

Experiencing Truth  
May 17, 2015

**Strange Things that Don't Seem Strange Anymore.** That is the title of a blog article by a Christian missionary serving in the country of Tanzania in Africa. Some of the things on her list include:

- Finding geckos in my kitchen cupboards
- Finding the little golden tree frog that lives somewhere in my bathtub drain
- Garden snails the size of the palm of my hand
- Buying milk in a box, unrefrigerated
- Driving on the left side of the road
- Waking to the sound of roosters and the Muslim call to prayer.
- Buying electricity at the store on a little card, which I then insert into a box inside my house which then recharges my house with electricity.
- Electricity going off in restaurants, grocery stores, and at church....and no one even reacts. The waiters light candles, the grocery clerks hand-write receipts, everyone at church just keeps singing.... No big deal!

In December, which is summer for them, she wrote: *"It's been a rough electricity week in our area. Every day this week, the power has been off from about 9 am until 6 pm. And when it has been on, it's been in phases, which means that only some parts of our house have electricity."* Many of us don't have to imagine what that would be like, as twice in the last few years we were without power for a week or more, in the summer.

When our missionaries request prayer, it is hardly ever for physical things. They don't ask for more comforts like we have in the United States. They sometimes ask for safety or protection, though not as often as you might expect. They are in danger from malaria, dengue fever, dysentery, parasites, poisonous insects, spiders, and snakes, and radicalized adherents to other religions. But most of the time they don't ask for safety.

What I read them asking for most are spiritual things. They ask us to pray for opportunities to share Jesus. They ask us to pray that God will prepare hearts to hear the gospel. They ask us to pray that God will make strong the faith of new believers who face the rejection of family and friends.

I wonder, today, how often we ask for spiritual things? When someone asks you this question, "How can I pray for you this week," do you tell them to pray for things of the world or spiritual things? When you ask someone how you can pray for them, do they mention everyday life things or spiritual things?

If I asked you what you most needed me to pray for you, what would you say? Would you want me to pray for more money? Would you ask for better food, a better living situation, better health, a better job, or new boss? What spiritual things would you ask for?

**Are the things you pray for most things that non-Christians would ask for?**

Are you aware of any spiritual needs that you have? Do you pray for these to be met? Do you ask others to pray for these to be met? Do you pray for the spiritual needs of other Christians?

Do you ever pray for the peace and joy of Jesus? Do you ever ask for prayer concerning your chief temptation? Do you ask people to pray that you will grow closer to God?

Now Jesus taught us, in His Sermon on the Mount, that it is okay to ask for such things as daily food. Many Christians in the first century had lots of physical needs that they could pray about. But they also had spiritual needs.

In the Bible we have letters addressed to six churches by Paul the missionary. In three of these letters he shared what he had been praying for these Christians. His prayer is pretty much the same for all the churches, at least these three. While he had great concern for the poor Christians, and took up offerings to help them, his primary prayers for them were of a spiritual nature. We want to look at this today.

How focused are you on your spiritual needs? Maybe you are not aware of any spiritual needs. In the book of Revelation in the Bible, Jesus writes a letter to seven different churches. Three of these churches had a significant spiritual problem that they were not even aware of. Jesus had to point it out to them. One He describes as having lost their love for Him. Another is spiritually dead, and the third is spiritually poor. None of them were aware of their spiritual need. They were busy, active churches, with good reputations among other churches. But they had significant spiritual shortcomings... and were not even aware of it.

I hope that you are aware of your spiritual needs today and that you are praying about them. But if not, I hope that today's sermon will serve as an eye-opener for you so you can expand your prayer requests.

So what does Paul ask for? Let's look at Ephesians 3 this morning to find out.

**Ephesians 3:16-19 (NIV)** I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Those first Christians had no Bibles. There were no Christian preachers on TV or the radio or the internet. Once Paul the missionary had left them to start new churches in other places they had nothing but the Holy Spirit in them. Maybe they wrote down key doctrines from Paul in order to preserve the teaching. But there were no supplemental helps to maintain and grow their faith. In addition, there were so many religious and cultural influences to pull them away from the truth of Jesus.

It is no wonder that we read how Paul worried about them and prayed for them like a loving parent. So he reveals to them what it is that he has been praying for them. He is praying that God would empower their prayer and worship experiences by His presence. Then the teachings they learned would take on life.

You see, **You can know spiritual truths as just more trivia.** Our world today is more loaded with trivia than ever before. And much of it has no bearing on your daily life. It is possible to

consider spiritual truth to be like that, interesting, but of little consequence to living your day at work or school.

For example, you can know that Jesus wanted us to have His joy, but do you? Have you experienced moments in prayer when God was just so real that you were brought to tears or laughter? It is one thing to know that God has adopted you, but another to feel it.

