

Knowing God

Part 2:

God's Purpose for Us is to Know Him Better

Scripture: *Ephesians 1:15-23.*

Exegetical Big Idea: It is through the *power* of the Holy Spirit that God works out in our lives His *plan* and *purpose* of bringing us to know Him better.

Introduction

Today is Palm Sunday. Traditionally the Christian church has on this day commemorated the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem a week before His death and resurrection, which we will celebrate next week on Easter Sunday. Because one of the main reasons for Christ's death and resurrection was so that we would come to know God, I explained last Sunday that over the two Sundays leading up to Easter, and on Easter Sunday, we are reflecting on the theme of *Knowing God*.

For the sake of those who were not with us last week, I explained that in both the OT and the NT the concept of knowing God refers to experiential knowing, rather than mere intellectual knowing about God. I explained that God originally created us with that kind of deep inner experiential knowledge of Him, not just knowing *about* Him. We lost this experiential knowledge of God when our first parents disobeyed Him in the Garden, and they, with all of us inside them, were banished from God's presence in the Garden of Eden. So, God's overriding desire for us is for us to recover, through what Christ did for us on the cross, that lost experiential knowledge that we had of Him before the Fall.

Last Sunday, in our first sermon in this three sermon series, from the story of Elijah in **1 Kings 17 and 18**, we reflected on the *profile* of those who know God. On this Palm Sunday morning we are turning to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, specifically, from the first of his two prayers in this epistle, which is found in **Eph. 1:15-23**, where Paul helps us to see that God's primary *purpose* for us is to know God.

This prayer of Paul helps us to discover three truths about knowing God. First, we see that God's primary *purpose* for us, in Christ, is to know God better. Second, we see something of God's *plan* for accomplishing this purpose in our lives. Third, we come to understand God's *power* at work in our lives to carry out this plan. *Read Passage.*

I. God's Purpose for Us (Verses 15-17)

- 1) Paul begins his prayer for the Ephesian Christians in **verse 17** with these words: *I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.* The original Greek word for *know* that Paul used in this verse refers to experiential knowing rather than intellectual *knowing about*, as I have already explained. This word refers to not just knowing about someone or something intellectually, but rather, to knowing something or someone intimately through personal experience. Eg: *putting my hand in fire.*

- 2) When Paul writes *I keep asking* that God may make *you know him better* he is saying that he prayed persistently and continuously for the Ephesian Christians to come to know God better.
- 3) This was because, in Paul's understanding, knowing God *better*, is God's main purpose for us as Christians. Paul based this understanding on the fact that God created us to *make friends* with us, as amazing as that may sound to us. We see this right from the beginning of the Bible in **Gen. 3:8** where we read about God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, looking for our first parents, Adam and Eve, to join Him and to share His company. However, as I noted earlier, Adam and Eve, with all of us inside them, broke that friendship between God and us through their disobedience to God in the Garden. This is why Christ came into the world; to restore that broken friendship and to bring us to know God.
- 4) We know from Paul's epistles that he traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire. In the course of his travels, as he interacted regularly with rulers, soldiers, merchants, laborers, farmers, and slaves, Paul came to see the spiritual poverty of the Roman world. He saw that most people, regardless of their material wealth or social position, suffered from the same spiritual condition that was characterized by depression, discouragement, fear, anxiety, superstition, and the dread of the future, with no hope of life beyond death.
- 5) Paul contrasted all this with his own experience of Christian joy, love, and faith that had transformed his life. Although Paul's life as a missionary was a very tough and difficult one, we know from his testimony in this epistle as well as from his other epistles, that his Christian joy, love, and faith came from the fact that he understood God's main purpose for him as being for him to know God better.
- 6) This is why he prayed this prayer for the Ephesian Christians so persistently and continuously. He wanted the Ephesian Christians to share his understanding that God's main purpose for them is to know God better so that this would become the basis of their own Christian joy, love, and faith.
- 7) This is why Paul's prayer in this passage for the Ephesian Christians that they would grow in their experiential knowledge of God should be our own prayer for ourselves. And this is why this is our **first P** from this passage.

II. God's Plan for Us (Verse 18)

- 1) In **verse 18** Paul writes this: *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.* Here, Paul has put together two NT truths that help us to understand God's plan at work in our lives for bringing us to know Him better.
- 2) First, Paul helps us to see that God's plan relates to *the hope to which God has called us*. In the NT the word *hope* refers to something that is absolutely sure of happening. So, here, Paul is referring to our ultimate Christian destiny of complete spiritual transformation that will be realized at Christ's second coming.

