

April 16, 2023

“Going Deeper”
Ephesians 1:15-23

FCF: News of victory not enough

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Given what lies before us,
(anchor) We must go deeper.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

If all you know of *Star Wars* is Episodes IV-VI, you might think that with the Death Star destroyed, the Empire defeated, and the Rebels victorious, all was well. But that was 1983. Fast forward to 2015 and to Episode VII. The New Republic is struggling to govern. Their resources are spread thin and the First Order is on the rise. Not all was finished with the news of a victory.

Last Sunday we heard good news of a great victory. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, we have a new past, a new present, and a new future. But what now? Where do we go from here?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Ephesians 1:15-23](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION:

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Journey to the Center of the Earth is a classic science fiction novel by Jules Verne, first published in 1864. Professor Otto Lidenbrock is the tale’s central figure, an eccentric German scientist who believes there are volcanic tubes that reach to the center of the earth. He, his nephew Axel, and their guide rappel into an Icelandic volcano and contend with many dangers - cave-ins, subpolar tornadoes, an underground ocean, and prehistoric creatures. Eventually, the explorers are spewed back to the surface by a volcano in Italy. This wasn’t the first such tale. And there have been many versions and retelling of it since. It would seem that there is a certain fascination with exploring what’s down there, a sense there’s more to be found as we go deep.

Paul wants us to go deep, deeper in our relationship with God. He has received news of the faith and love of his readers. So he gives thanks to God for bringing that about. But he isn’t satisfied or content. We want more for them. So he prays and tells them what he is praying.

This should tell us something. Given what lies before us, given what God has done for us in Christ, given the temporal and eternal significance of resurrection reality, we should not stop with just hearing the news. We should not be satisfied or content with that. We should want to go deeper. That’s the basic thrust of the text. Given what lies before us, we must go deeper.

How do we see that in our passage? In two ways. First, in the burden of Paul’s heart. And, second, in the focus of Paul’s prayers. Those two things point us towards going deeper.

I. THE BURDEN OF PAUL’S HEART

First, we see the burden of Paul’s heart for his readers ([READ Ephesians 1:15-18a](#)).

A) What It Means

Three questions. What does this mean? How does it come? Why is it needed?

1. Personal and relational

First, what does this mean? Paul is speaking here of a knowledge that is personal and relational.

2. Not theoretical or theological

It is far beyond knowledge that is merely theoretical or theological. It's the difference between a Facebook friend and a spouse. It's the difference between being able to break down the chemical composition of honey and knowing its sweetness. This is personal and relational knowledge.

B) How It Comes

1. Not through information

How does it come? It's clear from Paul's prayer. He doesn't ask that more information be given. He doesn't ask for a cartload of scrolls at their door or a great speaker to light up their town.

2. But through illumination

This knowledge comes not through more information but through illumination. It is something given by the Holy Spirit. It is something received, an enlightening of the eyes of the heart.

C) Why It's Needed

1. The reality of the counterfeit

Why is it needed? Because of the reality of the counterfeit. We can know a good deal about God without knowing God. We can know a good deal about godliness still without knowing God.

2. The delusion of the counterfeit

A Spirit-given illumination is needed because of the reality of the counterfeit. And the delusion. When you're caught in this web, you can't see it. And that's a really dangerous place to be.

The burden of Paul's heart is that we would know God. Not just about Him but Him.

Illustration:

Paul's experience bore this out. He had seen it - not just in people around him but in his own story. He had been the best of Pharisees, with more zeal than anyone else for God. We read of this in Acts ([READ Acts 8:1-3](#)). Looking back, Paul later writes in Romans this was a "zeal without knowledge." But that all changed ([READ Acts 9:1-6](#)). Jesus had to knock this man to the ground. Paul knew well the difference between knowing God and knowing about God.

Application:

This raises some hard questions we would do well to ask this morning. Are we willing to acknowledge the difference? Are we willing to acknowledge where there is a deficit of such knowledge in our lives? Are we willing to enter the dangerous space of a relationship with God?

It's a dangerous thing to enter into a relationship with anyone, to go deep with them. You will be seen. You will be known. You may be affirmed. But you will also be challenged. That's what deep relationships demand. What of a relationship with "the God of our Lord Jesus, the Father of glory"? His is a love that really will not let you go - not just a love that won't abandon you but a love that holds onto you and keeps pressing in upon you. Do you know that love?

So lay hold of the resurrection reality. And given what lies before us, let us go deeper.

II. THE FOCUS OF PAUL'S PRAYERS

That brings us to the focus of Paul's prayers. This can be broken into three parts, each one marked by "what," each involving a growing experience of something that is already ours.

