Ephesians 1:15-16

"For This Reason…Pray!"

Sermon

The Apostle Paul, in the book of Ephesians, is giving to us a very broad picture. The letter to the Ephesians is written almost like a Missional Letter – he is detailing for us the Mission of God to bring about the reconciliation of all things that the devil through the fall has torn asunder. In 1:10 (the thesis of Ephesians) we learned about this plan – that God's plan is a "plan for the fullness of time to unite (sum up) all things in Him (Jesus) things in *heaven* and things on *earth*. Those are broad strokes. This is a cosmic manifesto where Paul is writing about huge mysteries. Things formerly concealed, but now revealed. The revelation that he gives are things that we don't see with the naked eye. It takes another type of seeing to see things from God's perspective as they really are.

Paul wants them to see this…and SO HE PRAYS.

Because of the massive GOD PERSPECTIVE that Paul wants to reveal to the Ephesians, he prays. He prays for God to open the eyes of their understanding and the affections of their hearts. So that they would see, and know, and love, and have victory as they are illumined to God's perspective of things as they really are.

Magic Eye: Some of you may know about this book, "the magic eye". It's filled with images that at first glance look like nothing. But if you stare at the image long enough, relax your eyes, and persist…you will have a 3D image revealed that was formerly concealed. All of a sudden you say, "It's a boat, it's a boat!" It takes another type of seeing. Paul's praying is in response to the glorious secrets of God that had been revealed to him…he prays for God to bring illumination to the Ephesians so that they would see what he himself sees!

Paul is writing from prison. The Ephesians are surrounded by paganism and persecution and spiritual warfare. But Paul wants them to see a reality that is far greater than their current circumstances, to see beyond what they see…God's Kingdom that is already ruling and reigning. Satan who is already defeated. Jesus with all things in subjection to Him. So…he prays for them to see this. God wants for you and me to see this heavenly vision as well as we too are surrounded by the challenges of our world.

Prayer is the doorway to unlock our spiritual sense of sight.

Context/Recap: Think of what Paul has already revealed to the reader in vv.1-14: He spoke of our spiritual blessings in Christ. That God has put us in union with Jesus so that *who He is* and *what He has done* is applied to our account. That we are IN CHRIST chosen, predestined, adopted as sons/daughters (vv.4-5), heirs with Christ of His inheritance (vv.11-14), redeemed by the blood of Jesus from the penalty of sin (vv.7-8), sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (v.13), and we have great assurance of a future hope of salvation from the presence of all evil both within us and all around us (v.4,14). This plan of God has been revealed to His children. ***It is our heritage and we are the heritage of God.***

"For this reason…v.15…Paul Prays."

What I want to do this morning is to simply walk through the prayer in vv.15-23 verse by verse to get a birds eyes view, *and we'll dive into the weeds of it in weeks to come*. *The goal of the next few weeks is to consider Paul's prayer as a template for how we can pray and for what we can pray about.*

Keep your eyes fixed on the text with me as we walk through it together carefully – I want you to see the progression of his prayer. Look closely, starting in v.15.

15 For this 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, (Paul is looking back on what he has already written, looking forward on what he is about to write, and hearing of the faith and love of the Ephesians…he give thanks to God, and he intercedes for them in prayer without ceasing. The verses following give us his intercessory prayer that Paul is remembering to pray for them)

