

EPHESIANS | Prayer for the Saints

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Introduction

We're continuing our study in the book of Ephesians. Last week we ended with the Paul's encouragement:

Romans 8:31

If God is for us, who can be against us.

PERSONAL: When I was a new believer, almost 20 years ago now... hard to believe. I thought this verse meant that now that I was "in Christ," that somehow I would be exempt from all the normal difficulties, trials, and hardships of life. All the bad things other people have to deal with. It didn't take me very long into my years as a believer to realize that this, in fact, was not the case.

Instead, what I discovered was that being "In Christ," becoming an apprentice, a disciple, a follower of Jesus doesn't protect you from hardship, *but in many ways thrusts you into hardship.*

A few months ago, I talked about Jesus' promise that "*In this world you will have problems*" John 16:33. That someone should put that on a coffee mug just to help followers of Jesus set expectations for their day. My friend Thomas made me one. And I use it often. And it's actually been helpful..

When Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, he's writing to a group of people that were surrounded on all sides by some of the most depraved, sinful behavior in the first century world. They faced great hardship and persecution — far more than just social or economic. Their very lives hung in the balance — and yet they remained faithful to Jesus in the face of incredible hostility.

If you were to pray for a group of people in that situation... what would you pray for? When you came to God on their behalf... what would you ask for? *I can pretty much guarantee that our prayers would look very different than what Paul prays.*

Paul's prayer for Ephesus

Ephesians 1:15-23

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might ²⁰ that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

You know what we would pray?

“God protect them! Comfort them! Save them from hard things! Deliver them from that pagan culture and those evil practices! Give them a way of escaping that city... bring in a conservative Christian magistrate and change the laws in that city! Ease their circumstances in some way... Don’t let them suffer!”

What does Paul pray?

“The God would give you WISDOM and of REVELATION in the KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! That your eyes would be enlightened! That you would know the HOPE to which He called you! That you would know the greatness of His power toward those who believe...”

Do you see any differences there? This doesn’t mean we never pray for God to ease someone’s suffering... this isn’t prescriptive for every prayer but — take notice of what Paul is doing here.

Whenever Paul prays for the church, whenever he prays for the saints, not once, not one single time does Paul pray for easier circumstances. But instead, he prays that they would KNOW GOD more deeply as a result of their circumstances.

- Paul could have prayed for anything! When he prays for what they need most, he ignores their economic circumstances, their political circumstances, their material needs, and He prays that in and through whatever they face, that they would KNOW GOD more deeply. That they would trust Him more completely. *Not that they would be delivered from, but that they would be strengthened through.*

Why?

- Because if you have what Paul is talking about, then no matter how bad your circumstances are, you’ll have power to stand firm and to process those circumstances in a way that’ll make you more with Him than you could ever be on your own.
- If you *don’t* have what Paul is talking about, then no matter how good your circumstances are, you will process those circumstances in a way that’ll make you shallow, bitter, narcissistic, resentful, self-absorbed, entitled, condemning.

**When you become an apprentice of Jesus,
God doesn’t rescue you from hardship
but instead gives you an ability to persevere through hardships
that previously would have utterly crushed you.**

***This is one of the greatest signs that you’re actually in the kingdom of God... that you belong to Jesus.
Does suffering make you bitter toward Jesus — or help you become more like Jesus?***

- When hardship comes into your life, does it make you more compassionate — or less?
- Does it make you more understanding, caring, sensitive toward others — or less?
- Does it help you have more empathy for the hardship and difficulties and the complexity of the human condition — or less?
- More patient with other people — or less?
- More self-controlled — or less?
 - On the other hand, does hardship make you more self-righteous, more judgmental, colder, harsher, angrier toward people you don’t understand?
 - Does it make you scornful of those who have a different viewpoint than you?

- When hardship comes, do you lash out? Do you malign? Attack? Slander? All of which are evidence that you're not submitted to Jesus. You're not following Jesus. You're no longer practicing the way of Jesus. And it's evidence that you don't really trust Jesus or His promises.

I've been through hardship and I'm doing my best, and I'm trying to follow. Some days I'm doing well, and other days I fail miserably. How do I get consistent, how do I walk this out?

Paul points us to the answer in his prayer for the saints of God in Ephesus.

He knew the hardships they were facing, because all the way back in Acts 19-20, after leading people to Jesus in the area several years prior, he was almost killed by a mob for undermining a business making idols of the goddess Diana. He knows the danger there and the hardship they're facing.

