

EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: "A Prayer for Wisdom"

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:15-23

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PASTOR: Jim Thompson

The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

God doesn't have a Plan B for reaching the world with the message of his saving love. He has one plan – his Church empowered by his Spirit carrying the Message of his Son, Jesus. Whether we like it or not, **we are** God's people for the world. That's not the question. The question is, "What do we need to be or do or think or believe to actually live like we are God's plan for the world?" What's required out of us? Doesn't the church have enough problems of its own? Consumerism, legalism, exclusivity, hypocrisy – how should we live so that things like that are put to death? And how can we be known for being a welcoming family, a Scripture-soaked people, and a caring refuge for the broken and the vulnerable? How do we get there? In short, how should we live as God's people in the world and for the world?

Paul's prayer for his friends in Ephesus helps us answer this question. In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul's basic request to God is that he would give them wisdom. Ephesus was a city fraught with pervasive religiosity, powerful politics, crude sexuality, and financial greed. Paul could've given the Jesus-followers in Ephesus any number of practical suggestions for how to live in their fragile cultural space. However, his basic plea to God is for them to have wisdom. And Paul's prayer is our answer:

Wisdom is how we should live as God's people in the world and for the world.

Not more rules. Not less rules. Not more politics. Not less politics. But a God-given, Spirit-wrought, culturally-aware wisdom. The Ephesian believers needed a dependent-yet-confident discernment that could only be a divine gift. That's why Paul is praying for it. And the way that Paul qualifies this wisdom challenges our modern assumptions about wisdom. He says that real wisdom is connected to knowing the hope of God's calling, the riches of his glory, and the greatness of his power. Meaning, the most discerning and prudent thing you can do is be blown away that he loves you and he has called you to himself. Those who don't know Jesus, they don't primarily need to see you as relevant, influential, networked, wealthy, or intellectual. They need to see you dumbfounded by the riches of his glorious grace. They need to see you in awe of his mercy and forgiveness. We need a wisdom like that, that sees things from the perspective of God's love rather than whatever we think is our most immediate, functional need. Put differently,

Wisdom that will change the world seeks a heavenly view of our earthly reality. It seeks to know the eternal God before it seeks to engage our temporal situation.

Paul also knows that this can feel backwards. He knows that most wisdom is supposed to be practical and have a hands-on knack to it. Yet, in his mind, the foundation to all wisdom is first and foremost to be captivated by God. That's where the real power is. And that's the language that Paul starts to use next, power language.

If wisdom is Paul's basic prayer request for his friends, then Jesus' resurrection is Paul's basic example of what that wisdom should look like and entail. And just like he qualified wisdom in three ways, he does the same with Jesus' resurrection. Paul says that Jesus' resurrection led to him sitting at God's right hand, having all things put under his feet,

and him being the head of his body, the church. These images can feel abstract, but Paul is hinting at something specific.

Jesus' resurrection did something to the evil, invisible powers at work in the world. These powers – often manifested through systems, -isms, politics, and power structures – their sway has been broken by Jesus' resurrection. The powers try to distract people from the inevitability of death and all its associated fears. They use sex, money, power, and prestige. But the resurrection means that death has lost its sting. And now, we are set free from having to identify with the powers. Their grip is loosened. And beyond this, because we don't bow to the powers, we are supposed to live so distinctly in the world and for the world that they see that there is hope beyond corrupt systems. The relational and worshipful wisdom Paul is praying for his friends requires exponentially more trust and dependence on God than the supposed ease of living for the powers. The wisdom he wants for them is aware that more is at stake than what meets the eye. That's why Jesus is seated "in the heavenly places" (1:20). He is victorious over the powers. Meaning,

Gospel wisdom believes that the bigger battles have already been fought and won by Jesus.

This can sound really simple, but think about how this sets you free. We don't have to win. We don't have to single-handedly solve the epidemic of hypocrisy in the American church. We don't have to wholesale fix materialism or legalism. Rather, because of Jesus' resurrection and heavenly enthronement, Jesus has emerged victorious over the true enemies – sin, death, hell, and the powers. And real wisdom means living in light of that. Now we're free to be God's family, to be Christ's body. Loving one another. Caring for the vulnerable and those broken and by the powers. Joyfully joining God on his mission. This is what it means to be the church – to graciously be an extension of divine wisdom and resurrection power. This is how we live as God's Plan A in the world and for the world. We rest assured knowing that the biggest battles are won, and we press on – not alarmed at the smaller and temporal fights that weigh us down day-to-day and week-to-week. Because Jesus understands those battles, and because he won the war of which those are mere echoes. Thus, we have to look to him *in faith* and *for discernment* as we engage the world around us with his love.

Discussion Starters —

1. What stood out to you most about this passage and/or message?
2. In your opinion, when is the church at its best and worst?
3. Who is someone you know who lives in this kind of heavenly wisdom?
4. What makes you want to "rush" wisdom and make it practical before worshipful?
5. What does it mean for wisdom to give us an eternal perspective on what we face?
6. What are "the powers" in the Bible, and how did Jesus overcome them?
7. Where do you need to trust God for more wisdom?