

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 7 January 2018. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“The Eyes of Your Understanding”

Ephesians 1:18-20

An expression that we often use in our everyday speech is the phrase “eye-opener.” Oftentimes we say, “Boy, this thing (or that thing) was a real *eye-opener*. That truth or reality was there all the time, right in front of my eyes; but for some reason, I couldn’t see it. It took that difficult situation that I went through to make me see it. I didn’t see the truth before: but now I do.”

In the Scriptures, God often uses the word “eyes” in a figurative way, as well. However, when God uses the word “eyes” in a figurative way, He isn’t talking about seeing just *any* reality: He is talking about seeing *spiritual* realities. For example, Jesus said in **Matthew 6:22-23**, “***The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness.***” In other words, the eye is like the “gateway” to the mind and the soul. If your eye be “***single***” (in other words, singly focused on Christ), you will be filled with spiritual light. But if your eye be focused on sinful things, then you are allowing spiritual darkness into your soul.

Tragically, this is the natural state of every person that has ever been born. Because we are all sinners by nature and by choice, every single one of us is born into this world with an eye that is “***evil***”—an eye which recoils away from light, and gravitates toward darkness. An unsaved man is blinded by his own sin, and full of darkness. He cannot really see or understand spiritual truth, even when he is exposed to it. What’s more, the god of this world, Satan, does all in his power to *keep* men in darkness. Jesus often described the condition of lost men by saying, “***Having eyes, they see not.***” That is why it is absolutely necessary that a lost man’s eyes be *opened*. In **Acts 26:18**, Paul explained to King Agrippa that God’s purpose for the Gentiles was “***to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.***”

An unsaved man is in complete darkness. Yet, when a lost man responds to the Gospel, and repents and believes on Christ, his eyes are immediately opened. A floodgate of light suddenly rushes into his formerly blinded eyes. The first thing he sees is the Lord Jesus Christ! For the first time in his life, he sees Christ as his Saviour and Lord. Spiritual truths which his blinded mind had never comprehended suddenly become as clear as the noonday; and he wonders how he could *not* have understood them before.

But that’s not where it stops. *Every day of our Christian lives, there is more spiritual truth that God wants us to see.* That is why the Apostle Paul made a very specific request as he prayed to God for the Christians in the church of Ephesus. Let’s look at Paul’s prayer request.

Read Ephesians 1:18-20.

In our last message from Ephesians, we read Paul’s first prayer request for the Ephesian believers. In **verse 17**, Paul prayed that the Father would give them “***the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ.***” The Holy Spirit is that “***spirit of wisdom and revelation.***” He is the believer’s “Eye-opener.” The Spirit opens the truth of Scripture to us, and gives us wisdom and revelation of God’s truths. Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would continually give them this wisdom and revelation.

But now, we come to **verse 18**. In this verse, we find Paul's *second* prayer request for the Ephesian believers. Paul's second request was **that the eyes of their understanding would be enlightened**. Particularly, Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would enable them to see three extremely important *spiritual* realities that they hadn't fully seen before. This morning, we will examine the three parts of this prayer request. The title of this message is ***The Eyes of Your Understanding***.

The first spiritual reality that Paul wanted the Ephesian Christians to see was...

I. The hope of the Father's calling (v. 18)

One of the spiritual realities that the Lord wants you to understand, Christian, is the *hope* of your calling. When you really see and understand **"the hope of his calling,"** it will radically change the way you live!

Now, maybe you're thinking, "That's sounds great, Pastor: but what exactly is **'the hope of his calling'**?" I'm a little fuzzy on that." Well, in a moment, we will look at some Scriptures which will explain what the **"hope of his calling"** is. But first, there's something I want you to understand about that word **"hope."**

"Hope" is a good Bible word. In the New Testament, the word *elpis* ("hope") is used 54 times; and almost every time it is used, it is used to describe the "hope" that a Christian has. Sadly, though, the word "hope" is greatly misused in our everyday speech. When people use the word "hope" in their everyday speech, they usually do *not* use it in the way that it is used in Scripture. When people say, "I *hope* that this or that thing will happen," what they usually mean is, "That's what I *want* to happen. That's what I *wish* to happen. I'm *expecting* that it may happen. But I'm not absolutely sure that it *will* happen."

