

Kingdom Prayers

[Announce Text] Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 1:15-23

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship. If you are joining us online for the first time, we are in a series through the book of Ephesians which was written by the Apostle Paul to instruct Christians in some fundamental and important truths of the Christian faith.

[Read Text] Please read Ephesians 1:15-23 with me...

[Prayer for Illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] A friend of mine flew in to the African bush to help a missionary. The missionary was a brave and faithful man who was building God's kingdom by reaching out to tribal members who had practiced folk and animistic religions for generations. While there, my friend heard the very level-headed missionary started calmly telling of some of his encounters as a prayerful outpost of God's kingdom against the kingdom of darkness and demons. And he wasn't someone who exaggerates.

He told of one encounter when he was talking with a young man and events took a noteworthy turn. He was sharing about Jesus- the King of Kings and then the missionary said, "That's when the demon picked the guy up and flew him so that he crashed him into that front wall. Then it picked him up again and flew him even further into that back wall."

Though we are near them often, in our culture we don't think much about demons. Many Christians live like we hardly believe in them. But for many other cultures, that's one of the main reasons to come to Jesus- He can protect us from demons while we build His kingdom through gospel witness, prayer, and love for our neighbor.

That is one of the main things going on in the Ephesian church. Ephesus was home to great pagan temples and it had a history of being a center for the practice of dark magic. That meant that this church was being especially assailed in spiritual warfare from all sides. They were a small outpost of God's kingdom in the middle of the kingdom of darkness. And this undoubtedly tempted them to

fear. But Paul, writing from a Roman prison is here writing showing that he's fighting this war from a distance. He's doing it by praying kingdom prayers for the Ephesians. In looking at this text today let's see that

[Proposition] We learn and benefit from kingdom prayers

Paul is praying while under arrest in Rome. As his mind moves to the church in Ephesus he served with years earlier, he begins to pray. Let's listen in from the next room so that we can learn and benefit from his prayers. In doing so, we'll notice Paul's prayers are a lot different than the prayers most of us pray, which tend to put ourselves as the center of the world. Kingdom prayers are different than simply praying to have lives that are happy and healthy and easy with perfect relationships. This kingdom prayer contains three examples of how to pray: **Kingdom prayers give thanks for grace already given. Kingdom prayers seek greater work of the Holy Spirit. Kingdom prayers seek spiritual knowledge-** where Paul, and therefore we, will spend most of our time.

As we listen in to Paul's prayer we'll notice that

[Main Point 1] Kingdom prayers give thanks for grace already given

Look with me at vv. 15 and the beginning of v. 16

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you...

The most heartbreaking thing for many of us is looking at people who seemed to be walking with Christ for years drift into doubt and unbelief- showing that their faith was never there to begin with. But Paul is hearing that the Ephesians still believe! The Gentile believers haven't gone back to Pagan worship. They haven't gone back to magic. They haven't caved into pressure to worship the emperor. The Jewish believers haven't gone back to Judaism. They continue to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And they continue to show that with faith at the root- they are bearing fruit of love toward one another and other Christian saints who encounter them. So Paul gives thanks! Do you ever show up to a gathering and look around and just give thanks that these people still have faith? Paul would! He does here! Let's learn from him and do the same. Let's give thanks for grace already given- that Christians still believe and still love! That's something we'll do if we are praying kingdom prayers.

We're listening in from the next room as Paul prays and we're going to learn and benefit from his kingdom prayer. And kingdom prayers give thanks for grace already given. Now let's see that

[Main Point 2] Kingdom prayers seek greater work of the Holy Spirit

Read the end of v 16 and all of v. 17 with me

...remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,

As I mentioned last week, if you have faith in Christ- you have all of the Holy Spirit! But that does not mean that He is always filling us to the brim with the most possible amount of His power and grace and love. So Paul prays a very Trinitarian prayer here to the Father of glory, on the standing of our Lord Jesus Christ, that these Ephesians would have the Spirit who's in them stirred up. Specifically, this means that the Holy Spirit would function by giving them more wisdom and more revelation into the knowledge of God. Simply put, Paul is praying that the Ephesians and we would seek the Holy Spirit because He will allow us to see more of God as He is. The idea of revelation means that things are hidden until someone does the revealing. We need someone to do the revealing for us. We can't get their purely by the use of our reason or through scientific study or advanced theological research. We need revelation. For that to happen we need a greater work to occur.

[Application] If I weren't a Christian, I might come to church just to try to be a bit more well-rounded and well-informed person. But listen, if you come to church or read Christian books, or whatever because you like to have a little bit of religious knowledge to put on the bookshelf next to your knowledge of history or literature or mechanics or whatever- you should feel a sense of rebuke here. You can know some facts about God and religion, but you can't really know Him in the experiential, personal way Paul is speaking about here unless the Holy Spirit reveals Him to you. You are helpless without Him. So learn from Paul and pray kingdom prayers like he does. Pray them for yourself, your children, your neighbors, your church elders. We need a greater work of the Holy Spirit.

