

## ***Turned on by Prayer***

### ***Ephesians 1:15-23***

Writing in Moody Monthly magazine a few years ago, Mayo Mathers tells about the first time she saw Kam sitting alone in a pew at the back of the church. He wore a biker's T-shirt and tattoos decorated each arm. Only 36, he was more faded than his jeans with a worn-out, lived-out look in his eyes. He seemed puzzled, as if he wasn't sure how he ended up in that tiny country church. He was there because someone had invited him. Someone wanted to introduce Kam to Jesus Christ. Someone yearned for him to come to know Christ in a life changing way.

Kam certainly needed the Lord. From the time he left home at age 15, his life had gone steadily and tragically downhill. He'd tired most of what the world had to offer but nothing brought him the happiness, and meaning and peace he craved. Kam was a drug user; an ex-con, and he constantly battled alcoholism.

Kam returned to church the next week.... and the next... and the next. People lovingly reached out to him, accepted him, and prayed for him. Eventually Kam accepted Christ as personal Savior and Lord. He began his new life in Christ with an astonishing passion, yearning to know Christ better and better. Kam devoured his Bible; fellowship became a priority. He faithfully prayed and worshiped. And he grew and grew in Jesus. Oh, he had his difficulties, failures, and setbacks; it was not all-smooth sailing; he lost some battles along the way. But, my, did his life ever change.

Kam lived in a tiny camping trailer parked at the back of his parents' property. His main passion was his motorcycle. It was his life, his passion; it was all he really had. When the pastor challenged everyone in the church to give something to God, Kam sold his motorcycle and gave the money to the Lord. Needless to say, Kam's hunger to know Christ and His transforming power had an impact on those around him, both in and out of the church.

Touched by his life, the author of the Moody Monthly article wrote: "After Kam gave his motorcycle to the Lord, I realized that I had forgotten the feeling of such dedication...passion... and hunger for Christ. I stared at Kam, fascinated by his life. He looked like a new man; now I was the one who looked faded"

To passionately know Christ and to experience Him transforming our lives is what Christianity is all about. Down and outers like Kam are not the only ones who need to know the Lord. People from all walks of life have discovered how wonderful it is to be saved by Jesus Christ.

Starting today with verse 15 of chapter 1 we move on from that great hymn of praise to God that we have studied in verses 3-14. Vv.15-23 is also one sentence; it is a prayer for the people of God. Verses 15 through 23 are Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. He says he gives thanks for them and prays for them. Paul does the same thing in his letters to the Philippians and Colossians. I think we can safely say that Paul was a man of prayer and that he prayed for the believers in the churches on a daily basis. This passage reveals what sort of

things he has been praying for them. Today we will look at (1) Why Paul Prays; (2) How He Prays; (3) For What He Prays.

Let's read his prayer now, Ephesians 1:15-23:

**15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,**  
**16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:**  
**17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,**  
**18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,**  
**19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power**  
**20 which 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 principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.**  
**22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,**  
**23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**

Prayer: "O Father of glory, God of our Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of our hearts today that we could see You and know You through Your living and enduring Word, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN."

In our previous lessons we have seen Paul describe to the Ephesian believers blessing after blessing and promise after promise. Now, Paul says in verse 15, "**Therefore I also.**" Some of your Bibles translate that beginning phrase, "**For this reason.**"

## **I. Why He Prays (1:15)**

A. Because of all our spiritual blessings in Christ.

*For what reason?* Well, first because of all of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ: Because we have been chosen and adopted by God the Father; because we have redemption and forgiveness through Jesus Christ the Son; because He has revealed to us the whole plan of God; because we trusted in Christ when we heard the gospel; because we are sealed and secured by the Holy Spirit; because all of what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has done in making us for the praise of God's glory—because of all of this! Paul prays. It is for this reason, Paul says, that he prays for the saints at Ephesus and others who read this letter. It is because they need to understand these truths, so it will make a difference in their lives.

Remember that Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesian church from prison. It has been a few years since Paul was in Ephesus, but he has heard about what is

happening in the churches in that area. And it is good news! V.15 tells us that he heard about their "**faith in the Lord Jesus**" and their "**love for ALL the saints.**" And here we have the second reason why Paul prays this prayer:

B. Because of their faith and love.

Those are two good measuring sticks for every Christian and for every church. Paul is convinced that the Ephesians are true believers because of their "**faith in the Lord Jesus,**" and their "**love for all the saints.**"

Do you know that those two things always go hand in hand? Faith and love. Faith finds its focus in Jesus Christ and expresses itself in love to others. A great proof of our faith in Jesus is our love for the saints, "**faith working through love**" (Gal 5:6).

