Ephesians 1:17-19

Spiritual Illumination and Christian Growth

Sermon

Jesus told a parable in Mark 4 of 4 types of soil. The Word of God is likened to a seed that is sown by a farmer on the soil. **For the first soil**, the seed is quickly snatched away by birds, it never takes root – this is a picture of the devil snatching away God's Word. You have encountered this - you share God's Word and it is almost immediately disregarded. **Then there is rocky soil** – the seed is planted, and it springs up, it shows signs of growth. However, when persecution and trials come the seed has not taken root because of the rocks…so the plant dies. The trials and tribulations of this world overcome the Word of God planted. This is the person who shows strong signs of conversion…but shortly thereafter they just fall away from the faith. The challenges of their new faith are too much for them, and they reject the faith. **Then there is the thorny soil** – it is planted, and it also shows great signs of growth. But there are thorns all around it. The thorns – the cares of this world – riches, sinful desires – choke out the plant and it too dies. **The last soil is the soil that is planted in good soil**, it grows, and it continues to grow….eventually, it begins to produce fruit…and continues to produce fruit to the end.

Out of the four soils, three of them showed genuine signs of being planted. The plant initially sprang up, but the rocky and thorny soil didn't endure. Only one soil endured.

What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus who endures to the end? What is needed in order for that follower to endure to the end?

One of the pastors at Harvest, Jeff Bucknam, spoke of what a genuine disciple of Jesus looks like: Three things. **First,** a genuine disciple of Jesus will ***profess*** Jesus Christ as Lord. He will believe the right things about God and profess them to be true. **Second**, a genuine disciple of Jesus will ***practice*** what Jesus taught. His life will be in line with God's Word. He will hear the word and live it out in his life. **Third**, a genuine disciple of Jesus will ***PERSEVERE*** in their profession and practice. They will profess and continue to profess. They will practice, and will continue to practice. They will endure to the end.

What will protect us from tragedies of the rocky and thorny soil? This parable is given to us as a warning. ***Do not be like the rocky or thorny soil Brian***! Endure to the end! The rocky soil was plagued with trials and persecution…and it did not endure. The thorny soil was choked by the cares of this world…and it did not endure.

Paul wants for the Ephesians to endure to the end…so he prays. He has said some radically assuring things about them, and he wants them to endure in the things he has shared…so he prays. They have shown great signs that the seed has been planted well - they have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love toward the saints (1:15). We see Paul planting the seed in Acts 19 where we read of the conversion of the Ephesians. That they burned their books on pagan magic that were worth the total of 50,000 pieces of silver – that's the equivalent of around 35,000 dollars today. This is the cultural context of the Ephesians. There conversion appears to be genuine…their repentance from their idolatry was clearly proclaimed in the sight of all the citizens, in fact, it sparked a riot as they were publicly denouncing

Artemis, magic, and the occult. **The plant has sprung up! But Paul wants them to endure to the end…so he prays**.

Look at v.16, Paul is remembering them in his prayers…

"16 remembering you in my prayers, [17] **that** (so here is the prayer…) **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,** [18] **having the eyes of your hearts enlightened**, (this is the prayer – it's a prayer for what might be called Spiritual illumination – that the Holy Spirit would give wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God. He wants for them to endure, so He prays for them to KNOW GOD. Then he gives three things he is asking for them to know…first) **that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,** (second…that you may know…) **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,** [19] **and** (third…that you may know) **what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.**

Three Things we can learn about prayer this morning from Paul…

1. **Paul prays to the Father of Glory**

Notice that Paul calls God His "Father". For some of you, the idea of a "father" is warped because of bad experiences. For the Jews, to call God "Father" was close to blasphemous. For the Gentiles, to use the name "Father" to speak of a transcendent deity was also a very foreign concept. Everyone needs to have their understanding changed. He is a loving Father who has chosen and adopted you knowing all of your baggage that you bring to the table. He loves to hear your requests. Here the radical thing that Paul is modeling for these Gentile believers that were formerly cut off from God, is the fact that we now have access to God! By praying to the Father, he is giving them permission to pray to God as Father also.

