

Spiritual Vision Ephesians 1:15-18

Introduction

In 1952 – a young woman named Florence Chadwick stepped off the beach at Catalina Island – determined to swim the distance to mainland California. She was an experienced long-distance swimmer – she was the first woman to swim across the English Channel – both ways.

The weather was foggy this particular day – as she set out. She could barely see the boats that would cross with her. She swam for fifteen hours – but then begged to be taken out of the water. Her trainer urged her to keep going – telling her that she could make it – that the shore was not far away. Physically and emotionally exhausted – she finally stopped swimming – and they pulled her out of the water. The boats made for the shore and she discovered that she was a mere half-mile away from her goal.

The next day at her news conference she said: ‘I do not want to make excuses for myself. I am the one who asked to be pulled out. But I think that if I could have seen the shore I would have made it.’

Two months later she proved her point – on a bright and clear day – she made the attempt again – and this time made the distance.

In this next section of this great letter to the Ephesians – we find Paul moving on to share some of the content of the prayers which he prays for the believers there

One of the things he prays for is for the Ephesians to have their eyes opened / enlightened to see the glory of this inheritance they have by virtue of their being Christians

In a sense – he is praying for them to see the shore at the end of the journey / the finish line in the Christian life

In running the Christian race – it is always important to have one’s sights set on what is to come

Charles Spurgeon: 'Many a man has been tempted to start upon a voyage by hearing much of the land to which he sails.'

Where are we sailing to when we put our trust in Jesus?

Where does all this end up?

When Paul gets to praying for believers – he sees that a grasp of our spiritual inheritance – having eyes to see such things – will only help us as we navigate our way thru this world

I. The Apostle Paul and Prayer - vv. 15-17

Here we get to listen in on the Apostle Paul’s prayer life – and we get to see some of the kind of things which he prays for

There are two ways to grow and develop in your prayer life:

- 1) Pray
- 2) Pray with others / listen to others pray

That is one of the side benefits of prayer meetings / or times of prayer with others

Someone may lift something up in prayer – and it may jar something in your own heart – and you think – ‘Oh – I want to pray for that too.’

There are several prayers of Paul recorded in Scripture / several of Jesus - - - they all are very instructive in the matter of how to pray

We will note a few items here in Paul’s prayer:

Paul’s Prayer’s were marked by:

- 1) **Gratitude**

*** Gratitude - - - we see Paul expressing gratitude for the Ephesian believers

He is thankful to God for them

Prayer to God should always include thankfulness [cf. Phil. 4:6, 7]

In our world – there is much to complain about / much to nitpick over - - - but – when grace is the dominant note in our hearts – we tend to see more things to be thankful for - - - we see more to appreciate

Paul thanks God for the good he has seen [or heard of] – and prays for more good down the road!

It is always something healthy for the soul – to stop and thank God for other people in your life – your brothers and sisters in Christ

Paul’s Prayer’s were marked by:

- 1) **Gratitude**
- 2) **An Outward Focus**

*** We notice the outward focus of Paul’s prayers

It is clear that when Paul prays - he spends a fair amount of time praying for others – as opposed to his own personal needs / etc.

If you were to examine your prayer life before God

How much is directed outward for the benefit of others?

D.A. Carson: 'If we learn to pray with Paul, we will learn to pray for others. We will see it as part of our job to approach God with thanksgiving for others and with intercessions for others.'

We should check our prayers – make sure that they have a healthy outward focus

A healthy prayer life will have a relatively small percentage in the 'God bless me' – category – or 'God give me' - - - we see rather that it has an outward focus on others and God's glory

Jesus reflects this in the Lord's Prayer - when it gets to personal petition – the petitions are corporate inclusive of others – 'Give us this day our daily bread' - - - we are thinking of those around us in our prayers and including them as we approach the throne

Moule: 'the recorded prayers of Paul form in themselves one of the richest of Scripture studies. Most observable in them is their almost invariable intercessory direction. He thinks of others, not of self, upon his knees.'

Paul's Prayer's were marked by:

- 1) Gratitude
- 2) An Outward Focus
- 3) A Focus on the spiritual - rather than material

*** Paul's focus is on the spiritual – rather than material needs

The main point of his prayer is that they would know God more fully – that they would grow in their knowledge of God

That God would give them 'a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him' [v. 17]

This reminds us:

Our greatest need is always to know God more fully – everything flows from our understanding and communion with God

We are not talking about knowing facts about God / but relational / interactive / experiential knowledge of God

Paul is praying that they would grow deeper in their faith

MLJ: 'It means that God should be real to us, and that we should be conscious of His presence . . . Is God real to you? When you get on your knees and pray,

do you know that God is there, do you realize His presence? It is this that the apostle has in mind.'

Faith is more than knowing about God – it is knowing God

We might know a lot of details about someone – like a President

I know that George Bush was the 43rd President of the United States – his wife's name is Laura - twin daughters Jenna and Barbara

His dad was the 41st president – served as VP for Reagan

I know a lot about George Bush – but I don't know him in any experiential / relational sense

For that – he would have to be someone that I have spent time with / etc.

When we have a kind of experiential relationship with God – God is someone we have spent time with - - - we begin to sense how God feels about things / what is pleasing to Him

We have spent time in His Word / in prayer communing with Him

When we have this experiential relationship with God - - - we are more aware of His presence in prayer - - - we are conscious of His blessings - - - we are conscious of His presence in our day to day activities - - - we know when we have offended Him - - - we find ourselves living more in light of eternity and less in light of this world

Robert Morgan shares of a Christian who was relatively new to the faith – he was growing in studying God's Word / prayer - - - but every now and then in a heated moment – some profane words would slip from his tongue. He told Morgan about this.

