

Sermon – 16/03/2008 am

Light of Life

Study Text: Ephesians 1:17

How is your eyesight? Do you have difficulty seeing things in the distance? Do you have myopia? My daughter, like many people, wears glasses so she can see in the distance. When she goes surfing she takes her glasses off. But when she comes out of the water she has trouble finding her hat, towel and glasses on the beach.

What about your spiritual eyesight? Spiritually we are all short sighted. We have difficulty seeing far ahead on our spiritual journey. We have difficulty seeing beyond life in this world. We get so engrossed in the things of this world, things that we can see, that we forget about the things that we cannot see. We forget our God who is spirit, who is invisible yet infinite and all-powerful.

There is a great story in the Old Testament about the prophet Elisha and his servant. The king of Syria was fighting with Israel at the time. He sent his powerful army to the town of Dothan where Elisha was staying. His soldiers with horses and chariots surrounded the city. When the servant saw this army he was terrified. 'What shall we do' he cried out. Elisha said 'do not fear for *those who are with us are more than those who are with them*' (II Kings 6:16).

What did Elisha mean? There were not many soldiers in this town of Dothan. They were vastly outnumbered by the Syrians. What Elisha prayed was that his eyes would be open to see the army of God that was protecting them. God opened the spiritual eyes of this young man and *he saw and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha* (II Kings 6:17). God revealed to this young man what lies beyond the things that we can see in this world. He saw into the heavenly realms, he saw the heavenly host under the command of God.

Paul told the Corinthians that the things of this world, the things that are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Corinthians 4:18). His prayer for the Ephesians is along the same line. He prayed that the Father of glory would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation that they might see and know God better.

Wisdom and Revelation

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians began with thanksgiving. He gave thanks to *the God of our Lord Jesus Christ* for their faith and love. He thanked God because it was the Spirit of God that moved them to faith and love.

God quickened their dead hearts and made them alive in Christ. They once walked in darkness, according to the ways of this world. Their hearts were blind and they could not see where they were going. They were driven by pride and the lusts of the flesh. They were motivated by the desires of the sinful nature (2:3). They could not see beyond today. They wanted everything the world had to offer and they wanted it now.

Binge drinking that we are hearing so much about at the moment epitomises such a life. See what Paul later writes to the Ephesians – *do not be drunk with wine which leads to debauchery but be filled with the Spirit* (5:18). Drink once ruled their lives as they walked in spiritual darkness. Drink and drugs continue to hold many in the power of darkness.

Paul prays for **spiritual** wisdom and knowledge not worldly wisdom and knowledge. Many intellectuals walk in total darkness – and there are indeed many who consider themselves intellectuals. What do you think of those who tell you this world came about in a big bang? Do you not find it tragic that some spend their whole life trying to prove what is contrary to the word of God? Do you not find it tragic when anthropologists try to tell us that people living naked in the jungle and worshipping spirits in the trees are living an ideal life?

‘We are all born blind and understand nothing of God’s spiritual grace, unless he opens our eyes and takes away the veil that is upon them, and even gives us a new sight which we do not have. For our eyes are worse than put out until he enlightens them by his Holy Spirit’ (John Calvin).

God had opened the eyes of the believers in Ephesus. *You were once in darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of the light* (5:8). *God has shone into their hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (II Corinthians 4:6). Hearing the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ their eyes had been opened by the power of the Holy Spirit.

These believers could now see the cross of Jesus in its true light. They could see that it was God’s will for Jesus to die, and that he had died to take away their sin. They saw that in the blood of Jesus they had forgiveness of their sins. Moreover, God gave them the Holy Spirit to seal of their salvation. In the Holy Spirit they had the guarantee of their eternal inheritance.

The Cross was no longer a mystery to these believers. Many celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ but how many understand the significance of his death and resurrection for them and for this world. Is it just a ritual to be performed on Good Friday? Our whole nation takes a holiday on this day but most do not know why it is called Good Friday. Darkness pervades human hearts all around. What about your heart?

The world today, as in the day of Paul, abounds in knowledge. Worldly knowledge is expanding exponentially but what about spiritual knowledge? Some think that it was part of God’s purpose to send Jesus into this world at a time when human knowledge and philosophy was at its zenith. The Greeks were searching everywhere for wisdom and knowledge. They spent all their time telling or listening about something new (Acts 17:21). It is ironic that Jesus revealed himself to an intellectual man like Paul. It is ironic that this reborn man preached the simple truth of Christ crucified to these intellectual giants saying *the foolishness of God is wiser than men* (I Corinthians 1:25).

Enlightened Hearts

Why was Paul praying for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened? (1:18). He was writing to believers, to the saints at Ephesus. Their eyes had been opened by the Holy Spirit to see their sinful hearts and to see the wonder of what Jesus had done in going to the Cross for them. They were no longer walking in the dark but in the light. Still he prays that they would be enlightened.

He would be a bold and foolish man who declared that he knew all there was to know about God. For all his intellectual and spiritual prowess, not even the apostle Paul made such a claim. As he neared the end of his earthly life he said *not that I am already perfected but I press on* (Philippians 3:12). He reflected on the sovereignty of God *who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see* (I Timothy 6:16).

We all have spiritual myopia. We all look through a glass dimly. *We see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Then I shall know as I am known* (I Corinthians 13:12). God is infinite so with our finite minds, with the limitations of the body we live in, we cannot comprehend him fully. God's love is beyond measure. It surpasses knowledge! Paul prays for these same Ephesians that they will be able to comprehend with all the saints the magnitude of the love of Christ – which is beyond measure! He prays that they might be *filled with the fullness of God* (3:18-19).

Paul's prayer reflected that of Jesus himself. On the same night that he was betrayed Jesus prayed for his disciples – and for us. Jesus prayed to his Father saying *I have revealed you to those you gave me out of this world* (John 17:6). He said he have given them the word of God. *Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth* (John 17:17).

Sanctification means 'to make holy', and here we see the means by which we are sanctified. 'Sanctification is the work of God's free grace' (Shorter Catechism 35). That is why Paul is praying for these believers at Ephesus. He knows that sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit that we gain wisdom and understanding in the things of God. Sanctification, the Shorter Catechism goes on to say, 'is whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live unto righteousness'.

Paul's prayer is that we will see Jesus more clearly and love him more dearly, as the song puts it. Knowledge of our great and wonderful God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is essential if we are to overcome our spiritual myopia. Are you reading your Bible every day? You must start with this revelation of himself that God has given us if you are to see him more clearly.

And you must pray in the power of the Holy Spirit as you study the Word of God. As you do so the fog will gradually clear. As you do so your fear will begin to evaporate, just like the fear of Elisha's servant. As you see the Lord more clearly you will be lifted up, you will be excited with renewed vigour will press on in the race to glory. The finish line will become clearer and you will be eager to get there and see Jesus in all his glory.

Beloved now we are children of God. And it has not yet been revealed what we shall be but we know that when he is revealed we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:2).

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