[Illustration] My daughter Isla was working on a Latin assignment recently and she was stuck on a translation exercise. The main reason was because the teacher hadn't emailed out the English meaning of a Latin. Thankfully, I spent four years teaching Latin out of the same textbook so I was able to step in and help. But it made me realize that that lack of information was going to cause a problem for most families. Until someone came to reveal the meaning of the words part of the sentence was in darkness. So I wasn't too surprised to see an email come in from the teacher the next day stating the meaning of the words. Undoubtedly, some parents had sought out the teacher asking her to reveal the meaning of those words.

[Application] That's how helpless we are without the Holy Spirit. We're holding a pen looking at a piece of paper, but we don't know what to write. We don't even know what to think. We need God to reveal Himself to us. We need to have wisdom and the knowledge of God and we won't get it unless the Father of glory, gives us a greater work of the Spirit.

Hopefully you're learning and benefiting from this Kingdom Prayer already. In this kingdom prayer we see that such prayers give thanks for grace already given and that they seek greater work of the spirit. Now let's turn to where Paul spends most of his time as we listen to Paul pray and see that

[Main Point 3] Kingdom prayers seek spiritual knowledge

Spiritual knowledge means really knowing what we have in light of the gospel- not just in our minds but experientially in our souls. Here it means at the deepest core of our being that we have blessings that are life changing. But what is the spiritual knowledge God wants us to benefit from?

[Subpoint 1] Spiritual knowledge of our hope

Look with me at the beginning of v. 18

...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you,

Only when we're camping in isolation do most of us really understand what it means to live in the sort of darkness that made up every night for most people throughout history. No electric lights, just small candles and torches. Blackness

that keeps us from seeing where our next footstep will land. Yet that's the state of our hearts until they are enlightened by the Spirit. So we should pray that they are enlightened to know the hope that God has called us to. This hope is not a wish like we tend to use it now, but a confidence based on the objective truth of the living King Jesus. And we see here that we have it because God called us. God has called the Ephesians and us to be confident with a calm courage in the midst of all battles by knowing that since Jesus is unmovable in Heaven, our confidence is just as unmovable.

This kingdom prayer seeks spiritual knowledge of our hope. It also seeks

[Subpoint 2] Spiritual knowledge of our inheritance

Follow along in the v. 18

...having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

There is some debate among good, solid Bible scholars as to what the inheritance is that's being spoken about in Ephesians 1. Is it that we receive an inheritance from God as his spiritual children and heirs? Or is it that we redeemed people of God are actually God's inheritance as a sort of prized gift for Him to treasure in the age to come? Both ideas are biblical. Both ideas are true. Based on the flow and themes of the chapter I think it is probably our inheritance as heirs of God. While Paul doesn't go into deep detail here, he does tell us that this is full of riches. That our inheritance is glorious. And for the primarily Gentile church, this would have been amazing news. Before Christ, only faithful Jews could receive an inheritance from God, now it's open for all the saints- all those who have faith in Jesus. Come to Jesus and you get an inheritance! But we're so easily distracted by the things of the world that we don't know what we have coming to us. And which is now at our disposal.

[Illustration] In Jerry Bridges' excellent book *the Gospel for Real Life*, he tells the story of a former slave who was given an inheritance of \$50,000 by the plantation owner he'd served faithfully for decades. It would be worth more than half a million dollars in current money. The lawyer of the estate let him know that it was deposited in the local bank. After weeks went by and the man never came by to

access any of his inheritance, the banker notified him that he had \$50,000 at his disposal to be used at any time. Then the former slave, having been deprived of the responsibility of using money (due of course to the evils of slavery), asked the banker, “Do you think I could have 50 cents for a bag of cornmeal?”

[Application] The man would have lived a different life, a bolder life, if he'd have understood the inheritance that was his. We live like that man. We have a massive inheritance as God's children, but we so often don't know what we've got! We need to pray kingdom prayers to God to give us spiritual knowledge of this reality so that we live boldly for His glory.

[Subpoint 3] Spiritual knowledge of God's power

In the spiritual warfare that the Ephesians were fighting there would be a concern that maybe the evil demons around them would be strong enough to defeat them. Undoubtedly some of the church had experienced some of this evil power at times in the past- not unlike the African missionary I mentioned earlier. If a demon can throw a man across a room, what hope is there for us? Paul is praying that they would know that God is far more powerful than evil spiritual forces. But how can we know that God is powerful? We can know that God is powerful by looking at the gospel- what has been accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Example of Power #1- God's power raised Christ from the dead

Let's read vv. 19-20a

(that you may know) what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead...

Demons can harm people. Demons are always working to hurt people. Demons are powerful. But compared to God, they are like a rat in front of a steamroller. We know this because God has so much power that He is capable of raising the dead! If a demon inflicted the most damage possible by driving someone to their death- that's nothing- because God can more than reverse it. He raised Jesus to new life! Political power can't do that! Financial power can't do that! Physical health and strength can't do that! Popularity can't do that! But God has done it! God's power is so great that it is vastly immeasurable! It's far greater than we can imagine and we know it because He raised Jesus from the dead! But it's easy to

forget. So Paul prays a kingdom prayer that God would reveal to them that this level of power is working toward the benefit of the Ephesians and for our benefit today.