A) The Hope of God's Call

([READ Ephesians 1:18a-b](#)). The hope of God's call, pointing us to the very beginning.

1. His gracious initiative

Our relationship with God begins with His call, His gracious initiative and work within us.

2. Some specific examples

"The hope of God's call" - there was a time when we were without hope. But now we have been called. Called to follow Christ, a life of holiness, a new identity. Called to freedom from the law and a fellowship that transcends all barriers of race, class, or culture. Called to suffer for Christ and to endure, trusting the judge of all the earth to do what is right as we await His reckoning.

B) The Riches of God's Inheritance

The next part has more of a future focus ([READ Ephesians 1:18](#)). Our inheritance.

1. One that God receives

Now there are two ways to read this. One would be that this is an inheritance that God receives. And the Old Testament does speak of God's people this way, as His inheritance and possession.

2. One that God bestows

But that's not likely what it means here, especially when you look at a parallel passage ([READ Colossians 1:12](#)). So this is likely not referring here to an inheritance God receives but one He bestows. That is, something that awaits us. And we know a few things about that. It's sure and guaranteed. And it includes the restoration of shalom, peace and wholeness at every level to the deepest degree - towards our messy selves, our messy relationships, and this messed up world.

C) The Greatness of God's Power

The third part is not so much focused on the past or the future but the time in between - the greatness of God's power. And this is what Paul is emphasizing, beginning with a piling up of power words ([READ Ephesians 1:18-23](#)). This dunamis is toward us, for us, with us in mind.

1. How this is demonstrated

How is it demonstrated? Paul speaks of three ways. In Christ's resurrection, enthronement, and headship. First, in His resurrection. This is the pinnacle of God's work, the center of His plan. The dramatic defeat of death, our bitter enemy. We've never been able to stop it. But God has. Second, we see this power demonstrated in Christ's enthronement - His being seated by God in the place of highest honor, forever exalted, far above all powers in both heaven and on earth. Thirdly, we see this power demonstrated in Christ's headship. He now reigns supremely over all things. All history, all current events, are for the sake of the church. Everything runs with that in view. Christ is not just head over all but over all for the church. That's hard to take in. But vital.

2. Why it is necessary

Why is this necessary for Paul to say? Think of the context. Ephesus was not just a Roman city but home to the temple of Artemis. When Paul was there a few years before, a riot broke out at the hint of a threat to Artemis worship. His readers were tempted to feel a power imbalance. But Paul is making clear that Jesus has been raised, enthroned, and made head over all powers.

So this is the focus of Paul's prayers - that we would know God deeply and grow in our lived out experience of the resurrection reality of His call, His inheritance, and His power.

Illustration:

I had a stomach bug this past week. Besides shifting my schedule and causing weakness, it exposed weakness. I can't control as much as I think I can. I'm not in charge. But that didn't start last week. It's always been true. And when I forget that, it's a kind of power imbalance.

Application:

Now let's stay with that. The first kind of power imbalance is when we feel like some something or someone is too much. It or they are going to overrun us. But go back to our text. Jesus is the only one with immeasurably great power. Not that spiritual or physical force in your life. Not your temptation, sin pattern, or upbringing. That is nothing before Him. So go to Him.

Then there's the other power imbalance, the one I needed to hear this week. It's when we say, "I've got this. I'm in control." Really? Again, Jesus is the only one with immeasurably great power. Not your cleverness, experience, energy, ideas, resolve, resources, or reputation. Any and all of that can be gone in an instant. Who has this? Who's in control? Go to Jesus.

Let us lay hold of the resurrection reality. And given what lies before us, let us go deeper.

CONCLUSION:

Think with me about the work of digging a well in third world country. How is it done? You identify the site where the water can be found. You get approval from local officials. Funds are gathered. A team is assembled and sent. And then, in time, a group of people has fresh water to drink, cook, and clean with. Now why is this needed? It's a desperate situation when there is a shortage of something so critical to life. People suffer and die. And so much effort is given.

Now transpose that to consider this. We are the ones in need of the drilling. We are not the donors but the receivers - not of something in the earth but something from the Lord. How do we know? How can we see the dry, parched dirt of our souls? Don't measure how much you know and your Bible content scores. Look at how you pray. What do you see? Look at what goes on in your heart. What do you hear? See and hear the dryness, the cracked dusty soil.

Then come back to Ephesians 1. Hear the burden of Paul's heart for us. Hear the focus of his prayers for us. These are the words of an apostle, an authorized agent, a spokesman for Jesus. Hear the possibility, the invitation laid out, the desire of God's heart for us to draw near.

Lay hold of the resurrection reality. And given what lies before us, let us then go deeper.

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Given what lies before us,
(anchor) We must go deeper.