

Ephesians 1:15-23

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

On this celebration of the Ascension of our Lord, let us turn our attention to Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 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, 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, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the

heavenly places, 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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

This text in our translation is divided into two sentences, but in Greek, this is the second longest sentence in the New Testament. This is all one long thought from the Apostle Paul. The importance of this isn't simply academic or to impress you with my knowledge that can easily be found in any decent commentary. No, the fact that this is all one long sentence tells us that it is all a connected thought by the Apostle.

In this prayer that we read in our text today, Paul is telling the people of Ephesus that he gives thanks for the faith that they already have and he prays for them to receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in knowledge of God for the purpose that

the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened, that they may know the hope to which God has called them, and that they would see the richness and greatness of his power.

That's a pretty great thing for Paul to be praying for. It seems like the kind of thing that we should all be praying for, right? It would be easy for us as well to focus on these things as well. After all, it is easy for us to talk about the eyes of our hearts being enlightened and to marvel at the richness of God's mighty power. Indeed, there are many Christians who do just that. They write trite and catchy songs based on this idea. But you see, when we focus on that section, we are missing the beginning. And if we miss the beginning, we miss a lot. If we focus on the visual acuity of our internal organs, we are focused on ourselves. But of course, that's exactly what our sinful nature desires.

We can attempt to quantify the ability of our hearts to see these wonderful truths of God. It becomes something that we can strive after. We can assess ourselves and our piety to determine if our eyes are opened enough. And what's better than being handed more opportunity to turn in on ourselves? The chance to weaponize it against others, of course! Once we are convinced of the openness of our eyes, we can sit in judgment over other Christians and proudly announce that the eyes of their hearts aren't as open as the eyes of our hearts.

And the riches! Oh, the riches. It is so very wonderful to have the chance to turn the Gospel and the service of Christ into another opportunity to fill the coffers of the congregation. After all, this text says that the riches come as the result of having the eyes of our hearts opened. Therefore, it is only the truly enlightened who get a share in the riches of Christ. So, if you're not rich, you'd better get out there and pray that you can be a

better Christian in order to get your share of these sweet, sweet, riches.

But that is all missing the point because it begins with God giving us the gift of the Spirit who reveals these things to us.

The Spirit is indispensable in this whole process of having faith and seeing the glory of God. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ ascended back into heaven. He said, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” Truly, on this day we remember and we celebrate the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ did return to the Father.

And because he returned he has given us the Holy Spirit who reveals these truths to us, the eyes of our hearts are opened already. Truly, this is because the Holy Spirit continually points us to Christ. We affix our eyes on Christ, who is the one through whom all of the aforementioned blessings come to us. Indeed,

when we rightly see and understand the true glory of the cross of Christ and the salvation that he won for us on the tree outside of Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago, we can see the true riches that our Father has lavished upon us. He has credited the righteousness of Christ to us to cover our unrighteousness.

The immeasurable greatness of God's power is revealed to us when we see that through Christ, our sins are completely forgiven. For us who are in Christ, there is nothing to fear from God. We have seen his great and powerful arm stretched out on the cross for our salvation. And we know that it didn't end there! No, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who was sentenced to die the death of a blasphemer and insurgent was vindicated, revealed as righteous and true by his Father when he was raised from the dead.

But even the vindication of resurrection was not enough honor for Jesus. No, as Paul says in our text today, he ascended

back into heaven and the Father “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Yes, Jesus, the very right hand of God himself with respect to his divinity sits at the right hand of the Father with respect to his humanity. He is the one who is the hand of God who was stretched out and saved the people out of Egypt. He is the hand of God who rescued Israel from the many and various enemies that surrounded them again and again. He is the right hand of God who saved you and me from slavery to sin, death, and the devil by being stretched out on the cross. He is the one to be

honored for all that he has done, for the redemption that he has wrought for you and for me.

Truly, the Ascension of Christ is an incredibly glorious event. It is, though, something that from our perspective can be a bit disappointing. Yes, he is honored to sit at the right hand of the Father. The name of Jesus Christ is above every name for at his name, every knee will bow. But it can easily seem as though he is far from us. When we are hurting, he isn't there to hold us. When the cancer comes back, he isn't there to touch us and heal us. When we are about to sin, he isn't there to call us out on it.

But make no mistake, dear friends. Our Lord Jesus Christ is still here with us. He promised that he would be with us to the very end of the age, and so he is. We come here and we hold his very body and blood in our hands. We receive him who is the very Word of God into our ears when we gather to hear. Our

Lord is not walking around, but he has not left us alone to find our way through this dark and wearisome world.

We are not alone. The Holy Spirit, the helper, comforts us. He points us to Christ again and again. He directs our attention to the many ways that Christ does yet come to us through the Word and Sacraments. You and I are never alone. Our Lord has not abandoned us. He is with us still now and he will always be with his people until the day of his glorious return.

In the meantime, the same Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary, who worked as a carpenter, and who amazed so many in his time with his miracles and teachings is the one who sits at the throne of the universe. Our world is ruled over by the one who felt hunger, sorrow, and fear. Every power on earth pales in comparison to the power wielded by our Lord Jesus who suffered on the cross, bearing the weight of our sins so that we would be forgiven. There is no one to whom Christ must

give an account because he is the faithful servant of his Father. He has fulfilled the Law in our place and gives us his own righteousness.

He has given us his Spirit so that we would see his glory, a glory that our world did not, does not, and never will see. But nonetheless, he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is the one who is our savior and he is the one who still with us and has given us many ways to see and know this to be true. Amen.

Now, may the peace that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord to life everlasting. Amen.