



*To Know Christ . . .
and to Make Him Known*

Wilmington, North Carolina
Dr. Mark E. Gaskins, *Senior Pastor*
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A Window on Eternity **Ephesians 1:15-23**

Imagine for a moment a child being born and growing up in a room with no windows. He's never seen the trees or grass or sunshine. Any light he's seen has been from an artificial source of some kind. Though he may have heard them sing, he's never seen the birds. He's never seen the rain or the effects of the wind, or anything else that one might see outside.

He can't go outside, because of some medical condition that confines him to the inside. He knows the outside is there—he's heard others talk about it and describe it, and even before that, he sensed that there was more than just the room he was living in.

But he's never *seen* the outside, until one day, someone takes him into another room where there is *a window*—a large clear window that opens onto a glorious scene with animals, trees, grass, a stream, brilliant sunshine, and a clear view of the sky. He can't go out there, but at least he can *see* it—through *a window*!

A window is a marvelous thing, isn't it? It lets us know there's something out there beyond where we are.

Years ago, most hospitals were built in such a way that their intensive care units were dark, secluded, and had no windows. But often patients would develop a syndrome in which they would become very disoriented, sometimes even paranoid or delusional. Many hospitals now have open ICU areas, often with windows!

It's important for us humans to be able to see beyond where we are, isn't it? We naturally plan for the future. We're not there yet, but we look through certain windows on the future, don't we?

When we're in the midst of crisis or trials or grief, it's even more important for us to be able to see beyond where we are. If we try to make sense of things from a purely temporal perspective, everything seems utterly meaningless, as it did to the writer of Ecclesiastes. He understood that God had set *eternity* in the human heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Since we're confined to time and space in this present age, there's only one way we can see beyond where we are. We need a window, *a window on eternity*.

That's what Paul was actually talking about in our text for today, Ephesians 1:15-23. Here *Paul prayed that God would give his readers an eternal perspective on God's purpose and power*. Listen to what he prayed . . .

Something big

In the second episode of *The Andy Griffith Show*, "Manhunt" (it first aired back on October

10, 1960—the day after I was born), Sheriff Andy Taylor has been out on the lake fishing with his little son Opie. Their boat starts leaking, so Andy and Opie row to shore and hide it so a stranger won't take it out on the lake and sink.

Just as they're finishing hiding the boat, Deputy Barney Fife drives up, gets out of the squad car, runs up to Andy and says, "Sheriff, this is *big!*" As Andy tries to find out from him what's going on, all Barney can say over and over is, "It's big!" When Andy finally gets it out of Barney that there's been a prison break and they think the escapee is in the Mayberry area, Barney asks Andy, "What do you say about that?" Andy replies, "Only one word I can think of—*big!*"

That's sort of how I feel when I read what Paul says here in this first chapter of Ephesians—*it's big!*

What Paul says

To begin to get an idea of how big it all is—we really could never fully comprehend it—we have to look at the context of what Paul is saying here.

As I said last Sunday as we began this series, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a little different from his others in that he seems to be writing to a group of churches rather than to one church or individual; and rather than addressing a specific situation or problem or problems, he's describing what God has done and is doing in Christ and what that means for believers as to how we should live individually and as the body of Christ.

Now like Paul's other writings, Ephesians is an ancient letter. He follows his greeting in 1:1-2 with a doxology blessing God, praising Him for all He's done for us in Christ, blessing us **with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**, choosing us in Christ, predestining us to adoption as God's children through Christ, redeeming us through His blood and forgiving our sins, thus displaying the riches of God's grace (1:3-14).¹

Now usually in an ancient letter, this section where you offered a thanks or a prayer or a well-wish for the recipients was very brief. But in this letter, Paul expands it significantly. Verses 3-14 are a thanksgiving for God's work in Christ. The key to what Paul is saying in this section is in verses 9-10, when he says (NIV 1984 edition):

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

What Paul is talking about here is God's plan to gather and unite all things in Christ, summing everything up into perfect unity in Him. He's alluding to the new creation—when Christ returns in glory, raises the dead, sits in judgment, and redeems the entire creation (except humans who have rejected Him) in new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells and the heavenly Jerusalem descends to earth and God dwells among His redeemed and resurrected humanity for eternity (Romans 8:18-25; 2 Peter 3:11-13; Revelation 21:1 – 22:5).

In the ancient world the Greeks applied the word Paul uses here to the process of addition in arithmetic. When they totaled up a column of numbers, they didn't write the sum at the bottom the way we do; they wrote it at the *top* of the column. They called this "bringing to a head." In Christ, God will bring everything to a head in perfect unity.² Everything will all "add up" in Christ!

