ. Amen

We Are Sealed

Eph. 1:13-23

¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. ¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. (Eph. 1:13-17)

Today's passage is incredibly rich.

... and in it we are going to see an amazing picture of what it means to be a Christian.

In these 2 long paragraphs it is as if Paul is holding up a "theological mirror" so that we can examine ourselves on several levels.

... If you think you are a Christian you can look at this passage and see if you really are

... If you really are a Christian, you can test to see if you are living consistently with who God says you are.

... Or, if there are people here who say they have rejected Christianity, they likely can look at this passage and realize they haven't rejected Christianity at all.

I say this because there are some people who say they have rejected Christianity but when you ask them to explain what they believe Christianity is ... their description isn't Christianity at all!

... what they have rejected is something other than Christianity.

... It might be a certain kind of religion or cultural understanding of religion that altogether something other than what Paul (and the Bible) calls Christianity.

In this passage Paul clearly shows us what true Christianity is, and what it means to be a Christian.

So, this passage should be incredibly important to you if you are someone who is uncertain about your salvation, someone who is inconsistent in your faith, or even someone who believes they have "rejected" Christianity.

We are going to look at three things:

- The security of the gospel
- The greatness of God's Power
- The value of God's Inheritance

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, (Eph 1:13)

1. The Gospel is Secure

Here is a wonderful description of someone who becomes a Christian.

Paul tells us that becoming a Christian doesn't start by doing something, it starts by hearing something.

What do you hear? ... The word of truth ... the Gospel.

... and after hearing it two things happen:

- You believed **IN** Christ
- And you were sealed **WITH** the promised Holy Spirit [Not sealed “BY” but “With”]

... and then Paul goes further to describe the Holy Spirit ... **“who is the guarantee of our inheritance.”**

Let’s take a moment and look at those 2 things.

What does it mean to believe “IN” Christ?

What is the truth of Christianity? ... Simply put, it is the Gospel.

... to believe in Christ is to believe the gospel.

The word “gospel” is an announcement of something that has happened in the past.

The Bible says a whole lot about how Christians should live.

... but what is sometimes overlooked is that what the Bible says about “how we are supposed to live” is based upon what the Bible says has happened in history.

False religions start by saying, “this is how god wants you to live, and if you live this way you’ll be saved.”

Christianity starts by saying, “here is what God has done in history to save you.”

The gospel is not good advice about what you should do, it is good news about what has been done.

The main theme of the Bible from beginning to end is to tell us what the Lord has done for us.

Why?

Hearing the truth about what Jesus has done for you generates faith ... faith comes by hearing ...

You heard the truth and believed ... but what does it mean to believe?

Look back at verse 12 ...

12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. (Eph. 1:12)

... here Paul speaks of his **“hope in Christ”**

In the Bible the word **HOPE** is another word (a synonym) for **Believe**.

In our English language when we use the word hope we mean ... “I hope so” ... I’m not really sure, but I hope this will happen or this is true...

However, in the Bible the word **“hope”** means an unwavering certainty about the future.

... it’s really a strong way of saying “this is what I believe.”

Paul is saying to the Ephesian Christians, *“even before you heard the gospel we had “hope (or we firmly believed) in Jesus Christ.”*

We humans are incurably *hope-based* creatures.

We need something to hope (firmly believe) in ...

... we need to be grounded in the assurance that something better is coming.

I don’t care who you are or what you believe ... all of us live our lives based upon what we believe about the future.

We are incurably *hope-based* creatures.

... how we live in the present is shaped by what we believe about the future.

Let me illustrate:

Imagine putting two people in the same room to do the same miserable, difficult, horrible job, all day long.

... but before they start you whisper into the ear of one guy "at the end of the day we will pay you 50 dollars" ... and the other a million dollars.

I can promise you they are going to be mentally and emotionally processing their circumstances in very different ways.

[The first guy, "I don't need this!" ... the other guy is going to be humming and singing all day long.]