That is very helpful to know, because, if your faith has not resulted in your becoming a more loving person, in your growing in this direction, then it is not genuine faith. Remember how James in his epistle stresses that "**faith without works is dead?**" (James 2:20) He says, "**Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works,**" (2:18). What kind of works is James talking about in that chapter? Back up in verse 8 (James 2:8), he tells us, "**If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well.**" Love for the saints is always a primary evidence of faith in the Lord Jesus.

And notice that Paul commends them for love toward **all** the saints, not just toward some of them. Some saints are easy to love. Some are beautiful people, joyful and happy, and everybody likes to be around them. Some of us are a little rough around the edges and still have a lot of growing to do. Sometimes our growing pains hurt other saints. But Paul says their love was for all. Real love for the saints includes all. We do not love based upon people's personalities, their friendliness, or upon their wealth or talents; rather, it is based upon the fact that they are saints, they belong to the Lord Jesus, they are in the family of God. One of the most remarkable signs that a person has genuine faith is that he loves anyone who loves the Lord Jesus. It doesn't make any difference what the person might be like.

Those two qualities, faith and love, have convinced the Apostle Paul that these Christians are real. So he really wants for them to know and grasp the great truths of their salvation, and it is for this reason that he prays.

Just knowing the truth never changed anybody; it is doing the truth that makes a difference. There are some people today who think that if you merely study your Bible and learn all these great facts, learn the doctrine, the truth of the Scriptures, that is all you need. But the apostle makes very clear here, that is never enough. Just that much will never change anybody. But that truth must somehow move from the head down to the heart. It must grip "the eyes of the heart," as Paul says in verse 18.

Prayer is what will do that. I must confess that I have been greatly moved by this passage because it has made me aware that we must deliberately add this dimension to our teaching. Teaching truth is never enough. We can teach

another person -- a student in the Sunday school or our own children at home -- and they are able to parrot the truth back to us, and oftentimes we are satisfied by that. We say that they know this truth. But the apostle was not satisfied. You never know truth until it has gripped you, and you have been changed by it.

Maybe that's why the apostles Acts 6 made a priority of devoting themselves to "prayer and the ministry of the word." Prayer is God's mechanism to move truth into action to move faith into love.

Are we willing to step out on "**faith**," following the Lord? Do we have a "**love for ALL the saints**" or just those who think like us, act like us and look like us?

That brings us to verse 16 and how Paul prays.

## **II. How Paul Prays (2:16).**

A. He prayed thankfully.

Evidently, Paul prayed continually for these precious believers. He says he did not "**cease to give thanks**" for them. Do you give thanks for other believers? Paul talks about "**making mention**" or "**remembering**" them in his prayers. It implies that Paul prayed by name for them before God. How many of your fellow believers here do you remember in prayer? Do you mention their names each week as you pray daily?

B. He prayed to the Father of Glory.

He prayed to "**the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory**." Why does he call Him that? Paul prays this way because he is sure that God will answer this kind of prayer because He is the One to whom the Lord Jesus prayed. Jesus often prayed for His disciples. Jesus depended on His God, the Father of Glory, for the enlightenment of His own disciples. He too had to pray for them in order that the truth might grip their hearts and they might be changed by the truth that they knew. That is why you often find our Lord praying for his disciples, why he spent whole nights on a mountainside, at times, praying truth into his disciples' hearts.

Do you remember on the night Jesus was betrayed Peter said to Jesus, "**Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death**," (Luke 22:33) But Jesus had said, "**Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren**," (Luke 22:31).

I believe it was that prayer which held Peter together when, three times in one night, he denied his Lord. Finally, gripped by the awfulness of what he had done, he went out and wept bitterly in the streets of Jerusalem. But something held him steady -- it was the prayer of the Lord Jesus, the light which came from that prayer, which gripped his heart and held him on course. And so the very God to whom Jesus Himself prayed, and upon whom He depended to keep His disciples in the truth, is the same God to whom we are to pray, that the Father of glory may open our hearts and lives to His truth.

Paul now tells what he prays for them.

