

Ephesians: God's Road Map



#2 What to pray for – Ephesians 1:15-23

Intro

Previously on God's Road Map. In our first sermon of the series we looked at

- Paul's Berocca for the spiritual life (that's *Berakhah*, actually; a Hebrew hymn of blessing)
- Paul's single sentence in Greek spans 12 verses in Ephesians 1:3-14
- It's a wonderful doxology – a hymn of praise for all Christians to learn to sing.
- Paul was writing to churches in an area we call Western Turkey, which included in and near Ephesus
- He was writing from prison, most likely from Rome, late in his life
- We learned that life following Jesus is has more affinity with an old paper folding road map than it does a digital navigation assistant. That is, God gives all we need for any road we are on, rather than a single "perfect" route to a destination.
- God's road map leads to a glorious destination
- A much better than the destination than the one we were bound for without Christ.



Verses 15-23 of Ephesians 1 contains the second-longest single Greek sentence in the New Testament. Once again, the Apostle Paul spills his heart emotionally. In this case Paul reveals his top priorities in prayer for the journey of life.

Let me ask you this question before we turn to the text:

When you set out on long journey (remember those days?), what are your top three prayer-points before you get in the taxi or uber?

- Do you pray for good health?
- Do you pray for safety as you travel?
- Do you pray for great weather?

In today's passage, Ephesians 1:15-23, note how the Apostle's top three prayer points for the journey of life and faith have a higher, wider, and deeper scope than ours!

1. To know our true hope and purpose (v18a)

The first of Paul's top three prayer-points, spilling from his heart of praise is that Christians may know their hope & their calling... "the hope to which God has called you" (Eph. 1:18)

What does Paul mean by our "calling"?

This takes us back to the first half of chapter 1 where God is praised for "calling" us, or "predestining" us in Christ. God planned before all time to bring all things in heaven and on earth into unity with Himself in Christ. We who are believers are caught up this great plan of God (God's road map). As a result, our lives have a greater purpose and a blessed future.

When we called on God, God had already "called" us.¹ In John 15 Jesus says to his disciples,

"You did not choose me, but I chose you... to go and bear fruit..." (John 15:16).

The Church, founded on those apostles (Eph. 2:20), is also "called" by Christ to go and bear much fruit to God's glory. In Romans chapter 8:30 Paul writes of God's plans to form one big, diverse "family" of people from all nations, saying...

"...those God predestined were also called; and those whom God called were also justified; and those whom God justified were also glorified."

In Ephesians chapter 4, Paul will urge his readers to "live a life worthy of your calling."² And in chapter 2 we will see that Paul believed God was in Christ on the cross making a "new humanity" that would be characterised by humility, grace and peace.³

¹ Jesus' first disciples were taught this in John 15:16 and told of their purpose, to live lives suited to their calling

² Eph. 4:1-2

³ 2:15-16

Paul even addresses his readers as “saints” or “holy ones”.⁴ The image here is from the Biblical temple, like that of Solomon. Like the features, fittings and furniture of that structure so specially crafted and purposed, believers in Christ are “set apart” for the sole purpose of bringing glory to God.

What, then, does Paul mean by our “hope”?

In our common usage “hope” is quite a different to how the ancient world saw it. For Paul it was more certainty than wish - an assured expectation.

Think of how you use the word “hope” today...

- For example, we hope that our State Premier will ease *all* the pandemic restrictions today. This is a baseless, romantic hope, but it’s emotionally powerful.
- When my dog, Castro, sneaks into the kitchen while I’m preparing food, he hopes I’ll pass him a nice fresh chicken neck. There’s no precedent for it, no promise of it, and no likelihood it will ever happen – yet he hopes.

The “hope” Paul prays about is altogether different – *our* purpose and destiny in Christ has solid ground:

- It has a firm foundation of God’s promises in Scripture,
- It is strengthened by the historical event of Christ’s resurrection from the dead - a sign of our future resurrection, and
- It is encouraged by the power and presence of God’s Holy Spirit

One writer says this hope makes Christians *tilt* forward. Another says it is “faith standing on tiptoe.”⁵

Paul prays that you will know your great hope and calling in Christ.