Ephesians 1:17-19

¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the **knowledge of Him**, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, **that you may know** what is **the hope** to which He has called you, what are the riches of **His glorious inheritance** in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of **His power** toward us who believe,

THE HOPE THE INHERITANCE

The Hope

This passage doesn't say "*the hope to which He will call you... one day.*" It says, "*The hope to which he has already called you.*" It's already done.

In Romans 8:30 doesn't say that *one day our glory will come*. It says...

Romans 8:30

And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also **glorified**.

- Paul isn't saying that someday God will glorify you. *He says God's already done it!*

How is that possible?

The common theological thinking is that *Paul is so certain of what is coming our way*, that he talks about it as if it's already happened. He's so certain of the future glory of the saints, he's so certain that we'll be conformed into the image of the Son, he's so certain of culmination of the Kingdom — that he talks about it as if there is absolutely nothing that could ever stop it from happening.

Paul is saying, *there is trouble coming your way*. As a follower of Christ, you will face tremendous hardship... but don't ever lose sight, don't ever forget the future glory that is coming your way, the future glory that is so certain, it's as if it's already happened.

How do you handle hardships? How do you handle suffering? How do you handle tragedy when it comes?

- What Paul is saying that life **is** going to be hard on you... you're going to suffer... life can unbelievably brutal. But what he's saying is, *that unless you know the hope to which you have been called — you'll be destroyed by hardship, you will buckle under the weight of life.*
- Paul is saying that only the certainty of future hope makes it possible to face how bad life is and live a free, victorious, triumphant life in the midst of it,

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

- “The suffering of this present time is preparing a weight of glory for us, for as our outward nature wastes away, our inner self is being renewed every day.”
- The thing that gives you strength, what gives you the ability to be more than a conqueror — you have to keep your eyes on the eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:18

...as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

**The way to freedom —
the way to find meaning, strength, the way to endure —
the only way to persevere is to keep your eyes on the eternal glory
that will one day be revealed in you. And it is a certainty.
It's so certain it's as if it has already taken place.**

Application: *We look at the external circumstances, the trials, the difficulties we face, and it causes us to question God and His love for us. We all have something that we look at and think — “See, this is why I can't trust God. This is why I don't really believe He loves me or cares about me. This is why I'm not willing to totally give myself over to Him because He let these things happen...”*

The Apostle Paul just completely blows up that perspective... look at what he says!

Romans 8:35-36

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

- What right does Paul have to say these things?

2 Corinthians 11:24-28

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

- How many of you have been beaten to the brink of death five different times! Anybody here been physically tortured for their faith? Imprisoned, shipwrecked, starving, dying of thirst for the cause of Christ?
 - Yet He **doesn't** say... "Because of all of this, I refuse to trust Christ any longer!" He **doesn't** say, "Because I nearly starved to death multiple times, I am out! I'm taking control of my life again!" He **doesn't** say anything even close to that! You know what He says?

Romans 8:37

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

- What!? How is that possible? How in the world can he have that kind of perspective in the face of such tremendous suffering?
- He **doesn't** say, "I barely made it. But I'm still here."
- He **doesn't** even say, "I'm just a conqueror."
- He **doesn't** say, "Ah, this is too hard I quit!"
- He **doesn't** say, "Poor me! Why do other followers of Jesus have it so easy and I'm the one who gets stuck with the flogging?"
- He doesn't go there!
- He **DOES** say, "We are MORE than conquerors!"

And in fact, he keeps celebrating!

Romans 8:38-39

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- In other words, there are going to be moments when suffering comes into your life and you're going to be tempted to throw in the towel — to doubt, to question, to ask "*Is following Christ even worth it?*" — to feel like a victim, and give up, lose hope. What Paul is telling you is that you have something that is unshakable. What is it?

Well, it's the next thing he prays for in our passage... the certainty of future glory — the hope for which you have been called.

The Power

Ephesians 1:19

...and what is the **immeasurable greatness of His power** toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might...

We'll deal with this in more detail when we get to chapter three, but for now, I want you to take notice of two things.

Paul mentions God's power. The word is *dunamis*, where we get our word dynamite. It's the earth-shaking, world-changing power of God. *Paul says His power is so great, that we can't even begin to measure it.*

He says this immeasurable power *is toward us who believe!* It's toward us. It's for us! What makes your life unshakeable? It's not your power, your strength, your might — it's His. In fact, ***scripture tells us that His strength is made perfect in our what — weakness.***

At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit falls upon the disciples — He gives them POWER. Dunamis. To be His witnesses, which is the word for martyr. To suffer. ***God gives you the power to endure suffering for His name's sake.***

Romans 5:3-4

...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope...