However, that is *not* what "hope" means when it is used in the Bible, in reference to believers. The "hope" that the Christian possesses has no "question mark" in it. For the believer, there is no uncertainty in the word "hope." If God have promised something, then it is a settled matter. Though the fulfilment of the promise may be a thousand years in the future, it is as sure as if it were already done. For example, let's look at a promise that God made to the house of David.

Read Isaiah 7:10-14.

Seven hundred years before Christ was born, God promised the house of David that one day a virgin would conceive, and bear a son, and call His name "Immanuel" ("God with us"). Now, I'd like to take a very close look at these words in the original Hebrew language. First of all, the LORD said, *Hinneh, ha almah harah*. This literally means, "Look, the virgin pregnant." In English, we smooth this out as **"Behold, a virgin shall conceive."** However, when you look at the simple phrase "the virgin *pregnant*," you see a powerful picture. God isn't talking about a woman who *was* a virgin, but then lost her virginity and became pregnant; He is talking about a woman who *still is* a virgin, yet is pregnant! (What kind of a "sign" would it be if a virgin lost her virginity and got pregnant? That happens all the time!)

This is a sacred promise. God promised that a "virgin" would be pregnant. But that's not all. The LORD goes on to say, *w'yoledeth*. This is translated into English as **"and bear a son."**

Now, there is something fascinating about that verb *yoledeth*. It is in what is called the *perfect tense*. In Hebrew, the perfect tense is used to express an action that is completed—whether in reality, *or in the mind of the speaker*. In other words, the speaker could be talking about

something that has been completed in the past: *or*, he could be talking about something that is still in the future, but which, in *his* mind, is completed. That is the way that God is using this verb *yoledeth*.

Now, normally, the verb *yoledeth* would be translated “**bore a son.**” (In order for something to be completed, it must have been accomplished in the *past*, right?) Of course, the KJV translators realised that this was a prophecy of Christ’s birth; thus, they translated it in the future tense. But in God’s mind, the virgin birth of His Son was so certain, that it was as though it were already done. God spoke of this miraculous event in the *perfect* tense, as if it were an event that was already *completed*.

That is how sure God’s promises are! We may see God’s promises as future events; but God sees them as “done.” That is why Paul says that “**all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen**” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Jesus Christ Himself is called “**the Amen**” (Revelation 3:14). He is also called “**the hope of glory**” (Colossians 1:27). Christ is our Hope. All His promises to us are true; and they are sure to be carried out.

With all this in mind, let’s see what the “**hope of his calling**” is.

Read Romans 8:28-30.

According to these verses, what is the Father’s “calling”? What has He called us to do? He has called us to be holy. Being holy isn’t a secondary matter to God. It is the whole reason that He saved us! He saved us so that we would have the ability to live holy lives.

Before God created the world, He knew who would receive Him as Saviour, and who wouldn’t; and He predestinated those who He knew *would* receive Him to be conformed to the image of His Son (in other words, to be made completely holy, just like His Son). That is your destiny, Christian. Your destiny is that one day you will be completely, utterly holy, without spot or wrinkle.

Now, how can a dirty, rotten sinner, who is bent toward rebellion against God, be made fit for the perfect, holy city of heaven? How can God call people who are *unholy* to be “holy”? Well, here is how He does it. Let’s look again at **Romans 8:30. (Read Romans 8:30.)**

How does God carry out His purpose? Well, Paul says that there are three steps. First, God “**calls**” sinners to receive His gift of salvation. (This call to salvation includes the call to a life of holiness *after* salvation.) Secondly, He **justifies** those who respond to this call. This means that He imputes His Son’s perfect righteousness to their account, as though it were theirs, and declares them to be judicially “righteous.” On this basis, God is able to forgive them, and accept them. Thirdly, God **glorifies** those who respond to the call. That word “glorify” refers to the *resurrection*. When the Scripture speaks of our “glorification,” it is talking about our future bodily resurrection. We who know Christ will be given a body that has no more taint of sin or unrighteousness. It will be a body like *Christ’s* resurrected body.

