



This week at Magdalen Road Church we continued our Autumn series in Ephesians looking at what Paul does in response to the glorious, meaty truths of the verses from last week (1-14). We saw that he prayed for them.

We began our time together by thinking about the tendency Christians have in wanting 'something extra' in their walk with God that will help them grow more or give them victory in beating sin – a silver bullet to make things easier. We considered that, rather in asking for something extra for the Ephesians, Paul longs for them to know who they already are and what they already have 'In Christ'. We were reminded of identity amnesia from our weekend away – the idea that most pastoral issues come from us forgetting what we already have in Jesus, and so looking elsewhere for joy / satisfaction / life etc...

Why does Paul pray?

We noted that he prayed fundamentally because of the good news in v1-14, but also in thankful response to the evidence of God's grace seen in them – especially their faith in Jesus Christ and their love for one another. He prays to the God who has revealed himself in history – and we said foundationally there were 2 aspects to the prayer - Knowing God better and knowing the blessings that God gives us, better.

1. He prays that we would know God better (v17)

v17, we saw, was a Trinitarian verse, as his Holy Spirit living in us was the means by which we might know Him better. We noted that this is the language of relationship, not of information. How easily we think we know God because we know all about him, rather than actually knowing him. JI Packer's advice was helpful in this respect:

"How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God?

The rule for doing this is simple but demanding. It is that we turn each Truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God."

2. He prays that we would know God's blessings better (v18-23)

The overarching second strand of his prayer seems to be that his people might know God's plan for the world better - grasping where they're going, who they are now and also the power in them, so God will get them there:

1) the hope to which he has called us.

Whilst their faith and love seem to be praiseworthy (v15), their hope needs some work. 1v10 outlined the end game of God's plan – to bring all things together under the headship of Jesus. In a culture that just looks for the now, or plans in worldly terms, it was striking that Paul prays for them to know the hope to which God has called them.

2) the riches of God's inheritance in his people

The inheritance he outlines here seems to be God's people, rather than what God's people will receive – ie what God will inherit, rather than us. Again, like last week, Paul is using Old Testament terminology – just as God's people were to be his inheritance, see Deut 4v20 for example, so he's praying that they might know the importance that they, as God's united people are, to him. Jew and Gentile, diverse and yet united in Christ – a new humanity. A glimpse of the future, in the now. We'll see more in the weeks to come, but as they grasp more of who they are in God's plan – the riches of his inheritance, so they will submit to one another, love another, serve one another – maintain the unity that he's achieved.

3) The power for us who believe

Power is an important term in this letter, probably because it was an important idea in Ephesus. Important in terms of commerce, religion but especially magic (hence names being invoked). To a potentially weak and intimidated church he reminds them that they have the power that raised Jesus from the dead, living in them and working everything in the world for them. Often despite the evidence in worldly terms, we are participants in the heavenly reign of God – staggeringly he is working out his plan in this world – for the church.

Here are just a few questions that might get things going, please feel very free to ignore / adapt for your group:

What 'silver bullets' are there out there?! What would we use them for?

How does Paul come across in this prayer? How does he relate to them? What can we take from his model?

Why do you think Paul prays here? What things does he pray for?

What do you think it means to know God?

Would you say you know God?

What's the relationship between knowing God and knowing about God?

What are the 3 'blessings' or aspects of his plan that Paul prays they would know better?

What do you think he hopes to achieve by praying them?

What does he mean by 'hope' here? Why does he want them to know the hope to which God has called them, do you think?

What are the riches of God's inheritance in his people? Why is it key the Ephesians latch onto that? What will it change?

What kind of power is he describing? Why does he describe it in this way? Why does it matter? What does v22 mean? Do you believe it?