- 3) In the context of his prayer here, Paul is also implying that this Christian hope of spiritual transformation is being realized even now in our Christian lives through our daily struggles. This should remind us that in all things at all times, especially when life seems to make no sense at all, God is working to spiritually transform us to be the kind of people He wants us to become.
- 4) Second, still in **verse 18**, Paul mentions *God's riches of His inheritance in us*. Let me point out to you that, here, Paul is *not* talking about our inheritance in Christ, but rather, he is referring to God's inheritance in us. In other words, Christians are God's inheritance, we are God's cherished property, we are very precious to God.
- 5) So, when we put these two NT truths in **verse 18** together, the point we draw from what Paul writes here is that, as God works through all the unpredictable twists and turns of our daily lives to transform us into the image of Christ, we can take comfort from the fact that because we are precious to Him, God will never leave us to be undone by the struggles we go through.
- 6) This helps us to see that our Christian lives need not be a depression or fear filled response to the discouraging and difficult situations and circumstances we sometimes experience. By way of illustration, let me share with you part of my family's experience here at Rosslyn. *Share Kofi Rosslyn story*.
- 7) This Rosslyn experience of my family, and your own similar experiences of God's faithfulness, confirm the point we are drawing here in **verse 18** that because we are His precious inheritance, God's firm commitment to us in the rough and tumble of our lives, as He works out our spiritual transformation in Christ, constitutes the *plan* that God uses to accomplish His purpose of bringing us to know Him better. These experiences, you see, bring us to know God better and better every day. This is our **second P** from this passage.

III. God's Power in Us (Verses 19-23)

- 1) In this final part of Paul's prayer he refers to God's *incomparably great power for us who believe*. We know that Paul is referring here to the power of the Holy Spirit because, earlier in this chapter, in **verses 13** and **14**, he has already reminded us that when we first became Christians, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit that marks us as belonging to Christ.
- 2) In **verses 20** and **21** Paul explains that this power of the Holy Spirit is the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at the right hand of God the Father in the heavenly realms far above all rule and authority. This tells us that, as Christians, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives can enable us to overcome every sinful habit and every demonic force that we will ever have to deal with.
- 3) In **verses 22-23** Paul goes on to declare that Christ is *head over everything for the church, which is His body*. One of the things this means for us is that because Christ is the head of the church, the power of the Holy Spirit is going to be demonstrated in us, the church, in the midst of our daily pressures and problems.

- 4) In other words it is the power of God the Holy Spirit power in us that gives us the ability to be patient in maddening and abrasive situations, the ability to love a person when he is irritating and unlovable, the ability to be joyful in the midst of suffering and distress, and the ability to be thankful in the midst of need and deprivation.
- 5) This, by the way, this is how God develops the fruit of the Spirit in our Christian lives. Let me once again share a personal testimony of this with you. *Share JG story.*
- 6) You see, experiences like this confirm to us that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that God works out in our lives His plan and purpose of bringing us to know Him better.
- 7) This is our **third P** from this passage.

Conclusion

So, those are our **3P's** from Paul's first prayer in his epistle to the Ephesians that lead us to surmise that God's primary purpose for us as Christians is for us to know Him better.

Let me turn your attention back to **verse 17**, where, at the beginning of our reflections on this passage, Paul declared that he prayed persistently for the Ephesian Christians to come to know God *better*. The word *better* refers to an enhancement or improvement to an existing product or condition. This means that the process of coming to know God had already begun in the lives of the Ephesian Christians. This is confirmed in the two preceding verses, **verses 15 and 16**, where Paul stated that ever since he heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus he had not stopped giving thanks for them.

This means that their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ had initiated in the lives of the Ephesian Christians the process of coming to know God. Paul's prayer in this passage, therefore, is that, now that this process had begun in their lives through their faith in Christ, the Ephesian Christians would grow in their experiential knowledge of God.

It goes without saying that we only get to know a person *better* with time. Think of the reality of marriage, for example, in which we get to know our spouses better and better with the passing of time. Sometimes, of course, as this happens, some spouses wonder if they would have married their spouse if, before their marriage, they had known them as well as they now know them. As a pastor, when I work with couples that are struggling in their marriages, this almost always comes up.

Fortunately, unlike our human relationships, in our relationship with God, the better we get to know Him with the passing of time, the deeper we grow to trust Him and to love Him as we daily experience His faithfulness, His kindness, and His goodness in our lives.

This is why in Paul's second prayer for the Ephesian Christians in this epistle, in **Eph. 3:19**, he prays that they would come to understand and to experience how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ that surpasses all human understanding. In **Psalm 34:8**, in the KJV, this is how the Psalmist put it: *O, taste and see that the Lord is good.*

This poetic phrase reminds us that you can know all about the scientific details of a fruit, for example, but it is only when you put it in your mouth and you taste it that you will experience what that fruit really is in terms of its exact flavor and its sweetness. When you swallow it, that fruit then begins its journey of being transformed to become a part of you, a part of your body.

This is exactly the same in our relationship with God. It is when we taste Him, that is, when we come to know God better and better that we begin to be transformed to become more and more like Jesus Christ.

But, like the Ephesian Christians, it is only when the process of coming to know God experientially has already begun in our lives that we can grow to know Him *better*, as Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians in this passage.

This is why next Sunday, which is Easter Sunday, in our third and final sermon in this sermon series, we shall once again turn to the Apostle Paul, and this time, from his letter to the Philippians, reflect on what initiates in our lives the *process* of coming to know God.

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March 13th, 2019.