17 that [the word "that" is a marker of purpose. He is remembering them in His prayers, "so that" – so here is the beginning of the prayer itself, and it extends through the end of the chapter, possibly into the next chapter] **the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory,** [Notice he is praying TO THE FATHER] **may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, *<u>that you may know</u>*** [Here is Paul's intercession, Paul is praying for the Father to give wisdom, revelation, and illumination in the affections of their hearts. He is praying for them TO KNOW. It's kind of like when you know something to be true, but then you REALLY KNOW it to be true. There is wisdom, there is revelation, and the affections of your heart are stirred in response to what you KNOW. He is praying for a miracle! He is praying for God to open the eyes, minds, and hearts of the Ephesians to all that Paul longs to reveal to them – He is praying for them to see THE MAGIC EYE of God's revelation with a different kind of seeing, a different kind of knowing. Now he gives three specific petitions/requests that he wants for them to KNOW….first petition:] **what is the hope to which he has called you,** [Paul wants them to know the hope of their future redemption and calling which he has already referred to previously…second petition:] **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,** [Paul spoke of the inheritance of God in vv.11-14 – He wants them to know the riches of this inheritance! Third petition:] **19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,** [Paul wants them to know the power and victory of God in the midst of living in a fallen world…this third petition Paul expands on…possibly all the way to 2:7. It is the greatest of the three petitions, and it reveals to us the heart of God's revelation in this letter] **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. 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.** (there is a lot there…too much to share right now…but hopefully you see the flow of Paul's prayer and we'll get to the particulars in the weeks to come.]

With the rest of our time I want to start off this series with 4 big ideas regarding prayer which I see in vv.15-16.

1. **God's sovereign plan inspires Paul to pray** –

The fact that Paul chooses to pray at this point in the letter is instructive on its own. Why? Paul has just gone through a long description of the Sovereign plan of God that starts "before the foundation of the world" (1:4) and extends all the way until the final redemption of God's people (1:14 – until the

redemption of the purchased possession - NKJV). Paul has shown that the entire span of our redemption is already DONE in the mind and plan of God. So why pray? Why not close the letter and sign off? If God is in control of all things, as we've been learning. He has the beginning, middle, and end victory already planned. Why pray? If God already knows His own plans, and who are a part of His plans, how He is going to work those plans out…if God already knows in advance how He is going to answer YOUR PRAYERS…why pray? ***Maybe some of you have thought that as I have been week after week teaching on the sovereign control of God over all things. What are we puppets? Do we even have a part to play?***

Some of you record football games or sporting events ahead of time. You don't want to know the final score until you watch it. How would you watch the game if you already knew your team was going to win? You'd kick your feet up, you'd sit back, you'd relax…you wouldn't be on the edge of your seat when the other team is winning at halftime. ***But what if you knew your team was going to win in advance, but you were actually IN THE GAME PLAYING? How would you view the game if you had a very real part in the game? Paul knows the victory is sure…and he knows that he is a part of the game…so he prays.***

I want to give you a word that I have found is very helpful in understanding HOW God providentially causes His plans and His victory to come to pass. The word is "compatibilism". It speaks of the compatibility of God's part, and our part. God's sovereign plan, works through the *means* and is *compatible with* the actions of His creatures. Satan, sickness, government, history, good, evil, planets in motion, kingdoms that rise and fall, God's chosen people…TIME…God is outside of it all and He is in control, but His plans unfold *through the means of what He has created*. Prayer is a mystery where the sovereign plans of God meet the desires and will of His people. Sometimes He says yes, sometimes no, sometimes SLOW and wait. In this way, God's plans are assured, and our prayers are a part of the plan and are effective, real, and necessary. This is a mystery to be sure.

Remember last week when Mike Vanlaningham spoke of God's Sovereignty (he raised his right hand) and our free will (he raised his left hand). Scripture teaches BOTH are true…so that our choices have a real effect in the world around us, we are responsible and even culpable for the choices we make – whether for good or evil. Now some people want to stress God's sovereignty to the neglect of our free will…(right hand up)…so you really don't need to pray, preach, persevere in your relationship with God. Some people want to stress our free will (left hand)…so God then isn't in control, the end isn't assured, not really, and you are anxious about all that will happen. God's Word teaches BOTH. God has planned, it will come to pass (right hand), and He uses our prayers as a means to bring about what He has already planned. ***Therefore, our prayers are effective, necessary…and we can pray with expectation that God really will work!***

Paul here has a massive vision of the plan of God that will come to pass, and rather than sitting back on the couch in v.15, or rather than just closing the letter…He prays! "for this reason"…he is praying…he writes, he preaches, and he is praying for God's plan to come to pass, knowing that it will come to pass.

