

The first three words of Ephesians 1 v 15 are .... For this reason.

They are a reminder to look back to all that Paul had already said at the beginning of his letter. A bit like the beginning of a star wars movie, or the second part of a television drama, we need to be reminded of the main things that have gone before.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is all about the love that God has for his people, how he has chosen us in Christ and how in Christ we are given a wonderful new identity.

Ephesians was written by Paul to believers, to those who had put their faith in Jesus. Now it is possible that some of you listening today are still checking out who Jesus is and that is great.

Whether you believe in Jesus at the present time or not, God has some amazing things to encourage all of us from Ephesians 1.

Scott reminded us last week that the letter to the Ephesians we have today may have been written to a group of churches. But to make things easier I will keep referring to the original recipients as the Ephesians.

It would be good for you to have your bibles open at Ephesians Chapter 1, to follow and also check out what I am saying.

So, following on from the great benediction in Ephesians 1 v 3-14, we find Paul continuing in Ephesians 1 vv 15-23 with a great prayer of intercession.

It is important that we see how the two sections of Ephesians chapter 1 complement one another. John Stott, in his commentary highlights how firstly, the apostle Paul blesses God for having wonderfully blessed us in Christ (verses 1-14).

But Paul does not stop there, rather he goes on to pray that God will open up our spiritual eyes to help us to truly know, understand & experience the fullness of this blessing (verses 15-23).

So what Paul is advocating is that we should keep praising God that in Christ all spiritual blessings are ours, and to keep praying that we may know the fullness of what he has given us.

We need a healthy rhythm of praise and prayer in our Christian lives.

This morning I want to begin by asking a question – **What kind of things do we mostly pray for ?**

Maybe it's for the results of the Six Nations. I have to be careful when I say this ! Maybe for our favourite football team. Maybe that God will bless our children, our family, our friends.

Let's just spend a few minutes discussing in some smaller groups, of three or four, for a few minutes, this question. If you want to, you can just think about the question on your own.

Prayer is something that not all of us find easy. This has maybe come up in your discussions.

Maybe it has raised another question, what more could I actually be praying for ?

As we look together at Ephesians 1 vv 15-23, we will see the amazing things Paul prays for the Christian believers in Ephesus.

And by applying these principles in our own lives, and especially as a church, we can begin to transform what we pray for.

There are actually several specific things that Paul prays for the Ephesians, but they are all connected to Jesus, so the big picture that God is showing us is Prayer in Jesus.

**Paul's first specific prayer in Ephesians 1 verses 15 and 16 is one of thanksgiving**

Even although it appears that Paul had not met them personally, he had somehow heard of how the Ephesians had come to faith in Jesus.

It's clear that their faith in Christ was evident, from the love they had developed for their fellow Christians.

Paul tells the Ephesians that he is genuinely thankful to God for them, and he assures them of this by telling them about his prayers of thanksgiving to God for them.

So, all those years ago, Paul, in his planned and spontaneous times of prayer, is so overjoyed about these new believers that he has not met.

And so he can't stop giving thanks to God for them and remembering them in his prayers.

Very practically, in our own lives, we can learn from Paul to thank God for our fellow Christians in this Church, in Inverness and further afield.

Look around you, think about our young people and leaders that have gone out to their activities, and think about those who are not able to get to worship with us at the moment.

We can all find so many people we can give thanks to God for.

But we can also give thanks for Christians that we might not have met but we have heard about or come to hear about. One practical way that we can do this is to use the prayer points in our weekly bulletin for our own times of prayer.

Returning to the Believers in Ephesus, Paul does not stop there, he wants more for these believers. He prays for at least five more things, all of which are linked to them increasing in their knowledge in Jesus.

We find the words **so you may know** embedded in what Paul prays in verses 17 and 18.

As we will see, this knowledge is spiritual knowledge that transforms our thinking, and also our lives experientially.

Looking at verse 17, wisdom and revelation brought through the Holy Spirit, are what Paul prays for the Ephesians.

The central purpose of this prayer is so that the Ephesians can know God better.

He wants the Ephesians to know more about this trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit that they have come to trust in and are now following.

If we look closely at Ephesians 1 v 17 in the NIV we find the words the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

There is also a footnote saying that the verse could also be translated or a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

What is important to see is that the Spirit mentioned in verse 17 is the same Holy Spirit that Paul mentions in Ephesians 1 verses 13 and 14.