... Why? Their different futures mean they will process their present circumstances very differently.

Now apply this to two guys going into Hardees tomorrow morning.

One is lost, "I don't know if there is a god or not, there is not heaven or hell Etc."

The other person is a Christian who believes that when all is said and done, they will be with God forever and at that God will come to earth and put everything right and defeat all evil.

Here is two people with two absolutely different hopes/beliefs about the future.

Inevitably, those two futures will affect how they live their lives.

Here is what I am saying.

... your belief (your certain hope) about the future will either brighten and strengthen your life or it darken and weaken you.

... your belief about the future will either make you sweeter as the years go by ... or it will make you more bitter with every passing year.

Paul says a Christian has heard the truth and has hope in the future that the gospel guarantees.

... So, what exactly are you hoping?

Paul gives us one more thing about the Christian.

Paul tells us that when we were saved, we *were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance (Eph 1:13)*

Do you know what this word “**guarantee**” means? ... It means “surety” or “first installment.”

The Holy Spirit that comes into your life when you put your faith and trust in Christ is actually a first installment of the final glory that we will experience when we see Jesus face to face.

... His Holy Spirit is in you now!

Paul is saying, “I want you to know you have received the Holy Spirit as a deposit on your eternal perfection...”

- This guarantees that you won't be lost or discarded along the way.
- It is God's promise and proof that one day you will be just like Jesus.
- This is guarantee is an assurance that one day God is going to wipe you clean and fix everything that is wrong with you,

... My friend this is earth shattering ... revolutionary ... more radical than anything else!

God has not come into your life to make a few tweaks and minor upgrades ... God has come into your life to transform you.

... IT is God's plan to make you into something greater and more wonderful than you could ever imagine for yourself.

And if this is true, and it is, then you should give up your small ambitions.

You need to be **aware of** and **realize all** that you are in Christ ...

... His Holy Spirit is in you NOW ...

... He entered into you the moment you believed.

So, why live lives plagued by fear, anxiety, doubt, ego, pride, bitterness?

Too many of us are like Esau.

Esau gave up his birthright for a mess of porridge ... in fact in the Bible he says to Jacob, "what good will my birth right be if I die of hunger."

... and Esau gave up his birthright for a mess of porridge.

I want to ask you ... What mess are you settling for?

The life of the child of God should be characterized by love, joy, peace, hope, meekness, kindness ...

... but instead, they are characterized by lack of self-control, fears, overwhelming anxieties, all kinds of things draining us ...

... it should NOT be this way.

There is not a thing wrong with you, that the Holy Spirit of God in you cannot change and overcome!

Can you not see how wonderful and powerful this is?

What is a Christian?

Someone who has heard, believed, and been sealed with the Holy Spirit of God for future glory!

You are sons and daughters of the king and that will never change because you have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

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, 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, (Eph 1:18-20)

2. God's Power is Immeasurably Great

Paul doesn't want to leave his reader with an abstract idea about God's power.

... Paul is very specific **God's immeasurable power is toward (for) us.**

According to verse 13 it was God's power, in God's Word that enabled us to believe in Jesus.

But here in v. 18-20 Paul goes even further ...

He says that if you believe in Jesus Christ, it is **ONLY BECAUSE** of the **immeasurable greatness of God's power ...**

... it is only because of the **working of His great might**

... and the power that it took for you and I to believe is **the exact same power** that it took to raise Jesus from the dead.

... salvation is God's resurrection power coming to you ...

... that goes along with Romans 3 where Paul writes that **no one seeks for God**

Or John 6:44 where Jesus says, “**no one can come to me unless the father draws him.**”

The power of God is so **immeasurably awesome** it can awaken the heart of sinner and make even the vilest person **long** for the holiness of Christ.

God takes the initiative in our salvation.

People say that the church needs to be seeker sensitive because there are a lot of people out there who are seeking for God ...

People are looking for religion ... but they are not really seeking him.