Paul saw this as a great privilege, and we should too! It's one thing to watch your favorite football team on the screen (Go Seahawks), but it's an entirely different thing to actually have the privilege to be a part of the game, to rejoice at the victory when the game is finally won AND in the middle of the game while the victory is still unfolding knowing that you have a very real part in the victory. That's prayer.

Your prayers move the heart of God, and they are a means to bring about what God has already sovereignly planned. I can even say, on the authority of Scripture, "if you don't pray, God won't work (left hand)…but if you don't pray and God doesn't work, He didn't plan to work (right hand). This is a mystery, but you can know that your prayers matter GREATLY and they are a GREAT PRIVILEGE.

2. Paul prays God's Word

The glorious revelation of God's plan inspires Paul to pray that God's revelation would be known to the Ephesians. The content of His prayer in Ephesians 1:15-23 is drawn from God's revelation to Paul. He prays that they would have hope, that they would know the inheritance of God. That they would know the power of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. That they would see Jesus as a seated King far above every spiritual evil in heavenly places. That they would know that all things are put under His feet. ***In other words, Paul is drawing from the revelation that God had given to him personally and that he had received from His knowledge of the OT.*** He alludes to several passages of Scripture in the OT in this prayer. He alludes to what he has already written in vv.3-14. He points forward to what he is about to write more on – the church (4:1-16), spiritual warfare (6:10-18), our reconciliation and the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (2:1-10; 2:11-22). He draws upon what he knows of the glory of the Father. ***Notice, then, that Paul is praying in accordance with God's word.***

God's word is like fuel and prayer is like the fire that burns on that fuel. God's truth fuels prayer, it fans it into flame, it provides the kindling…and prayer burns in response to it. If you want to spark the flame of your prayer life, start building a fire with the kindling of God's Word.

Is your prayer life weak? How about your time in God's word? So often we sit down to pray, and we don't know what we are to pray, we just know we are supposed to do it, and we want to…and God has given us 66 books as a prayer journal. When you allow the Bible to become your prayer journal you pray effectively…you know why? Because you know that everything you are praying for is a part of God's plan! You have the content of your prayer right before you, you are confident about what you are praying. ***It's like giving the QB the play that you know will cause the touchdown because the game highlights have already been revealed to you! Use God's Word as your playbook for prayer.***

- **1 John 5:14-15** - And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything ***according to his will*** he hears us. **15** And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.
- **Using God's word as your prayer book will give you confidence when you pray**…because you are asking in accordance with God's will. Open your Bible, read the words, and pray the words back to God.
- "When asked, 'What is more important: prayer or reading the Bible? ' I ask, 'What is more important: breathing in or breathing out? '" — C. H. Spurgeon. Scripture and prayer become like inhaling and exhaling – you take in through reading, you breathe back out through prayer.

3. Paul prays when he sees God's miraculous handiwork

Look at v.15 – "**because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and your love toward all the saints…I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers"**. Paul is praying in response to witnessing the miracle of the new birth and growth within the lives of the Ephesians. How do I know? Because Paul had heard of their genuine faith in Jesus and love for the church…so he is

rejoicing and can pray effectively and confidently. Notice that he gives thanks to God for their genuine conversion! God was the source of their faith and love, not the Ephesians. He doesn't say, "I heard of your faith and love…and I am so thankful TO YOU!" He says, "I heard of your faith and love…THANK GOD!" Because God had chosen them, adopted them, redeemed them, sealed them with His Spirit…they believed.

When someone is born again…they believe! Their affections are changed! They begin to trust God in ways they didn't before. They begin to love others in ways they didn't before. We talked about this in our series on love. Remember the watershed – "we receive, we enjoy, and we supply the love of God in Christ unto the glory of God" The Ephesians had received the love of God, they now were demonstrating that transaction by supplying that love…and Paul was glorying in God for it.

