

SERIES: Reach for the P.E.A.K., Week 2 (Slide #1)

TITLE: A Transforming Prayer

TEXT: Ephesians 1:15-23

DATE: June 21, 2009

I. INTRODUCTION.

- A. Reach for the P.E.A.K. week 2 and the excitement of our Bible readings certainly have not taken a week off – are you excited with me about what Paul is saying in Eph. 1:15-23?
- B. Honestly, after last weeks text, the question in my mind was, “Can I even preach anything close to the truths offered in Eph. 1:1-14?” Well, the answer to the question is YES.
- C. Paul certainly didn’t load all his dynamite into one brief passage and then cost for six more chapter; clearly we have in our verses for today words of explosive possibility and promise. AMEN?
- D. **(Slide #2 - REVIEW)** Paul, writing from prison, begins Ephesians with a song that should thrill the souls of all who are in Christ. Paul announces truths about God’s salvation gift:
 1. We have been chosen
 2. We have been chosen to be made holy and blameless in His sight
 3. We have been chosen to become the sons and daughters of God.
 4. We have been chosen for redemption
 5. We have been chosen for forgiveness
 6. We have been chosen to live in such a way that we make God proud and bring to Him praise
 7. We have been chosen to spend the rest of eternity in heaven.
- E. These are the words that define the church Paul wrote to in the first century and hopefully defines the church now reading those words in the 21st century.
- F. So where does Paul go from there? Well, let’s read and celebrate some more. READ TEXT **(Slide #3)**
- G. Clearly Paul is continuing a thought, not beginning a new one.
 1. He begins the next section of verses with the words, *“For this reason. . . .”*
 2. In other words, because of who we are in Christ – all of the things written in verses 3-14 – Paul offers to his readers a follow-up.
 3. Making sure that all understand who Paul will now go on to address, He continues, *“For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .”*
 4. Clearly he is writing to those who have laid claim to the provisions through Christ found in verses 3-14 - the verses that follow, then, offer to us exercises and provisions that belong to the redeemed.
- H. So quickly, here’s how we are to receive Paul’s words in Eph. 1:15-23.
 1. If we are redeemed, we are to receive Paul’s words as written to us.
 2. If we are not redeemed, then Paul and I would simply say: Why not now? Why not say right now, “Jesus, forgive me for my sins, wash them all away, come into my heart and make be your own. Give to me the gift of salvation.”
 3. Some may still not be ready, but by the time this sermon is done you may want to make the decision to get into the family of God and grab hold of all the blessings of last week and this week.
- I. So what can we learn from Paul’s words today? Well, I want to summarize Paul’s words in two steps.
 1. The first is a look at a powerful Kononia Activity
 2. The second is to look at a powerful prayer.

