

I remember in our last home in Garvagh, we lived up a rather long lane in the countryside. And when the house was being built there were a few problems at feeding the water supply from the lane which was at the bottom of quite a gradient. We moved in and I can remember the first shower. It was not only cold, very cold, but it was also a trickle. The water pressure was too low – there wasn't enough power to feed the house from the bottom of the lane. And the only way to make a difference with the pressure was to fit a pump. Well folks, the pump made all the difference. In fact, the shower in the bathroom, the first time we tried it, the pressure was so great that I remember it flying vertically on its holder and spraying the ceiling and most of the bathroom with it. The pressure was so great that it could literally take your skin off. But what a difference it was when you sorted the pressure out.

The Christian life at times can look like our water pressure in the house. We are told in Ephesians that there is immeasurably more power from Jesus Christ. It's ours, sitting waiting there for us to tap into it. And at different times in our lives, we can just go through the motions, but today my hope is that you realise there is immeasurably more to be experienced in the Lord than maybe we realise. Last week we marvelled at how God through Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, that he chose us in him before the creation of the world, and that through him we have redemption and the forgiveness of our sins.

You know over the years of being involved with different churches I've been on quite a few church weekends, and in some of the places we've stayed, the communal showers is just a little drip coming out from the shower head above you. People never get to experience that powerful flow. And that is what Paul is praying for us here this morning, that we would feel the flow of the spirit's blessing and power available to us.

In our verses this morning we find Paul's prayer. And as we listen into his prayer this morning, I want us to pay attention to what he prays for.

Verse 15 - *For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.* You see Paul has this special relationship with the Church in Ephesus. He has heard of their faith and love. Last week we saw how he outlined the blessings received in Christ, and now he's saying for that very reason, I know that you Ephesians are sharing in that blessing.

So it leads him to give thanks. Think about how the faith and love of the Church in Ephesus is leading Paul to his knees in prayer. So immediately we have to think about ourselves and ask this, does the faith and love of my brothers and sisters in Jesus lean me towards thanking God for them? Do we respond with thanksgiving when we hear about the faith of someone in our church, or are we not even interested? You see for me in this year 2022 that's what will bring me the most amount of joy; that in the struggles of these past two years when we have seen incredible waves of death around us, when people around us are struggling with mental health issues, when hospital waiting lists are beyond recovery, we have a people that say no matter what happens to me I will continue to trust in my Lord no matter what – that's the thing that will lift me the most; that personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Paul is doing here amongst many things that are probably challenging him, he says that he will never stop giving thanks for them. Back to my focus for us all in this coming year, who are you encouraging at this present time? Do they know that you are praying in thanksgiving to God for them?

And so now Paul moves into the purpose for which he prays for this church. Let's read verse 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'*. And that's actually my prayer for all of you in 2022 that you may have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know God better this year. This is why our core value of going deeper continues to be so important to me. For if we don't go deeper then our faith has no roots. In this phrase here *that you may know him better* it's the kind of knowledge that is so personal. The verb here in the Greek is not about knowing of something, but it's about knowing it at a deeply personal level. If you think for a moment about how you became aware of Jesus, it might have been in Sunday School, it might have been from listening to talks like this one. But there must come a point where we have to enter into a personal encounter with him. That kind of relationship is not a formality. It is a relationship that has such depth. You might be able to say much about your relationship with your family members, your husband and your wife, your children, but what can you say about your relationship with God? Paul desires here and I desire that it is greater.

And I think therefore as we sit with God's Word each day, our hope should be that the Spirit of God provides us with all wisdom and revelation so as to help us know God better, and I hope we can make a practice of this in our daily lives. The great preacher J.I. Packer in his book *Knowing God* describes the difference by saying *'how can we turn our knowledge about God into our knowledge of God. The rule for doing this is simple but demanding, and it is that we turn each truth that we learn about God, into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God'*.

The second thing that Paul prays is verse 18 *'I pray 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 his holy people'*.