<sup>13</sup> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.

Having already put their faith and trust in Jesus, in response to the gospel, God had already put his seal, or deposit, on the Ephesian believers.

But Paul wants more for the Ephesians, and so he keeps asking God in his prayers for spiritual wisdom and revelation to be given to them. This was something that Paul identified that they needed in order to grow in their knowledge of God more.

I want to think briefly at another question :—

**How can Paul's prayer for wisdom and revelation make a difference to what we pray for?**

When we put our trust in Jesus, we are also sealed with the Holy Spirit. God placed his mark of his new ownership on us.

And just like the Ephesians we all need more and more of God's wisdom and revelation so that we can know him better.

Jesus describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth in John 16 verse 13. By cultivating a relationship with the Holy Spirit, he can bring us God's wisdom and revelation.

This wisdom and understanding is way greater and above and beyond any of our own human wisdom. As we take time to read our bibles more, God is able to show us more about himself and ourselves, and guide us into wise choices.

Sometimes in the decisions we face - things may seem fine on the surface, what we can see from a human perspective looks trouble free and the right way to go.

But there may be something ahead, something beneath the surface that we are not seeing, that God may want to reveal to us.

Or it may be that we find ourselves being led by God into something that from a human perspective does not seem to make any sense.

The things I have mentioned are just two examples of wisdom and revelation that God can bring and there will be others that I am sure you can think of.

Paul kept asking God for this spiritual wisdom and knowledge to be given to the Ephesians so that they would know God better.

As a church, may we pray for one another that we would know more of God's leading, guiding and revealing by the Holy Spirit, as we grow spiritually and increase in God's presence.

Returning to Ephesians 1 verses 18 to nineteen, we find that there is still more that Paul has to pray for the Ephesian Christians. So he prays again for three further facets of spiritual knowledge

Paul wants the Ephesians to know :-

**Firstly the Hope to which God has called them in their new identity Christ**

**Secondly – the amazing riches of God's inheritance in the saints through Jesus – their new eternal destiny**

**Thirdly – that God's power is for them, as they live out their Christian lives**

The illustration of a journey is helpful here as the Christian faith is also often likened to an exciting journey.

The Christian journey has a start point – the time that we respond to the gospel and take the initial step of faith and put our trust in Jesus.

Then we have our final destination, which for the Christian is heaven. The wonderful and amazing eternal life that Jesus promises us with him.

And we have the time in between, the journey of new life in Christ we now live out as Christians in this world. The journey that so many of us are on this morning.

Paul wanted the Ephesians to firstly know that they had begun this journey with God. They had come to faith in Jesus, responding to his call through the Gospel.

The hope that he speaks of in verse 17 is that they would increasingly and confidently know all the spiritual blessings that are theirs in Christ – all the things he has already written to them about their identity in Christ earlier in Ephesians 1 vv 3-14.

Paul also wanted the Ephesians to know about what lay ahead for them at the end of the journey.

He uses the words glorious inheritance in the saints and has already used the word inheritance in verse 14.

Scott reminded us last week that back in Paul's world only sons had inheritance rights.

But in Christ, all this has wonderfully changed.

In the future, when we finish the journey of faith, there is a glorious inheritance awaiting us in heaven. What heaven will be like is not easy to really know for sure, but it surely be far better than anything we can imagine right now.

One facet of heaven we find in Ephesians is that there will be a glorious inheritance for the believer.... But we have to finish the journey of faith with Jesus to receive our inheritance.

And that its why, thirdly, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know that God has the power to see them all the way through the journey of faith in Christ they had embarked on.

The remainder of Ephesians 1 from the end of verse 19 to 23 is how Paul explains how this is true.

I have got an illustration that I think will help us partly understand what Paul is getting at in his prayer for power in Ephesians 1:19-23.

I went on a simple journey the other day. The journey involved me travelling from Maryburgh, my start point, to Inverness, my destination. And I decided to take the bus.

I got to the bus stop in good time, and the bus arrived a little bit late, but didn't bother me as I had given myself plenty of time.

Well the bus set off and it was clearly struggling, going really slow and it only just made it round the corner and just as we got to the next stop the engine died.

So all the passengers, including myself, had to get off and wait till the next bus came.