Let me explain.

People are seeking a resource, a tool to use ... and they think if they are real good, go to some church, be religious, read the bible, and when they pray then God will give them what they want.

And when they do all of that, and God doesn't do what they want ... They fired him!

They weren't seeking God ... my proof of that is this...

A number of times in my ministry I've had people say to me, "I've lost my faith ... I used to believe in God ... but not anymore."

And when I ask why they have "lost their faith" they will say something like ...

I was doing all of these things, teaching, helping, working in the church ... I led the choir; I was a deacon ... I was doing more than everyone else in the church ...

... but then this happened to me, or that happened to me, and I prayed and it didn't get any better

... so, I have no use for a God who doesn't listen to my prayers.

- *They fired God!*
- *They weren't seeking God!*
- *They had God on retainer and when He didn't do what they wanted or expected they fired Him.*

People will give you a hundred excuses of why they don't go to church or why they quit going to church ...

...and they try to appease their own guilty conscience by putting the blame on the church or somebody in the church ...

... here is the real reason they are not in church ... they need the Holy Spirit of God to draw them!

Paul is saying that Salvation is God's work alone, and it takes the resurrection power of a holy God to get a fallen, wicked, sinful heart to seek after the Lord.

It takes a holy omnipotent God to bring life into a dead sinner!

If you want God, if you long for Jesus, it is because God has opened your heart with the **immeasurable greatness of His power ...**

And Paul doesn't stop there...

... 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. ... (Eph 1:21)

Paul is saying that the power of God is being brought to bear on every circumstance of history ... for your good and for your redemption.

... past, present, and future.

As Paul says in verse 18- **THIS IS ENLIGHTENING!**

This alone should change how we view the circumstances of our lives because what we thought was a meaningless event in our past...

... we now realize that every one of these things was God actively working to bring us to HIMSELF!

The greatness of God's power has directed our lives and opened our hearts to receive the fullness of His love and grace.

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, (Eph 1:18)

3. Our Inheritance is GLORIOUS

Paul uses the word inheritance in verses 11, 14, and 18.

... the first two times Paul is talking about our inheritance **but here in verse 18** Paul is speaking of God's inheritance.

Paul is saying that we are God's possession ...

... and not just God's possession but HIS inheritance.

What is an inheritance?

It is the wealth and treasures of the Father!

Here God has the audacity to say, that although He has created the stars, the universe, EVERYTHING it is good

... but when He looks at you, he says, **THIS IS MY INHERITANCE!!!**

... this is my wealth ... my treasure ... my pearl of great price.

I AKS YOU ... what are the pleasures of this world compared to this?

God looks at you and He willing to use all of his omnipotent power not only to rescue you, redeem you, and keep you safe ... no matter what the cost.

... He then says, (after doing all of that) **“You are MY inheritance!”**

If you don't bring this glorious truth into the center of your heart and life, then you are going to be just like everyone else ... miserable, moody, and dissatisfied ...

... desperate for affirmation and praise

... hungry for one more “likes” on social media and devastated when they don't come.

... longing for the approval of people

... lying in bed at night tossing and turning because someone insulted you or made some snide comment ...

... somebody didn't notice you

... somebody slighted you

... NO, NO, NO!!!

YOU ARE GOD'S POSSESSION!

How dare you nurse grudges and walk around with a bruised ego and hurt pride ...

... get caught up in some major self-pity party.

... treat people differently simply because they didn't do what you wanted or acted in a way you didn't prefer!

YOU ARE GOD'S POSSESSION!

You need to bring that into the center of your being!

.... God has a valuable and glorious inheritance ... and it is YOU!

This isn't Joel Osteen, health, wealth, and prosperity ... this is the WORD OF GOD!

- You are sealed with the blessed Holy Spirit
- You are redeemed by the immeasurable greatness of His Power
- You are HIS inheritance!

Let me read you Paul's response to this glorious reality.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21)