



November 23, 2014

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**To Know God Better
Ephesians 1:15-23
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Turn to the picture on the front in your bulletin. Isn't that a beautiful cat? It's mine! This is Noble. Carla in the office designs our bulletins. She looks at the scripture for the day and the title of the sermon, then picks out a picture that she feels fits the theme. She came to me and said, "Wouldn't it be great to have a picture of your cat looking up?"

I agreed, and Georgia, another office person who does our newsletter, came to my house, and we spent a long time trying to get pictures of my cats. Georgia, by the way, takes pictures for the Green Valley Animal League. Of course, since my two cats names go together, Barnes and Noble, we had to put a picture of Barnes in here as well – you will find his picture in the back of the bulletin.

Anyway, my cat is the introduction to my message today....knowing God. We are going to read today a prayer of the Apostle Paul. Paul says to the Ephesians I want you to know God. Isn't that what our church is all about? It's our purpose statement underneath my cat: To know Christ and make him known through word and deed.

So, let's see what knowing God is all about.

Read Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul is one of those guys when he is speaking can't get from point A to point B in a direct line. What he can say in 10 words, he takes 50. I have a friend like that (talk about Bob).

Paul gets so excited about Jesus that instead of saying just “Jesus is the head of the church,” he says “Jesus, the almighty One, the One God raised from the dead, the One who sits at the right hand of God, the One who has all power and authority, the One who fills everything is the head of the church. And of course, it is beautiful to get a full picture of Jesus.

That is what Paul is doing here, and sometimes it is hard to pick out what Paul is really trying to say. This is what I picked out, what jumped out at me. That Paul wants us to know God better.

This getting to know God better is not just head knowledge. When I first came here, my title was Associate Pastor of Christian Education and Outreach. About a year ago, the Christian Education committee decided to change its name from Christian Education to Faith Formation.

The reason why we did that is because, to me, Christian Education means head knowledge. And we certainly need head knowledge about God. But I want that head knowledge to go from here (point to head) to here (point to heart). I want you to experience your head knowledge of God so that it will transform your life, so your faith will be formed. Faith formation.

So, Paul says, I want you to know God better. Not just the head knowledge, but experiencing your faith.

Paul gives 3 reasons why it is great to know God better. I’ve listed them in your bulletin:

- So we will know the hope of our calling
- So we will know the riches of God’s glorious inheritance
- So we will know the greatness of God’s power for us.

Let’s flesh these out.

We are to know God better so we will know the hope of our calling.

On the Sundays that I preach, I try to plan out my week and reserve times to write my sermon. It didn’t work this week, and I didn’t get to sermon writing until

Friday, which is my day off. I was able to come up with a good rough draft, and decided I would finish it on Saturday.

I woke up Saturday with a headache/pain in my jaw. I get this from time to time, and often it throws me into bed with nausea...which happened Saturday. I can't do anything except lay there.

As the morning went into the afternoon, my hope of working on my message began to dim. I even had thoughts of calling Paul to preach for me (by the way, this is the first time he has heard about this! Talk about throwing new guy into the water).

Yet I still had hope the pain and nausea would diminish, and I could work on the sermon in the evening. You see, I know this is my calling - to preach and teach. So even though my hope was diminishing, in the back of my head I know God, and God would make sure I got this message done. That was my hope.

We are to know God better so we will know the hope of our calling.

The Christian is called to hope. But that hope is not simply a vague sense of optimism about the future. It is not merely a hope in hope. The point here is that we have something in which to hope. We have a hope into which we have been called.

Because Christ has eternal life, we have been granted eternal life. Because Christ is righteous, we have been declared right before God. Because Christ is the Son of God, we have been adopted into God's family as His children. Because Christ is the Heir of the kingdom, we have become co-heirs with Christ.

This is the hope of our calling. Our hope is totally focused on God. And the more we know God, the more we have hope. This hope is our possession. Knowing this, how does it change your life?

This leads us into our next point of knowing God:

We are to know God better so we will know the riches of God's glorious inheritance.