Thankfully we all got on the next bus we made it safely into Inverness a little bit late but we had completed our journey.

While I was stood waiting for the next bus a man next to me rang his friend and I remember him using these words – **The bus has ran out of power .... The bus has ran out of power.**

Returning to the last part of Paul's threefold prayer for knowledge, in a nutshell he wanted the Ephesians to know that God does not lack power.

God never runs out of power, nothing can be compared to or with his mighty power. And amazingly God's power is for us, or towards us, and to an extent in us who believe.

Paul is convinced that God's power is sufficient, and at the end of verse 19 he accumulates the available words in Greek - **power, working, might and strength**, to convince the Ephesians of this truth.

We can also take great encouragement from this truth about God's power for us this morning. Paul also goes on to remind the Ephesians some of the amazing ways that God demonstrates his divine power.

Look at Verse 20 – By public demonstration of the resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven.

Jesus is no longer dead, but alive, the tomb where they laid him is empty. ! This is the wonderful story of Easter Sunday.

And then the risen Jesus was seen by many and then taken back into heaven by God – we can read about this in Acts 1 verses 1-11.

Through God's power, Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms. At this point I want to highlight that the whole of the bible holds together from beginning to end.

The words seated at God's right hand used by Paul in verse 20, and God placing all things under Jesus' feet in verse 22 point back to the Messianic Psalm 110, especially verse 1 which says

The Lord said to my lord: "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool."

I would encourage you to read Psalm 110 this coming week for yourselves as it helps us understand more of the knowledge in Jesus that Paul prayed for the Ephesians to have.

But there's more ! In a nutshell, verse 21 shows us that God's power is so great that he has exalted his Son Jesus, in the heavenly realms, far above all competitors.

Jesus is far more powerful and exalted, above all others who rule, exercise authority, power and dominion, whether human, angelic or demonic.

Paul is clear that Jesus is risen and exalted, far above all competitors.

Ultimately, Jesus rules over all things with absolute supremacy. This is what he wants the Ephesians to know.

And the name, or title, that Jesus has been given is really significant. The name of Jesus is like no-other, in history, in this world today, or in the world to come.

The world we live in today has very much a celebrity culture, and its easy for us to get sucked into these things. What the celebrities say, what you should do, what you should have, we have to be careful of these influences.

Human celebrities come and go. For Christians, Jesus is the greatest name, the one to follow.

One day, at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.

When we pray we often close our prayers with words like 'in Jesus name we pray, Amen.' From what Paul has taught the Ephesians about knowing God's power, we can take real confidence from praying to God in Jesus name.

So it's not just a nice or Christian way that we have learned to pray. Prayer in Jesus name reminds us, with confidence, of God's power to act and change things.

The close of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians introduces the metaphor of the church being the body of Christ, with Jesus being the head.

So Jesus is the head of our local church here, and also his church throughout the world. We will find out more about this in the coming weeks.

In our world power is so often misused, we see this so often in the news stories, even over this weekend.

God never misuses his power.

John stott notes helpfully that it is because of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and his enthronement in heaven, over all powers of evil, that he has been given headship over the church.

One final question of application - **How will praying for knowledge in Jesus transform our prayers ?**

Perhaps some of us may want to reflect on the vision God has given the church – to increase in his presence, to take the land, to watch out for idols when we get there.

In my previous job I worked in the electricity distribution industry. Above all else, the main purpose was to ensure that our customers had a reliable and secure electricity supply.

In other words the main task was all about ensuring that people were always connected to the power source.

Whenever there was a fault on the network, whatever the time or place, the priority was to get people connected once again to the power source. So Day or night, sometimes in the most horrific of weather conditions, the priority was to get people back on supply.

This picture of re-connection to the power supply reminds us that God did everything he could by sending Jesus to this world to rescue us.

He loved us so much, and through the cross provided the way for us to restore our broken connection with God and know his power once again.

As I draw to a close, may we take great encouragement from Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, prayers for knowledge in Jesus.

As we pray for our fellow Christians, and for our church here, let us thank God for one another.

And may we especially pray for increase in our knowledge of God. That the Holy Spirit would reveal to us more and more our identity in Jesus, our secure eternal destination in him.

And may we know that God has the power to guide us and keep us along the exciting journey of faith that we are travelling on with Jesus.

Amen