Notice how Paul describes God in his prayer as the "Father of Glory" or "glorious Father". Whether or not Paul is ascribing a title ("Father of Glory") or not is debated, but the mention of glory in this prayer hearkens the reader back to vv.1-14 where Paul clearly showed that our spiritual blessings in Christ are, v.6 – "to the praise of his glorious grace.", and, v.12 – "to the praise of his glory", and again, v.14 – "to the praise of his glory". God is the Father of Glory. We should know who we are coming to when we pray. Remembering who God is when we approach Him purifies our prayer. Have you ever tried to take several moments when you start to pray to first just acknowledge who God is. This isn't to try to work God up…like buttering Him up to ask something from Him. This is more for YOU to remind yourself who He is when you bring your cares to Him. Reminding yourself who God is will humble you before Him, and it will give you confidence that He is able to answer your requests. Jesus taught us to pray this way, "Our ***Father in heaven***, ***hallowed be your name". When you come to God to pray, remember who it is that you pray to.*** **He is your Father, and He is Glorious!** ***Paul draws attention to the glory of God – and this would remind the Ephesians in the midst of opposing pagan deities and spiritual warfare that there is One True God who is Glorious and above all and He is our Father.***

2. **Paul Prays for Spiritual Illumination**

Paul prays, "***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***". He is asking the Father for "wisdom and revelation that comes from the Spirit in the knowledge of Him." Remember last week when I spoke of the book – the magic eye. In order to endure we need to see with another type of seeing. We need to see things as God sees them…that's Paul's prayer here. That the Ephesians would grow in their knowledge of God.

Remember that the Ephesians lived in a very pagan culture. I think what Paul is doing here is he is asking for the Father to enable them to see who He is more clearly in the midst of the temptations around them to worship false deities. The reason I say that is because he uses very specific words in this prayer that were associated with the practice of magic and spiritual warfare. He wants for them to endure, so He prays for God to help them see things as they really are. That they have hope, that they have an inheritance, and that they have the power of God that is far greater than every spiritual enemy that we might face. He wants for them to see with heavenly vision so that they will endure through earthly struggles.

Paul is asking the Father for the "eyes" of their "hearts" to be "enlightened". These are words that would be used by the Jewish people as well as the Greeks and Romans to speak of a spiritual awareness. A depth of spiritual illumination. What does it mean to "see" with your "heart". Certainly, Paul isn't speaking of a physical seeing here…he is talking about a different type of seeing. There is a seeing that we see with our physical eyes…and there is a seeing we see with the eyes of our heart.

The heart in Scripture is the seat of our emotions, passions, and desires. Paul is asking that they would not only know God intellectually, but that their affections, passions, and desires would be awakened to God. ***This is how we endure through trials and temptations…we get a bigger vision of who God is.***

You can know things about God but not love God! God doesn't want only our minds…He wants our HEARTS…He wants EVERYTHING! There is a type of faith that believes, and sees, and even asserts truths about God, but doesn't love God. Paul is praying that they would become intimately aware of who God is. That God would open their eyes to a deeper relationship of Himself through the Holy Spirit. God is not only concerned with what we *know about Him*….but that *we KNOW Him personally, affectionately, relationally*…that we are *awakened to Him* in a vibrant relationship with Him. By the way, this is what you and I are truly longing for. Your heart is a desire factory and your soul is totally empty until it finds fullness in God.

It is a frightening thing to know that you can know truths about God but not truly know God. There are passages of Scripture that show a type of believing in Jesus that isn't a genuine relationship with Him.

- **John 2:23-25** - Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, ***many believed in his name*** when they saw the signs that he was doing. **24** But Jesus on his part ***did not entrust himself to them***, because he knew all people **25** and needed no one to bear witness about man, for ***he himself knew what was in man***.

Their faith was a *type* of faith, but it wasn't a *saving type* of faith. It wasn't a relational, intimate faith. This could be part of the problem with the rocky and thorny soil. They affirm all of the right things…but in the end they wither and die – crushed by trials and tribulations, choked out by the cares of this world.