Two fold things going on here: an inheritance we receive AND we are made an inheritance. I should have written the rest of the sentence in this point. It says to know “the riches of God’s glorious inheritance *in his holy people.*”

First of all, the inheritance we receive which gives us hope, which goes back to point number one. Also, if you go back and read the beginning of chapter 1 of Ephesians, there is a list of all our spiritual blessings – in other words, our inheritance. I encourage you to do that sometime this week. Here are some highlights of our inheritance: we are chosen in Christ and adopted as children in God’s pleasure; God lavishes on us his grace, we receive forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace.

This inheritance is our possession, and God delights in giving it to us. How will you live it out?

When we know God, we begin to realize all the blessings that are bestowed on us. But, not only do we receive an inheritance, but God does, too. God is on the receiving end of this glorious inheritance and we, the saints, are it. God has not only given you an inheritance, God has also made you to become an inheritance. You are God’s prized possessions. You are worth inheriting. Not because you are so wonderful. But because of what God is making you to become. Knowing this, how does it change your life?

Let me give you an example:

Victor felt like a loser. He didn’t do very well in school. When he was 16 years old, a teacher advised him to drop out of high school and get a job. He didn’t do much better in the working world so that by the time he was 32, he had failed at 76 different jobs.

But applying for job number 77 was to change Victor’s life. As a part of the interview process, he was required to take an I.Q. test – a test designed to

measure his intelligence. A score of 100 was considered to be normal. Victor scored 161.

Victor was a genius and he never knew it. The knowledge of that fact transformed his life. Victor Serienko went on to become famous for his research in laser surgery and to become president of MENSA, an organization for geniuses – all because a test said that he was special.

God has said some tremendous things about you. God has said that you are so special that you are God's inheritance. You are God's prized possessions. How will that knowledge change your life?

Third reason why to know God better:

So we will know the greatness of God's power for us.

A.C. Dixon: When we rely upon organization, we get what organization can do; when we rely upon education, we get what education can do; when we rely upon eloquence, we get what eloquence can do, and so on. Nor am I disposed to undervalue any of these things in their proper place, but when we rely upon prayer, we get what God can do.

What Paul is saying here is that we have a power available to us. What is so amazing is that this power which raised Jesus from the dead and seated him at the right hand of God and placed Christ as head over all things (I'm doing a Paul run-on!)– is available for you and me. God did all this for the church.

What in the world do we do with this statement? I must admit, I can't quite grasp it and the ramifications for my faith, for the church. I read several commentaries, hoping to get a hold/handle on this. Most of them said this power that is available for us is the power that gave us salvation. This power is the power that enables us to live the Christian life. It is the power to believe, to trust, to serve, to give.

And I think all of this is true. But I think there is more because Christianity is a religion about power; it focuses on two powerful events – the resurrection and the exaltation of Christ. It has to do with being aware of the great power of God

working in our lives. It is experiencing God's resurrection power. God takes his power and extends it, presents it, makes it available to you and me and this church and every believer in the world.

What does that look like? When Arthur Rubinstein, the famous concert pianist, was in New York, someone invited him to attend church. His answer: "Take me to a church that will challenge me to attempt the impossible." Now, I think that is what the power of God looks like. Attempting the impossible, because the power that is available for us is the same power that did something impossible: it raised Jesus from the dead. And we are to experience it – not only when we die – but now.

This power is our possession. How does knowing this change your life? I want to find out what this looks like – in my life, in our life together as a church. I want us to dream together, to experience God's resurrection power in our lives together.

It's Thanksgiving week. Time to count our blessings.

It's not hard for us to count our blessings, is it? We are so blessed in this country. In my family, we would sit down to eat, but before we ate and prayed, we went around the table and said what we were thankful for in the past year. Usually we were thankful for family, health, things are physical, material, tangible things.

But Paul encourages us to give thanks for things which are not things: faith, love, God's hope, God's inheritance, God's power.

None of these blessings can be seen, touched, or purchased. And yet, they are the very greatest gifts we could ever receive.

Happy Thanksgiving!