### III. What Paul Prays for Them (17-18).

A. He prayed for illumination.

Paul prays that God would give them **"the spirit of wisdom"** and the **"revelation in the knowledge of Him."**

Why does he pray that? Aren't these Christians? Didn't he already say back up in verse 8 that God made His grace **"abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,"**? Didn't he already write in verse 9 that God has **"made known to us the mystery of His will,"**? Haven't these believers already been indwelt by the Holy Spirit like he showed in verses 13-14? Yes. He has said that they were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. So he is not praying that they will be given the Holy Spirit. He is praying for a special ministry of the Holy Spirit.

In Isaiah 11, speaking of the Lord Jesus says, **"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."** Notice that Isaiah speaks of the seven spirits of God -- the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of understanding, the spirit of counsel, the spirit of knowledge, and so on... The book of Revelation also talks about Jesus as **"He who has the seven Spirits of God."** He doesn't mean that there are seven Holy Spirits; he means that there is one Holy Spirit who has a seven-fold ministry of illuminating and enlightening the heart. That is what Paul is praying for here.

Paul doesn't take it for granted that this is going to happen. This is not an automatic feature of the Christian life. If you want the Scriptures, the Word of God, to come alive to you, you need to ask for illumination. And if you want it to come alive to someone else you, ask that they be given the spirit of wisdom and of revelation.

That is why for most of us there are times when the Bible becomes dull. You read it and it doesn't say anything -- there is no illumination; or you are listening to a message and it falls flat -- other people seem to be blessed, but you get nothing out of it. What is the reason? Maybe it's because we have not asked God to give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation. I wonder sometimes if much of our teaching doesn't fall flat and much of the training of our children isn't a failure because we have never prayed this for them. Notice how the apostle does, how he is so concerned that these mighty truths should be more than mere sentences on the page, that they will really grip the lives and hearts of these Christians.

B. He prays for them to know the Lord.

And notice also that it is wisdom and revelation **"in the knowledge of him"** for which Paul prays. That is where truth finally leads. It leads to the understanding of the Person of God. The word **"knowledge"** here is not just talking about knowledge *about* God. It is really getting to know God through personal acquaintance, personal experience. In other words, Paul prayed that they would have the **"wisdom"** and **"knowledge"** to understand who God is and what God had done for them and to appreciate who God has made them to be in Christ.

There is a particular phrase in v.18 that is a key to unlock this prayer, "**that you may know.**" Next week we will study the three requests Paul makes to God for them: To know the hope of His calling; to know the riches of His inheritance; and to know the greatness of His power. You might say we already know these things. Well, you may have a head knowledge, but do you have a heart knowledge? Paul prays that "**the eyes of your understanding** [lit. 'heart']" would be "**enlightened.**"

Did you know that there are "**eyes**" on your heart? In Scripture, the heart is the seat of the intellect, emotions and will. The Bible says our inner person can see (Ps.119:18), hear (Mt.13:9), taste (Ps.34:8), smell (Phil.4:18) and touch (Acts 17:27). I think this is what Jesus meant when He said, "**Though seeing they do not see, though hearing they do not hear, or understand**" (Matthew 13:13 NIV).

The inability to see and hear things is not linked to intelligence, but rather spiritual condition of the heart. The Spirit of God must open the eyes of the heart. God wants our hearts, our inner person to be "**enlightened** [lit. 'shed light upon']." Remember what the disciples on the road to Emmaus said after Jesus appeared to them? "**Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?**" (Luke 24:32). God wants us to have an intimate knowledge, and experiential understanding of Him.

Do you pray like that when you read your Bible? Do you open the pages and say, "Lord, show me yourself?"

Ray Stedman said, "This is not merely a book to read in order to learn what is going to happen as prophecy is fulfilled. It isn't merely a book from which to get some ethical guidelines on how to behave in the relationships of life. Primarily and paramountly this book is designed to lead you to stand in the presence of the living God, to feel him, to know him, to sense his love, his wisdom, his strength, his might, his incredible grasp of circumstances, his control of human events, and to enable you to understand your relationship to him, to have him stand in your presence living, breathing, compassionate. That is what the book is for. That is the wonder of it. No other book has that quality, but this one has. Christ can step out of the pages and be a living presence in your life and heart, if you pray and ask him to give you that spirit of wisdom and of revelation. But it will not come in any other way."

God wants us to truly experience Jesus, not just "play church" or go through the religious motions of Christianity!

So what an encouragement this is to a ministry of prayer! Pray for one another. Pray for the class that you teach. Pray for your children -- that the truth they are learning, both at home and at Sunday school, will become vivid to them. Pray for your father and mother -- that the truth they are learning may change their hearts. Pray for your husband, pray for your wife -- that this enlightenment of the heart may come.