Friends, there's only one word for that—**BIG!**

Paul's prayer

Paul continues to expand this section in verses 15-23, offering a prayer for his readers and hearers. It's *a big prayer*—a prayer that God would give them *an eternal perspective* on what He's doing—a *window on eternity*, if you will (1:15-23).

He tells them that he has heard about their faith in Jesus Christ and their love for all the saints, and that ever since he did, he has continually thanked God for them and remembered them in his prayers (1:15-16).

And here's what he was praying for them—that God would give them a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, enlightening the eyes of their hearts to know three things in particular.

First, he wanted them to know *the hope to which God had called them*. For Paul, hope was future confidence—particularly the confidence that God would bring to completion what He has done in Christ, fulfilling all His covenant promises. While this hope involves several things, it all culminates in Jesus Christ's return in glory, when He will raise us with a body like His, judge the world in righteousness, and redeem all creation in new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. Paul prayed that God would reveal the breadth and depth of this hope to them, to give them the long look, an eternal perspective on things.

He also wanted them to know ***the riches of the glory of [God's] inheritance in the saints***. This was really another way to express the hope of God's calling, but specifically it refers to the inheritance we share in Christ. This inheritance involves sharing in Christ's resurrection glory and being with the Lord throughout all eternity. It's an inheritance that's far beyond what we can even begin to imagine. If you compared it to the inheritance that the richest person in the world could leave for his or her heirs, that inheritance would pale in comparison to what Paul is talking about here—spiritual wealth of an eternal nature, not wealth of a this-worldly nature.

He also wanted them to know ***the exceeding greatness of [God's] power toward believers***. Now hang on here—this is almost too big even to begin to grasp! Paul said that God is working *in our lives* even now with *the very same power* He used to raise Jesus from the dead, to exalt Him in the heavenly realms, and to subject everything to Him as head over all for the church, His body, which is to express His fullness!

Can you imagine that? God is working *in our lives* right now with the *same power* He used to raise Jesus from the dead and exalt Him over everything! He is working in us *with His resurrection power*! That's ***BIG!***

Paul wanted God to give his readers *an eternal perspective*! He knew they couldn't perceive these things on their own; they'd have to be revealed to them by God.

The window

The fact is, whether we're believers living in the 1st century or the 21st century, *we really understand things only when we see them from God's eternal perspective, which only He can give us!* This eternal perspective, this *window on eternity*, makes all the difference in the world in how we view reality, how we view our relationship with God and with others, and how we deal with the circumstances of our lives.

Paul knew how important this eternal perspective was. In 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:10, he told the Corinthian believers that even after all he had been through and was going through, he didn't lose heart, because he looked on the things that were eternal, not on what was temporary.

When we read the stories of the martyrs in the early church and in other ages, we often find that they were encouraged as they faced death because they looked at things through this window

on eternity.

This makes all the difference in the world for us as well. When we're facing the limitations and liabilities of this life and the trials and tribulations that come with living in a fallen world within time and space, it's easy to get tunnel vision. But when we go to this window and look out on the vast expanse of God's eternal purpose, we realize that what we're going through here, what often seems so *major* in the temporal sphere, is really *minor*, like a blip on the radar screen, and that somehow God will incorporate it and use it in His grand eternal purpose.

Years ago—I don't remember where, maybe it was an *Our Daily Bread* devotional—I read the story of a farmer who found a young wounded bald eaglet. He took it home, nursed it to health, and tethered it in the barnyard on the ground with the chickens. For a long time, the awesome bird, now fully grown, knew nothing but scratching like a chicken. One day, someone commented on how sad it was to see such a marvelous bird acting like a chicken. So the farmer gently took it, removed the tether, and set it up on a high post. For the first time, the bird gazed into the sky and caught a glimpse of the heavens. Then suddenly, it spread its majestic wings and soared into the sky where it belonged!

Isn't it the same with us? We become so bound by the limitations of this life that it's almost like we never knew there's an eternal realm, a totally different dimension.

So brothers and sisters, gather round this window this morning, and peer through it carefully! See what our Father is doing in Christ *from His perspective*—how He's working in our lives and our life together and at what awaits us in glory! He shows us a glimpse of it in His Word, and enlightens the eyes of our hearts so we can see it. Look, be lifted to the heights, if only for a moment!

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

†MEG

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version.

² Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* in the *paideia Commentaries on the New Testament* series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 47.