2. Know how precious you are to God (v18b)

The second of Paul’s top 3 prayer-points for life’s journey is to know how precious we are to God; to know...

“the riches of [God’s] glorious inheritance among the saints” (Eph. 1:18)

⁴ Eph. 1:1

⁵ Snodgrass, and C.F.D. Moule respectively

Sometimes Paul writes about an “inheritance” we will receive as believers in the future: like the riches an heir of an estate might gain.⁶ Yet, here, Paul has in mind an Old Testament notion that God’s people are God’s inheritance or possession.⁷

Paul’s prayer is that we will come to know that we are like the riches God will inherit in the future. The Church is God’s possession. We who are in Christ are precious to God.

How does that make you feel?

- When you pray to God, do you feel like your intruding?
- Are you worried you’re interrupting God’s busy day?
- Do you feel like you’re that annoying, needy child?

Instead, Paul’s prays you will grow to know you are God’s great joy and riches – we will bring God glory. We should learn that we approach God, God is already facing us, ready to listen, knowing of our joys and concerns; eager to see us grow into maturity.⁸

To use an Old Testament expression applied to Jacob and Israel, we are the apple of God’s eye.⁹

Paul prays that you will know you are precious to God.

3. To know God’s new life in us (v19)

The third of Paul’s top three prayers for the Christian life in Ephesians 1 is in verse 19 - that we might know God’s resurrection power at work in us. He prays that we will know...

“...the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe, according to the energy of the might of His strength” (Eph. 1:19).

Paul focusses on God’s power a lot in this letter (there are 4 different Greek words for “power” in verse 19 alone!) In the verses that follow, Paul points to the resurrection of Christ as the type of power at work in us!

⁶ See Col. 1:12 which some scholars see as a parallel passage

⁷ E.g Exodus 34:9 where Moses appeals to God to see His people as His inheritance

⁸ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16)

⁹ Deut. 32:10 and Zech. 2:8

Such power is not for us to exercise over others for our benefit. Instead, this power is fit for transforming the heart; renewing our thoughts and words and actions so that we may be a blessing to others and givers of glory to God.

Conclusion

There's Paul's top three prayer-points for the journey of life and faith:

1. To know our hope and calling
2. To know we are precious to God, and
3. To know new life at work in us

If we back up to verse 17 we'll see that these three unpack Paul's one theme of prayer for the church here - that we may know God better. He writes:

“I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you wisdom and revelation from His Spirit as you come to know Him...” (Eph. 1:17)

The “knowing” is not mere intellectual, theological knowledge about God.¹⁰ Nor is Paul pointing to a spiritual funnel for abstract special knowledge direct from the heavens.¹¹

Instead, Paul wants us to keep on coming to know God better as we receive God's Word as revealed in the Scriptures, and to keep gaining more insight through the light the Holy Spirit shines on that Word.

Paul's prayer is that we will know God better in a relational sense, since we have such privileged access to the Living God in Christ.¹²

Jesse Takayama is someone who understands privileged access. The Japanese tourist arrived in Machu Picchu in March this year but his dream of visiting the ruins of the Inca Citadel were thwarted by the pandemic. All tourist sites were closed until further notice.

Jesse chose to wait out the pandemic to see if he could eventually gain access to the citadel. He took a lodging in the closest village and became much part of normal community life for the next six months.

¹⁰ Yet, it's fascinating to see the proto-trinitarian and theocentric shape to Paul's beliefs at this stage of his life.

¹¹ Something so called Gnostics would claim a couple of centuries on

¹² Paul says, “...through [Christ both Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18)

Jesse's story caught the attention of the local mayor who subsequently told it to the tourism minister and Jesse was granted access to the magnificent Inca ruins even while no other person could.



Here he is, the most privileged tourist on earth today, at the sacred site!

How much more, the Apostle Paul wants Christians to understand, are we privileged to be able to know God! Through Christ, we have this privilege of access to God, and to all God's blessings as we journey through life.

Paul wants us to know – to *really* know – the privilege it is to be part of the big plan of God to renew all things.

Perhaps it's time to review our top three prayers as we journey through life.