Kingdom prayers pray for knowledge of God's power. The first example of God's power is seen in the fact that God's power raised Jesus from the dead

Example of Power #2- God's power seated Christ far above all rivals

Let's read vv. 20-21

...that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Not only was Jesus raised from the dead, but He has ascended to the Father's right hand. We're meant to picture a sort of throne where God the Father is (even though He doesn't have a body), and next to Him- to the right- emphasizing power and authority- is Jesus. And He's seated because His work of redemption is finished. And this is in Heaven. Above every sort of ruler. Over the rulers of Rome who wanted to force the Ephesians to worship Caesar. Over the temple of the goddess Artemis of Ephesus and other pagan gods who were confined to this earth. Within magical practices it was common for spells to require the use of the right spells and the right names of the right evil entities in order to release their powers. But we see that in v. 21 that Jesus is FAR above every name that is named. Jesus has his foot on the throats of all evil rivals to His power. And that will never change- it is happening now in this age and it will be the same in the age to come.

Kingdom prayers will include the prayer for more knowledge of God's power which we see in the fact that Jesus has defeated death and been raised and also that He is seated in power in the heavenly places. But there is one very comforting truth that we need to know

Example of Power #3- God's power is now at work through Christ's body- the church

Let's read vv. 22-23

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

The gods of the ancient Roman empire were fickle. They would be your friend one minute, and then turn on you the next. How does having a knowledge of God's power help us? Doesn't knowing that an even more powerful God could turn on us make things worse? What if Jesus puts his foot on our throats? Paul is saying that we never have to worry about that. Through a confusing Greek sentence Paul is essentially saying that it's not just Jesus who has power over His enemies. It's also His people. Verse 23 tells us that the church is His body and the church is filled with Jesus, so now Jesus the Head uses His body to crush enemies underfoot.

[Application] Imagine how you would live if you really knew these things were true! You would never be afraid of anything ever again! Rejection by loved ones? Physical harm from evil people or governments? Demonic attacks? A terminal diagnosis? You would never be afraid if you truly knew that this power was available for you! And that's why Paul prays this. That's why kingdom prayers contain these truths. Notice that he's not praying that this power would be at work- God is saying that it already is! The problem is with us. We lack the spiritual knowledge of just how powerful He is and that He's using that for us.

Notice also what we learn from this prayer. Most of us react with hatred at the preaching of the prosperity gospel. But, honestly, we all tend to be personally committed to the praying of the prosperity gospel. Our prayers are constantly directed around having comfortable, easy lives. We ask God to heal our sicknesses so that we can be comfortable. We ask God to restore our relationships so that we can have less to worry about. We ask God to bring us better jobs so that we can fix our houses, cars, or whatever so that we can have easier lives. **And it's good to pray for these things!** But those aren't kingdom prayers. Too many of us live like squirrels running from one side of the street to the other to find the safest, softest spot when the car is coming. But God's kingdom gives you more! If we know the depth of God's power and the Holy Spirit is working in our lives, then we'll be freed from the tyranny of seeking comfort. God wants to free us from this sort of life.

The elderly can look at death with courage. Fathers can seek to lead their families even though they may look like they don't know what they're doing. Moms can find the power to be patient even when you are addressing the same issue with your child for the tenth time today. Singles, you can endure temptations to lust or relational compromise because God's has more than enough power to help you. All of us should see that the local church as Christ's body is a means of displaying that power- so we should look to one another for help.

Notice also that this kingdom prayer is gospel-centered. It's focusing on who Jesus is as the crucified and resurrected One and what He has done. Are your prayer's gospel-centered? Here we see that He's the King who is putting all enemies under His feet. Are you His enemy today? The kingdom Jesus is building will not be stopped and your sin is an act of war against Him. He will conquer that sin in One of two ways- by putting it and you under His feet for all eternity as this text says He does to all rivals OR He will have conquered your sin at the cross. He's a good King and He was willing to die for His citizens and conquer their greatest enemies like death and the devil by being raised from the dead. And He came to call you into His kingdom by taking the punishment for all of the citizens of the Kingdom at the cross. But you must bow to His rule now by placing all your trust in Him and repenting of your sins.

Do you also see how the glory of God becomes essential to the Christian life? Knowing the glorified Jesus, meditating on how He deserves all credit and glory- knowing that He has all power transforms how we live. The scurrying masses of the world are running back and forth trying to accrue power by wealth. No wait, through political activity. No wait! Through educational philosophies! No wait! Through being connected to the right people! No wait! Through living the American dream of house, family, and three day weekends! But when we know where the real power lies- with God Himself. And that He gives it to His people- the church, we can rest. We live lives that are different. And people will begin to wonder if we might even be living in a different, unshakable kingdom. That's how we benefit from kingdom prayers. That's what Paul prayed for the Ephesians and what we should be praying as well.