Morgan said: 'give me an example – go ahead and curse right now.'

'oh no ' – he said embarrassed. 'I can't do that.'

'Sure you can' – Morgan said – 'let her fly'

'No' - he repeated

When I asked why, he replied, 'You're my pastor, I can't cuss in front of you.'

'Well' – I said – 'If you're too ashamed to cuss in my presence, why aren't you ashamed to do it in the Lord's presence? He's always with you.'

The young man got his point

That's what Paul is praying for – this experiential knowledge of God – He is here – I am living in light of His presence

II. The Eyes of the Heart - v. 18

Here – we find Paul praying for this spiritual vision - - - that the eyes of the heart would be made to see such great truths

There are things to be seen in this world – that require this spiritual vision

Some of you may remember back when 3-D images became popular for a while

And you could look at a picture – but if you just took a casual glance at the picture – it didn't look like anything was there – or you didn't see the 3-D image

But – for the person who patiently waited for their eyes to adjust – they began to see the real picture within the imaging clear as crystal

The 3-D image was there all the time – but only those saw it who took the time to allow their eyes to adjust

In the spiritual realm – we are told that there is more to this world than meets the eyes

There is a spiritual realm / a supernatural realm

Some try to deny it – they are like the person looking at a 3-D image and saying – ‘I don't see it – where / what?’

You will never understand the world or humanity if you ignore the spiritual realm

This idea of spiritual vision shows up in a famous OT text

II Kings 6:15-17

The king of Syria is trying to take Elisha captive – sends a great army after him - and Elisha's servant is in great fear

Elisha: ‘Don't fear – there are more with us than with them’

Elisha then prayed: ‘O Lord – open his eyes that he may see.’

And God opened the servant's eyes and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire all around for protection

Elisha had a kind of spiritual vision

Paul wants us to have a kind of spiritual vision – that will be an aid to our spiritual lives

Because of our fallen nature – we need God's Spirit to open our eyes to see certain things – spiritual truths

Paul is praying for believers – so the idea is that to grow spiritually - - - we need God's Spirit to show us these things in an ongoing manner

We see this idea of spiritual vision all over the Scriptures

Ps. 119:18 - 'Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law.'

'God – open my eyes to see what is in your word!'

When you read God's Word – pray for understanding – 'Show me Lord what is here'

Calvin: 'when we come to be taught God's Word, or when any one of us reads it by himself, let us not imagine our minds to be so discerning that we are able sufficiently to understand whatever the Scripture tells us, but let us acknowledge our own lack of understanding and pray God to make His doctrine prevail with us in such a way that it may not slip from us.'

We see this idea of spiritual sight with Jesus all over the place

He talks of people having eyes to see / having ears to hear

Jesus referred to the Pharisees as blind – they don't see spiritual truth

Matt. 15:13-14

He said these words to Peter – after Peter made his great confession of faith

Matt. 16:17 - 'Blessed are you Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.'

Peter's eyes have been opened

Paul picks up on this theme in I Corinthians

He says the word of the cross is to those who are perishing – foolishness [1:18]

He then goes on to explain the problem is with the natural man

His heart is corrupt – and so he does not see - - - he needs the Spirit to open his eyes

I Cor. 2:14 - 'But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually appraised.'

The inability of man to see and perceive spiritual truth is not due to a lack of intelligence but due to the corruption of the heart. The eyes of the heart must be opened.

W.A. Criswell: 'One does not get to heaven because he is shrewd or smart. Now the vehicle and the instrument by which God reveals the truths of heaven to us is in the enlightenment of our inward souls.'

What we need is illumination – the opening of our eyes to spiritual truth

Paul turns the Christian to his hope – what lies before us

We use 'hope' oftentimes in a way of wishing for something – 'I hope it doesn't rain . . .'

But – biblical hope is something that is certain – but for which we are waiting for

***** Rom. 8:23-25**

Our hope is in the resurrection / the consummation / the kingdom

The hope of eternal life – Titus 1:1, 2

We hope for certain realities based on the promises of God

I John 3:1-3

The faith of the Christian is a forward looking faith - - - we are constantly called to recognize certain realities and events that will occur in the future - - - the return of Christ / the resurrection of the body / the kingdom / our inheritance among the saints

As unbelievers – we were without hope

I Thess. 4:13 – some are without hope in the face of death – but not the Christian

The Christian is pointed to future glory

What does the future hold for believers? [it holds an inheritance]

We will see God / He will dwell with His people

We will gather with all believers of all time to offer up praise to God

We will enjoy all that God has laid up for His people

When Paul visited heaven – God had to give him a thorn in the flesh to bring him back down to earth – keep him from exulting too much in it

That is where we are headed

Our inheritance

I Cor. 2:9 - 'eye has not seen nor ear heard . . . all that God has prepared for those who love Him'

Christianity has this forward look – an eye on the prize / a vision of what awaits us at the end of the journey

We are to live in light of eternal realities

The Christian life can be lived faithfully only if it is lived in light of the end

Conclusion

It was John Newton who immortalized the gaining of spiritual sight in His great hymn
Amazing Grace

Amazing Grace - how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me

I once was lost - but now am found

Was blind but now I see

God opened his eyes to the truth

We come to the Lord's Table – we are to keep 2 events before our eyes

- 1) The death and resurrection of Christ
- 2) His 2nd Coming