Pray for God to give you spiritual illumination so that you will endure to the end. Pray for others around you to be given spiritual illumination so that they too will endure to the end.

3. Paul prays for them to endure through Gods promises and power

His prayer is that they would be given wisdom and revelation from the Spirit in the knowledge of God with the result that they would have a deeper, more intimate relationship with God…and then he gives three things Paul wants for them to be intimately aware of in their knowledge of God. Paul's prayers are very complex aren't they? But they are rich in theology:

First, Paul wants them to intimately know (v.18) "what is the hope to which He has called you". For Paul, hope is not an uncertain "wish"… "I hope it will be a sunny day". Hope is a confident assurance.

In 1:4 Paul wrote that the Ephesians were "chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him". That's our calling! Talk about hope! That spans the entirety of our redemption! Brothers and sisters, God wants for you to know the hope of His promises to which He has called you. The hope of heaven. The hope of all things made right. What do you see wrong in the world around you…God is going to make it right! Hope in God! What do you see wrong within you…God is going to make that right also! Hope in God! God has chosen you…and He will present you in the end to Himself "holy and blameless". You can know this…and you can intimately know this to be true. The devil wants to rob you of this hope…we fight this often! But the NT speaks so confidently about the promises of God that we are to put our hope. The Word speaks of these future realities as though they already are. Paul wants for them to see things as they already are from God's perspective. Pray for yourselves and pray for one another that we would become intimately aware of the hope that we are called to. We need hope! Speak words of hope to one another, speak words of hope to yourself!

Second, Paul wants them to intimately know (v.18) "what are the riches of His glorious inheritance". In vv.11-14 we saw that the inheritance spoken of by Paul was actually God's inheriting of us. Because God has chosen us as His special heritage…we are heirs of all that He has for us. This is how God spoke of the nation of Israel – they were His heritage. But what about the Gentile Ephesians?

Now the "inheritance" of Israel is a study on its own. Probably the best way to summarize it is to see that there is in the OT a specific genealogical line traced through Scripture and the inheritance is promised to those who are inherited by God and are a part of this lineage. In order to benefit from inheritance given to this lineage, you must become a part of the lineage.

It begins with a seed. In Genesis 3:15, after Adam and Eve sin and their death sentence is given…there is a promised seed who will come from the woman who will crush the head of the serpent, Satan. From that point on you have the physical lineage going down to Noah, and from Noah to his son Shem. The other sons, Ham and Japheth are left to the side as the OT continues to trace the lineage of the seed through the line of Shem to Abraham.

Abraham is then given a greater understanding of the promise of the seed. That from Abraham and Sarah will come a nation. Gal. 3 tells us that the seed promised to Adam and Eve will come from that nation. Then the lineage continues down to King David – from David a King will come, the Messiah. His Kingdom will rule forever and ever. Then we see the promise of the suffering servant in Isaiah – the one who will die for the sins of the world.

And then Jesus is born, from the lineage of Abraham and David. The proclamation of God's Kingdom – the gospel message now goes forth. The Messiah has come. The King of David, the Seed of Abraham, the Seed of Eve who is to crush the head of Satan, has come. But what about the Gentiles? Now we are grafted into this inheritance…the Gentiles, through faith in Jesus, have become members of the household of God (2:19). Paul is going to talk about this mystery later on in Ephesians that the Gentiles have become partakers of the promises of God through the gospel (3:6). But for now, he is praying that they would know the riches of this glorious inheritance that is now theirs as they have been grafted in to the inheritance and promises of Israel.

Third, Paul wants them to intimately know (v.19a) what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe – This third petition of Paul is really the subject of the remainder of Paul's prayer. He isn't just praying for power in a general sense, He is speaking of the power of God displayed by the resurrection, and the ascension of the Son of God who is now seated over every form of evil. We'll look at this the next time we meet God willing.

Church as we close now we want to pray together for our brother Garrett Reed. Garrett has served our church faithfully these last several months as the Security Lead. We thank God for these guys who are here to keep us all safe. Garrett is going off now for basic training in the Army, so as he has faithfully served our church he is now going to faithfully serve our country. We are blessed and honored to now pray together for him as he is sent off.