Do you have genuine faith? How can you know? Do you trust in Jesus? Do you love His church, the assembly of saints (the word "Saints" simply means those who have been chosen and set apart from the rest of the world). When was the last time you thanked God for the miracle of the new birth. Do you know it's a miracle? This room is filled with miracles! We like to think of a newborn baby as a miracle…but the new birth is a miracle. 100% of all people are born through natural childbirth. Not all are born again – God intervenes into the natural way things work – that's a miracle.

You believe, you love the church…that's a miracle! Be in awe of it! ***When you see the miracle happen in someone (all of a sudden they believe, they are changed, new affections…new life) thank God for it and PRAY FOR THEM.***

4. The quality and quantity of Paul's prayer

Notice the quality of Paul's prayer…he "remembers" them… in "prayers". Paul's prayer for them in vv.17-23 is what is known as an *intercessory prayer*. Where you intercede on behalf of another and bring them before the throne of God in prayer. You might not be able to reach that prodigal child. You might not be able to physically help that missionary across the world. But you can bring anyone at anytime to the throneroom of God by simply bending your knee and praying for them. Through prayer, we can reach the entire world from our living rooms! Access is granted for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The Ephesians were stamped upon the heart of Paul, and so he prays for them…remembering them in his prayers.

He prays "without ceasing". This doesn't mean that Paul spent his entire day praying continually for the Ephesians, rather, he *often* and *regularly* was praying for them. ***Two bits of advice I want to give you to cultivate your prayer life where you can say that you are "praying without ceasing".***

First, have you tried to write out your prayers? – get some note cards or whatever works for you and daily go through them as much as time allows. Choose a specific time, a specific place, and pray through the cards regularly. If you don't have a specific time right now to pray, you probably will fail to pray regularly. If you had an appointment with the someone important, you write it down on your calendar. How much more important is it to schedule your regular appointment with God! Schedule it, and schedule it at a time where nothing can get in the way. Set small goals, try to write out some

prayers that you can go through. It's amazing how the devil will throw things in your path to disrupt your time with God.

Second, praying begets prayer – Prayer is a muscle that needs to be regularly exercised and flexed. I walked into a starbucks one day and there was a guy in there who was RIPPED. How did he get that way? It was over time, it took a lot of intentional thought, repetition, and discipline. Prayer is a lot like that! No one loves to start running…but over time you find yourself loving it when you give yourself to it. Start praying, set small goals, set a regular time, don't shoot for the moon, just be diligent to do it every single day…even if for 5 minutes…and you will find out that praying begets a lifestyle of prayer. Sooner or later you will find yourself going for walks and praying for lengthy periods of time. Don't think you need to read a thousand books on prayer, or study the theology of prayer, or have your part and God's part all figured out…some of you may be lost in a lot of what I am saying this morning…here is something for you – JUST DO IT! JUST PRAY!

Don't lose heart – It's easy to give up on prayer when we don't see anything happening. Keep praying and don't give up.

In closing, Jesus taught a parable to his disciples so that "they ought always to pray and not lose heart". He tells the story of a woman who was a widow and was wronged and she went to an unjust judge who didn't fear God or care for people…and she kept bringing her just case before him. He kept pushing her away and wouldn't help her, but she persisted *again and again and again*. Finally, not because he feared God nor because he cared about the woman, the unjust judge gave in and gave her justice. Jesus then asks the question, "if an unjust, wicked judge, is willing to give justice to this woman who was persistent, how much more will God who is just and who loves His chosen people answer when they pray persistently?" Are you giving up on praying, don't give up. Keep praying. God loves you. Sometimes He says no, sometimes, yes, sometimes slow – wait for it. All along the way He uses prayer to draw us into deeper fellowship with Him.

Prayer Prompts – I want to give you some actual prayer requests…some things that you can start with this week that will serve our church and serve your prayer life so that you can put into practice what I've said.

- **Pray for revival in our church and community – Eph. 1:17-23; 2 Chron. 7:14**
- **Pray for unity in our church family – Phil. 2:1-11**
- **Pray for God's Word to be taught accurately and fervently – 1 Tim. 4:11-16**