One of my favorite stories of adoption took place when I was in college. Lisa was a young woman in our Baptist Student Ministry Group. She had been raised through her teenage years by foster families. In fact though about 20 she was still living with a foster mom. She had significant self-esteem issues. She would joke and laugh, but you could tell there were deep issues of sadness and depression.

Our Baptist chaplain at the time had three young daughters. And he and his wife called on Lisa to babysit. The whole family loved Lisa, and the Baptist chaplain and his wife approached her with the idea of adopting her. Lisa said that would be fine with her. She was somewhat enthused, but not like you would expect.

A few days later, Lisa stopped into the chaplain's campus office. (The Chaplain told me of this later that week.) While Lisa was sitting there, he called up his lawyer and told him of the adoption and that their wills would have to be rewritten to add Lisa as an heir. It was in hearing this that it finally became real for Lisa. She became very excited, her face showing great surprise, followed by joy, she started laughing and jumping around. The adoption, the acceptance, into a new family suddenly became very real to her.

This is what Paul was praying for those Christians. He was praying that their relationship to Jesus would become very real to them, that they would experience this spiritual truth in their hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. I have had such experiences. This is what I pray for you too.

It is one thing to know that we are supposed to have joy in our salvation. It is another thing when you are praying and the joy of your salvation comes flooding over you by the Spirit of God. In such moments you have a certainty of your salvation that is indescribable. This is Paul's experience and he wants the same for them. You and I need this too. My experiences of God's presence in prayer and worship have kept me going for all these years in ministry. I would not trade those experiences of God for anything. And I pray them for you too.

Paul is praying that Jesus would be real to them. They know who Jesus is. They have put their faith in Jesus. Ask them the basis of salvation and they will tell you. But they need to know Him as a person. It is one thing to know something up here (in your mind) and another thing to have experienced it down here (in your heart). Just knowing spiritual truth up here does not lead to life change. **Life change comes from experiencing spiritual truth.** This is how Paul was changed. This is how Paul discovered his need of spiritual things. This is why Paul has been praying for these things for them.

Paul is praying that God would reveal Himself more personally to each of them. I hope you are praying for this as well. Pray that for me. I need to experience God's truth in powerful ways when I read the Bible.

Having something and appreciating it are not the same. Warren Wiersbe, the pastor of Moody Church wrote a little book called, Be Rich, and in there he gives an interesting illustration about

William Randolph Hearst, who was a very rich man. Hearst at one point in his life decided to invest in the collecting of great pieces of art. He was collecting them from all over the world and storing them in warehouses in different places. One day he read a description of an incredibly valuable piece of art, and he determined that he had to have that piece of art. So he got his agent and he sent him all over the world to find it. Months and months went by and finally the man came back and reported to Mr. Hearst that he had found it. Mr. Hearst asked where it was and the agent said that Mr. Hearst already owned it. He had bought it years ago and it sat in one of his warehouses. He had a great work of art, but no appreciation for it until someone else pointed out how special it was.

How much spiritual truth have you learned, but it is not special to you? It is in your possession as a Christian but hidden away from use, hidden away from appreciation?

Jesus cautioned his disciples about those who had eyes but could not see and ears that could not hear. His point is that they had physical eyes and ears but not spiritual ones. They could not appreciate spiritual truths because they had closed their hearts and wills to spiritual things.

Paul knows that even Christians can become hardened and resistant to learning more spiritual truth. He is praying for them to experience God personally. He is praying that Jesus will become real and personal to them. And by telling them of his prayers, Paul hopes they will pray this as well. You and I need to pray this too.

Christianity is not about church. Christianity is not about religion. Christianity is not just about what happens later. Christianity is about today. Christianity is about having a personal relationship with Jesus.

Jesus had that kind of relationship with God. Jesus lived with a constant awareness of the presence of God, the Father. He lived each moment in the presence of God. Then, on the cross, I believe, He lost this. The father removed Himself from Jesus. This is when and why Jesus prayed, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" For the first time in His life Jesus felt cutoff from God. This occurred when He hung on the cross taking all of our sin upon Himself.

You and I grew up without the presence of God. How much richer our lives will be if we have this awareness. How much more confident our hope will be when we have this awareness. How much more faithful to Him we will be when we know we have experienced the living God.

Paul prays for that very thing, that the Spirit would enable us to know God on a very personal level. I need this. Direction and power for ministry comes from this.

Don't you want it too? You certainly need it. You need Jesus to live in your heart. You need to know how wide and long and high and deep is His love for you.

Come today and believe in the living God, the resurrected Jesus. Put your faith in Him for the forgiveness of your sins. Turn your life over to Him.