II. THANKSGIVING PROPERLY EXPRESSED: PRAYER (Slide #4)

- A. Having made the connection between verses 3-14 and this section in verse 15, Paul makes an interesting statement in verse 16 that I believe is intentional and instructional.
- B. Listen carefully to what Paul says in 16: *“I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”*
1. The phrasing of verse 16 is intriguing – perhaps you too stopped after reading verse 16 and asked the question, “Why did Paul write this verse like that?”
 2. I suppose that one could simply read verse 16 as two activities that Paul is doing for the saints in Ephesus: offering thanks and praying, but something in my heart tells me that Paul is not listing two activities, he’s listing one.
- C. If I could take a shot at stating Paul’s words another way, it seems as if he is saying something like this: (Slide #5) “Because I love you so much and am so thankful for you, I am expressing my gratitude by praying for you.”
- D. In other words, thankful within the body of Christ is best expressed in prayer.
- E. What we are discovering in Paul’s words is a model that is critical to immolate – we are discovering a critically important Koinonia principle: (Slide #6) Thankfulness properly expressed within the Community of Christ is prayer.
1. Paul in essence is saying to his audience: I love you so much and I am so thankful for you that I offer to you my highest expression of thanksgiving: I am praying for you every day.
 2. Folks, I get chills thinking about this truth, for if the church can learn what Paul practiced, imagine the difference it would make within the Christian Community.
 3. If I could put it into modern day words and context, Paul would say something like this:
 - a. I am so thankful for you that I refuse to just give you a plaque or send you a thank you note or praise you in front of the church or take you out to lunch or some other thing that can be noble. NO, I am SO thankful for you that I daily bring you to the father of glory every day!!!!
 - b. Not only is such thankfulness much higher, but it is much more powerful.
- F. I was reading **Maxie Dunnam’s** reflections on this 16th verse and I loved what he had to say: *“Prayer that flows out of a deep sense of gratitude is forceful. Our prayers should be rooted in thankfulness. When so rooted, our prayer will be punctuated with thankfulness as is Paul’s. Not only was he thankful, he was thrilled – thrilled because he knew who God was is what God was doing.”* – I like that!
- G. Or listen to the words of **Paul S. Rees**, a great practitioner and teacher of prayer: *“The Apostle’s mood is one in which, thinking [about] those FOR whom he prays, he is THANKFUL; and thinking about the God TO whom he prays, he is THRILLED.”*
- H. Friends, Paul’s life as is described in verse 16 offers to us a picture of how forceful and life changing Koinonia lived at its highest level can be:
1. If we are truly brothers and sisters in the Lord, our attitude should be one of thankfulness.
 2. If we are truly brothers and sisters in the Lord, the greatest gift we can offer to someone is the gift of prayer: “I LOVE YOU SOOOO MUCH, AND I’M SO THANKFUL FOR YOU, THAT I AM GOING TO OFFER TO YOU THE CROWNING KOINONIA GIFT: PRAYER!!!
- I. Ohhh, don’t you love the way that sounds and feels. We all need to powerful prayers of our brothers and sisters in prayer.
- J. **Illustration: Prayer Support Required after Jacque burst into our home.**
1. As I was thinking about this truth, a story came to my mind that I think God would have me use to illustrate this first point – the need for koinonia that goes all the way to prayer.

2. We lived in Haiti at the time and a dramatic event had just happened: A man possessed by demons had just burst through the front door of our house in the middle of the night.
 3. Calling other missionaries in to help in prayer, after hours of prayer the man was delivered from the demons - a cause for praise and celebration.
 4. But after that time, some strange things started happening around our home:
 - a. A herd of cows ran into the back of our house – that doesn't just happen.
 - b. Dishes fell out of cupboards and no one was in the kitchen – that doesn't just happen.
 - c. One night I woke up and there was a rat sitting on me while in bed – that doesn't just happen - and then it just disappeared into thin air.
 - d. All kinds of wild things were happening and we came to this conclusion – the man was delivered from demons, but the enemy was attacking our home.
 5. We prayed for deliverance, but it did not come.
 6. We solicited the prayers of other missionaries, but deliverance did not come.
 7. Finally mom and dad sent out a prayer letter to their prayer supporters.
 8. One day as we walked into our home, mom suddenly stopped and said, "It's gone. The house has been set free." And it had.
 9. Why, because on that day the prayer letter reached the homes of the prayer warriors and koinonia happened at its highest level: people who loved us prayed for us, and we were set free.
- K. Let me ask this question or offer this challenge: Are there ones within the body of Christ for whom you are so thankful? If so, Paul's model would show us that the greatest form of thankfulness would be a pledge of prayer.
- L. **(Slide #7) CHALLENGE:** I wonder, might there be five people in your life that you would want to send a note to this week with these words, "I love and appreciate you so much, and as an expression of my gratitude, I want to offer to you a pledge to remember you as often as I can in prayer."
- M. That's gratitude at its highest level. That's koinonia – Christian Fellowship – properly expressed.
- N. But listen, Paul not only models prayer, he tells us what he prays, and it is powerful.