So it's a knowledge of knowing God more, but then he prays that we have a pursuit of the hope. So what does he mean here by the eyes of our heart? Well in the ancient world, the heart was considered the decision maker of the body. It was the aspect of our lives where our mind and our will come together and we make a decision. In Psalm 119:18, the psalmist says *'Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your instructions'*. This is the kind of enlightenment that Paul is praying for. It's more than head knowledge, it's about heart knowledge. He wants the knowledge of God to affect our very decision making. It doesn't just affect what we say, or we think about God, but it affects how we live our lives.

It is Paul's prayer and my prayer for you that we would realise the hope that we have in Jesus. I was with one of our bereaved families in recent days as a follow-up to a family funeral. And we got chatting briefly, that even though there is great sadness losing a loved one, there is a magnificent sense of hope for those that have a real and living relationship with Jesus. 1 Peter 1:3-6 says this, *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ'*.

That's the hope that Paul is talking about. But Hope is a word that is often used in many different ways – for example, I hope it won't rain this afternoon or I hope that Man City win Europe this year. In that way it's a kind of wish, but the kind of hope in Ephesians is hope that is certainty. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ we are given certainty, that neither life or death have any hold on us. So whatever comes our way, hope is an anchor for our souls. The writer to the Hebrews uses that image of an anchor that is steady and sure. So Paul prays for this kind of hope. It will affect our very lives, because when our lives are grounded in this hope of resurrection, it changes how we think and how we feel and the way we act. So this hope when it settles into our hearts like this, it brings about joy, and peace, and the kind of living that is not dependent on circumstances but it is grounded in the knowledge of God and the knowledge of the hope we have been called. That's the hope that we so need for this new chapter post COVID, and when we couple that with our thoughts on last week that we have been chosen by God before creation, that he has so blessed us and we are forgiven, then all of us should be coming alongside an individual to share that hope. If we don't share that hope then what is it that we think this relationship is? When we walk in that reality it changes the way we live.

So Paul prays first for knowledge of God, knowledge of knowing Jesus more, and then he prays for a knowledge of hope of who we are made to be. And then thirdly in verse 19 let's read, *'and his incomparably great power for us who believe'*. He wants us to know that his power, his incomparably great power is at work in your life. For many of us, that remains like my shower in Garvagh without the pump being fitted. It's a kind of trickle that has no impact on us never mind anyone else. Paul prays that we would experience God's incomparably great power, and not some trickle. But Paul says that it's more than that. He says verse 20, *'That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ 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 name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come'*. He's saying that Christ's resurrection power is what he wants you to know. That same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you.

I think I said last week that Ephesus was the home for the goddess Diana. The temple was known for magical power, and the people would pray to these magical powers. So Paul is praying for the Church in Ephesus and he wants them to know that the power of God is far greater than what these people may have seen around them in those days. Paul is thinking about that temple as he writes and those people who are calling on Dianna to bring about power in their lives, and he is saying that Jesus is stronger, his name is higher, and his dominion and rule stretches far than anything now or in the age to come.

So what does that mean when we realise that hope, that power that is within us? Well it means that we are able to step into this world with circumstances that we face, and that God given power gives us strength, energy, joy, and God wants us to experience it every day.

So why don't we experience the power of God more in our lives? Well I think sin keeps us from the power of God. It's easy to allow sin to tune our hearts away from the heart of God. If we aren't focused on drawing close to God each day, the power of sin will very quickly take over.

The second reason is that we often are too busy. I've come to understand that busyness is actually a sin. And that is why this year cannot be all about the programmes if it isn't about encouraging us to awaken the power of God that is within us. It's like being on a running machine without a drink. We will very quickly tire and give up. We have got to be fed and stay close to God if we are to run this race that has been set before us, as Paul says, fixing our eyes on who? Not on our own efforts, not on lots and lots of people to do things, no it must be dependent on Jesus. He alone provides the power.

And with that proper focus, we take time out of our busy schedules every day and every week and we meditate upon the knowledge of God, on the hope we have been called to, and the truth of God's word. That's what Paul wants each of us to know today. Who today in your life needs to not only know that hope we have talked about, but actually needs to see it in your life?

I pray in this year ahead for each of you that you would make it your number one priority to know him more, that you would know the hope to which you have been called, and that you would know and experience resurrection power. Let's not leave it dormant or like that little trickle in my shower. Awaken what God has within you, and be a carrier of hope wherever you are.