

Sermon – 23/03/2008 am

That You May Know

Study Text: Ephesians 1:18–19

Some years ago I attended the funeral of a man who had committed suicide. His wife and young child were sitting up the front of the chapel as the service was conducted. It was a sad and indeed tragic sight – tragic because the wife was planning to leave her husband. Maybe the man loved his wife and felt he had nothing to live for if his wife left. Maybe he had lost all hope.

Without hope and without God in the world (2:12). This is how the apostle Paul described the Ephesians before they were brought near by the blood of Christ. They once walked in darkness, seeing only the things of this world and living for such things. The things of this world are not lasting. They will all pass away sooner or later, yes even your nearest and dearest.

Without God and without hope! Does this not describe the life of all who are outside of Christ? Millions of people wake up each day without hope. Many seek escape from this hopelessness, numbing their minds with alcohol and drugs. In desperation they may try permanent escape in death. The number of people who take their own life is staggering; the number who have attempted to do so is even more staggering.

‘For the Ephesians’ writes one scholar ‘life was, at the end of the day, a hopeless business – the future a closed door beyond which nothing could be seen. At their funeral services there could be little more than a clinging to the past, some small consolation in gratitude for good memories – but no light dawned on them for the future’.

Is it not the same today? Funerals have become a celebration of the dead person’s life. There is no mention of the future, apart from the odd mention of ‘becoming a star in the sky’ or some such nonsense. There is no real hope and no certain hope in the future. Yet Jesus spoke very clearly saying that all who are in the graves will hear his voice and come forth – some to the resurrection of life and others to the resurrection of condemnation (John 5:29).

This is the same Jesus whom God raised from the dead. On this very day, at dawn on the first day of the week, his tomb was found empty. The risen Jesus appeared to Mary, to his disciples and to many others. One day he appeared to Paul while travelling on the road to Damascus. Paul saw a great light and heard Jesus speak to him. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was an essential element of Paul’s preaching. If you do not believe in the resurrection you are still in the dark, you are still in your sins (I Corinthians 15:17). Paul continued all his life striving to comprehend the power of the resurrection (Philippians 3:10). In this very chapter he was moved yet again by the exceedingly great power which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

There are some who say they believe in God but not in anything supernatural, like the resurrection. Such people are also without hope for they have no eternal security. *If only in this life we have hope in Christ we are of all men most pitiable* (I Corinthians 15:19). I hope that you have a hope in Christ that goes beyond this world.

His Calling-Hope

Paul prayed for the saints at Ephesus that their eyes would be opened to see and understand three great truths. The first of these is *that you may know the hope of his calling* (1:18). He had already given thanks for their faith and love. Paul often spoke of faith, love and hope in the one breath. He prayed for the Colossians giving thanks for their faith and love and the *hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of truth of the gospel* (Colossians 1:5).

In common usage the word ‘hope’ carries a sense of doubt and uncertainty, but this is not so in the Bible. Hope does refer to things unseen (Romans 8:24) but unseen things which are promised by God, are even more certain than the things we see in this world. Paul’s prayer is that the eyes of our hearts may be opened to see these unseen realities.

Hope is fundamental to the life and outlook of a believer. But is not hope something vague and uncertain? What if hope disappoints us? The Christian’s hope will never disappoint. How can we say that? Because it is hope given by God; it is hope based upon his calling. God’s call is effectual and the hope that enters our hearts from his calling is sure and certain. ‘The Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by working faith in us and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling’ (Shorter Catechism 30).

Hope for many these days is based in science or computer models. Many sit anxiously at their computers or gazing into a crystal ball trying to predict the climate or the sharemarket. Many press on with an illness in the hope that scientists will find a cure. But what happens if and when a cure is found? No one has a cure for death – apart from Jesus Christ.

The hope we have is from God. It is the hope of his effectual calling. It is a *holy calling, not according to our work but according to his own purpose and grace which he has given us in Christ Jesus before time began* (II Timothy 1:9). What a glorious statement of our calling and our hope. Our hope is not based on anything we do; it is not even based in our faith, but is based in this divine calling. Hope is not according to our works or the strength of our faith. Our hope should not be going up and down according to our mood or feeling.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in his great mercy has begotten us again unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled (I Peter 1:3). The hope we have been given is a living hope because Jesus Christ is alive. It is a hope that we possess here and now in Jesus Christ. It is a hope that affects how we live today.

We have been born again of the Spirit of God. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus; we are children of God who hope to see Jesus soon. ‘How we live the Christian life is largely determined by how we think about the future. Putting it another way, the purpose behind God’s revelation about the future is to transform the way we live in the present’.

In Hebrews 11 we read of great men and women of the Old Testament. They are commended for how they lived. They lived by faith, sure of things hoped for and certain of things unseen. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and many others all lived looking for a better place, the heavenly city promised by God. They were ‘heavenly minded’, but not as is often said ‘too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good’. Where is the man who would dare say

such a thing about Moses who led a whole nation for over 40 years? Oh that we would learn to live like these saints of old.

His Inheritance-Glory

In India I met a man who was kicked out of his home because he believed in Jesus. He literally had no home to go to. His family treated him as if he were dead. He was cut off from any family inheritance. He wandered from town to town until a Christian man took him in and cared for him. Although he lost his earthly inheritance this man knew that in Jesus he had a much better inheritance. He was now an heir to the riches of heaven's glory – a joint heir with Christ. For him *the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18).

From God's calling we come to God's inheritance – to *the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints* (1:19). Commentators say that we need to decide whether this inheritance is what we have in God, or what God has in us. Most say it is the former – it is the riches we have in Christ. They say that is what inheritance meant in 1:11 and it means the same here. We did not agree. In this verse before us it clearly says *the glory of his (God's) inheritance*.

In the end we might ask, what is the difference. When God is our Father and he calls us his children is not the inheritance the same? We are *joint heirs with Christ* (Romans 8:17). Our heavenly Father is not going to die and leave everything to us. Indeed we have our inheritance now in Jesus Christ. Paul's prayer is not that we may get this inheritance in the end, but that we know what **are** the riches of his inheritance. Our inheritance is guaranteed in the Holy Spirit given to those who believe.

What is this inheritance? It is *in the saints*. Paul is writing to the saints in Ephesus. The saints are those who belong to God. They are the true church. The church is spoken of as the body of Christ. God gave Jesus to be head over all things to the church (1:22). The fellowship of the church is the sphere in which the inheritance of God is to be found. In his church God will be glorified on earth and in heaven (3:21).

Do not be misled into thinking of heaven as a place of great personal comfort and luxury. There will be 'no more crying and pain', but that is not all. We will not even be thinking about ourselves and our own comfort. Heaven will be full of the glory of God. Our only thought and desire will be to worship God who sits in all majesty and glory upon the throne in heaven.

Paul's prayer is that our eyes will be opened and we will not just know the glory but the **riches** of the glory of his inheritance. God has called us, he has justified us and he has glorified us (Romans 8:30). We already live to the glory of God. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. May we know more and more whose we are and whom we serve? Amen.

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