III. THE PRAYERS OF A TRUE FRIEND **(Slide #8)**

- A. As we read the words of Paul's prayer, it gives a person chills up and down their spine, for his prayer is powerful and life shaping.
1. In essence, Paul prays for two things for his good friends and brothers/sisters in Christ in Ephesus.
 2. They are not small things, but they are two in number.
- B. **(Slide #9) FIRST, Paul prays that God would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation SO THAT we might know HIM better.**
1. Again, the way in which Paul writes these words must be looked at carefully for full understanding and benefit.
 2. Here is what Paul does not pray for: that we would receive wisdom and revelation.
 - a. On the surface it may seem like these would be good things to pray for – we all want to be wise and we all would love to know what is true or what is to come (revelation).
 - b. But listen, if God were to simply give to us wisdom and revelation, the end result would easily be a notion that WE are wise and that WE know what is true or is to come.
 - c. The result of such a gift would most likely result in pride and perhaps abuse.
 3. But Paul did not pray that his brothers and sisters would receive wisdom and revelation. NO, he prayed that they would receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

- a. Now there is some debate concerning whether the “s” in Spirit should be a small “s” or a capital “S”, the difference being human spirit versus divine Spirit.
 - b. In the end, if we read the entire verse, it most likely makes little difference, because the end result will be the same.
 - c. However, the words used seem to suggest that Paul is praying that we receive the Spirit, capital “S” as in the Holy Spirit. Here’s why I believe that to be true:
 - (1) First, the result is revelation, and revelation is not the activity of mankind, it is the activity of the Holy Spirit.
 - (2) Second, the further result is wisdom and revelation that results in us knowing God more clearly – that is the primary activity of the Holy Spirit.
4. It would be my contention that what Paul is praying is that we would receive the Holy Spirit who is the source of wisdom and revelation. If you want to go the other way and state that Paul is talking about a human spirit, the result is the same, because the spirit described is one that gains wisdom and revelation, and that can only come from the Holy Spirit.
5. But notice what Paul does as he concludes this first request: **(Slide #10)** *“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation SO THAT YOU MAY NOW HIM BETTER.”*
- a. Paul understands something powerful: it is neither wisdom nor revelation that we need the most, it is the Source of wisdom and understanding that we need most.
 - b. Paul prays that our spirits will be quicken by God’s Holy Spirit resulting in wisdom and revelation/divine truth about who God is and what God does.
 - c. Doesn’t his prayer sound considerable better than asking God to be wise and to understand revelation? How much greater to know the All Wise One and the Divine Revelator
6. I was reminded of the song written by **Steve Fry**: *“Oh, I want to know You more, deep within my soul I want to know you, O I want to know you; and I would give my final breath, to know you in your death and resurrection. Oh I want to know you more, oh I want to know you more.”*
7. Both the song and the prayer of Paul understand this truth: what we need more than anything or anyone else is HIM. Paul prays that they will find Him and come to know Him more.
8. There is a second request, and it has multiple layers. . . .
- C. (Slide #11) SECOND, Paul prays that the eyes of our heart will be enlightened so that we may know. . . .**
1. **(Slide #12) . . . the HOPE to which He has called us.**
 - a. Hope refers to all the possibilities of spiritual growth open to those whom God loves.
 - b. Hope is the opposite of despair that control so many, even Christians.
 - c. Paul’s prayer is that we will see the hope that is our because of Christ; that we will understand the transforming process that is taking place to change us into all God intends for us.
 - d. **Maxie Dunnam** was in good form when he wrote: *“Is there anything more exciting than the unfolding and blossoming of a life yielded to Christ and shaped by His indwelling Holy Spirit? A garden, dazzling with the radiant color of tulips and daffodils, roses and petunias, is beautiful; yet that beauty does not compare to the beauty of a courageous soul who has taken the rough and rugged soil of a stubborn will, a mean temper, and selfish impulses and, by God’s grace, through the recreating power of the Spirit, transformed and landscaped it into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Moonlight is beautiful, especially as it reflects on the smooth silk calmness of a glistening lake—but not nearly so beautiful as the unselfish lovelight*

sparkling in the eyes of one who has been made loving by the Spirit of Christ. A mountain peak, robed in fresh fallen snow, is a magnificently glorious sight, but not half as glorious as a mountain peak personality—one who has been made a giant in the Spirit.”