The Inheritance

The ideas of His glorious inheritance in the saints.

I've always read this as our inheritance, because of what Paul tells in verses 1-14. I've always thought Paul is praying that we would know the riches of **our** inheritance in the saints. But do you realize *that's not what Paul prays.*

Ephesians 1:18

...that you may know the riches of **His glorious inheritance** in the saints

- What does that mean? His inheritance? He's God! Everything is His... it all belongs to Him. *What is Paul talking about?*

An inheritance is something of tremendous value, that you gain one day in the future.

And when Paul talks about God's inheritance, He's talking about you! You are so invaluable to God... that He gave His own life, ***in order to gain you!***

He's talking about YOU! You and me. He's talking about us! ***He is our inheritance. And we are HIS.*** I am His, and He is mine. Follower of Jesus, do you have any idea how invaluable that makes you!? That Christ would come down, that He would suffer, and die. That He would endure the most horrendous death imaginable *in order to gain you as His glorious inheritance!*

Over and over again throughout the Old Testament, God refers to us as His inheritance:

(cf. Deuteronomy 4:20; 9:26, 29; 2 Samuel 21:3; 1 Kings 8:51, 53; 2 Kings 21:14; Psalms 28:9; 33:12; 68:9; 78:62, 71; 94:14; 106:5, 40; Isaiah 19:25; 47:6; 63:17; Jeremiah 10:16; 51:19).

Deuteronomy 4:20

The Lord took you and brought you . . . out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.

Psalms 28:9

Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Psalms 94:14

For the Lord will not reject His people; He will never forsake His inheritance.

- Do you see how invaluable you are to Him? Do you see how loved you are by Him? Do have any idea the treasure that you are to Him?

- Does that not motivate you to respond to Him with absolute reverence and worship? Submission, and surrender? Love and adoration?

The Lord delivered you from slavery to sin; He set you free; He opened the prison doors; He gave you sight; delivered you from the evil one; rescued you from eternal separation from Him; and has sealed you with His Spirit — which is the guarantee of YOUR inheritance! Yet, the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, King, and Creator of the universe *considers YOU His inheritance!*

This is why Paul prays that we would know Him more deeply; that our eyes would be enlightened; that we would gain the spirit of wisdom of revelation; to know and understand these things. Because when you see them — *there is no circumstance, there is no hardship, there is no trial or tribulation that can come your way that can shake from you what God has declared over you.*

Ephesians 1:20

...that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

What is he pointing you to? What is He looking at?

- That Christ is ***over all***.
- He is sovereign.
- He's in charge.
- He's calling the shots.
- Christ alone is King.
- Why?
- Because Christ alone was raised from the dead.
- Christ alone is seated at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places.
- Christ alone is above all rule, authority, power, dominion.
- Christ alone stakes claim to the name that is above every other name in this age and in the age to come.
- Christ alone is head over *His church, who is His glorious inheritance.*

Do you see what's yours?

Do you see who you are, how valuable you are to Him?

That gives you the power to endure, to persevere in hardship, that nothing else in the universe can even come close to giving you.

That you would KNOW GOD and HIS PROMISES MORE DEEPLY.

Closing thought

How you and I walk through suffering matters.

Discipleship is like parenting. Your kids replicate who you are, not what you say. The same is true in discipling relationships.

- When hard things come into your life — how do you typically respond? Because how you walk through hardship, suffering, persecution will deeply influence how the people closest to you will respond.
 - It doesn't mean you have to do it perfectly — it doesn't mean you shouldn't process the difficulty with trusted — but do you consistently cling to the promises of God, the future glory, the hope of His calling even when it feels like you can't take another breath?

Paul counted it joy to partake of the sufferings with Christ. Do you?

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Paul never prays for believers to have easier circumstances?
2. In what ways could this change your approach to the challenges you face in life?
3. Discuss: What God is doing IN you is more important than what God is doing THROUGH you. Why is that hard for us to understand and live out?
4. Have you ever thought of yourself as “God’s inheritance”? How does that change your view of yourself, and of your relationship with God?
5. What would your family and friends say about how you handle life’s tough circumstances? What example is your life exhibiting?
6. Paul counted it all joy to partake of the sufferings with Christ. Do you?

NOTES