- e. This is what Paul is talking about: the hope of the believer.
 - f. The enemy would want to define us by our negatives and failures; but our hope is in the Spirit of God who wants to transform us into beings more magnificent than the most glorious sights the world has to offer.
 - g. Paul prays, “enlighten – open the eyes – of my friends so they can see God’s hope.
2. **(Slide #13) . . . the riches of His INHERITANCE.**
- a. The word inheritance usually refers to a future gift, but in Paul’s case it is both present and future.
 - b. Paul is praying that we will see with the eyes of our hearts how blessed we are because as sons and daughters of God we have available to us all of the glories of heaven while on earth and the glory of heaven once our time on earth is done.
 - c. This is a glorious thought.
3. **(Slide #14) . . . God’s incomparable POWER**
- a. What Paul does in this last section is incredible.
 - b. He prays that we will see and understand the power of God and that His power is available to all who belong to God.
 - c. But Paul doesn’t leave the term power strictly to the imagination, he defines it with clear pictures.
 - d. Paul illustrates God’s power like this. . . .
 - e. **(Slide #15) RESURRECTION POWER – The same power that raised Jesus from the dead**
 - f. **(Slide #16) ASCENSION POWER – The same power that seated Christ over all authorities, powers, dominions, and titles.**
 - g. **(Slide #17) DOMINION POWER – The same power that placed all things under Christ’s feet.**
 - h. Putting the three together, Paul is simply praying that as God’s children that we understand – see with the eyes of our hearts – that we are not in a weak position; NO, we belong to the one whose power is without limit.
 - i. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, the same power that has placed Christ on the throne at the right hand of the Father, the same power that holds all things under Christ’s dominion – THAT POWER IS AVAILABLE TO YOU AND ME!!
 - j. CAN I HEAR A “HALLELUJAH!” HOW ABOUT A “PRAISE THE LORD!” OR HOW ABOUT A GOOD OLD FASHION “GLORY.”

D. Folks, that’s good praying. It’s the prayer of Paul for his friends in Christ.

IV. **(Slide #18) THE CHALLENGE**

- A. My good friends, as we listen to the words of Paul and lay claim to those words, they are words that can transform us. That’s a good thing.
- B. So what can we do with such a glorious passage of scripture?
- C. Well, I want to offer a challenge that may sound strange, but my thought is that if we will rise to the challenge, the words of Paul have a possibility of jumping of the pages of our Bible and changing life.

- D. Remember that one of the things we are working on during these 12 weeks is Koinonia - Christian Fellowship.
- E. So here's what I want us to do with these glorious word:
1. I want to challenge you to prayerfully write down the names of five people for whom you are thankful. Can I suggest that those five people be a part of this congregation or at least a part of the community of faith in the Coshocton area. If you want to broaden your list to those outside of Coshocton area, add them above and beyond the five.
 2. Once you have made your list, write a letter or e-mail or twitter those five people and tell them that for the next 30 days you are going to pray the words of Paul's prayer recorded here in Eph. 1:17-21 on their behalf, asking that God would grant to them the things listed in the prayer.
 3. While you're at it, ask those five people if they would pray the same pray over you for the next 30 days.
 4. Since we are already being asked to pray 15 minutes per day as a part of our discipleship disciplines, we already have the time allotted for this prayer.
 5. Finally, as you pray this prayer for your five brothers or sisters in Christ, afterwards pray something like this: Lord, as my five companion disciples also pray this prayer for me, help me to receive this prayer into my life.
- F. Here's my thought: If we will endeavor to do this very thing, at the end of 30 days the transformation promises to be radical.