By the way, you’ll notice that the word “**glorified**” is in the past tense. In fact, all four of these verbs (“**predestinated**,” “**called**,” “**justified**,” and “**glorified**”) are in the Greek aorist tense. This means that these things happened *at a point in time in the past*. Now, let’s take inventory, Christian. How many of these things have happened to us so far? Have we been **predestinated** to be conformed to Christ’s image? Yes. Have we been **called**? Yes. Have we been **justified**? Yes. Have we been **glorified**? No. The Resurrection hasn’t happened yet.

Yet, in God's mind, we are *already glorified*. In God's mind, our resurrection is so sure, that it is as though it had already happened in the past!

The Christian's "**calling**" is to be holy; but that calling will be ultimately fulfilled on the Resurrection Day. On the Resurrection Day (also called "the Rapture"), we will be completely holy, because we will have resurrected bodies that are just like Christ's resurrected body. What, then, is the "**hope**" of Christ's calling? It is the absolute confidence that God will perform this promise. It is the sure expectation that we will one day receive glorified bodies. The "**hope**" of Christ's calling is founded upon a bedrock promise. That is why Paul referred to the Rapture as the "Blessed Hope."

Read Titus 2:11-13.

Everyone who is saved goes *immediately* to heaven after he dies. The Bible says that for the Christian, "**to be absent from the body**" is "**to be present with the Lord**" (2 Corinthians 5:8). That is a wonderful hope for every believer. However, that is not the "**blessed hope**" of which Paul is speaking here in **Titus 2:13**. The "Blessed Hope" is the hope that we will one day receive a new body which is free of sin, and fit to live in heaven with a holy God.

Christian, are your eyes enlightened to this truth? I'm not asking if you know it in your head. I'm asking, "Has this truth penetrated your *heart*? Do you *really* understand it?" When you allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten your heart about this truth, it will radically affect the way you live your life. When you really understand the "**hope of his calling**," you will not be *content* to wait until the Resurrection Day to be free of sin. Of course, you will never be free of your sinful nature until that day; however, if you long and yearn for the day when you will be made completely holy, then *you will strive to be holy right now!*

Read Romans 7:24-25.

The Apostle Paul did not have a casual attitude toward his sin. He hated it! He couldn't wait to be rid of his old, sinful body. He couldn't wait for the Resurrection Day. Is this *your* desire, Christian? Are your eyes of understanding enlightened to the "**hope of his calling**"? Your attitude toward those "pet sins" in your life is a pretty good indication of whether your eyes are wide open to this truth or not!

Now, the second spiritual reality that Paul wanted the Ephesians to see was...

II. The riches of the glory of the Father's inheritance (v. 18)

(Read verse 18 again.) Back in **verse 11**, Paul reminded the Ephesians about the *believer's* inheritance in Jesus Christ. But now he is talking about *the Father's* inheritance. Paul didn't say that he wanted them to know "the riches of the glory of *our* inheritance": he said that he wanted them to know "**the riches of the glory of his inheritance.**" Now, perhaps you are wondering what *God's* inheritance could possibly be. After all, God created everything, and everything belongs to Him. If everything already belong to Him, how can any part of His creation come to Him as an "inheritance"?

Well, here's the situation. God created all things: yet, there is a portion of His creation that has been *delivered over* to God's enemy, Satan. God permits Satan to have authority over it. Let's take a look at what Satan himself said about this transfer of power.

Read Luke 4:1-6.

Did you notice what Satan said about the kingdoms of this world? He said that the kingdoms of the world had been “**delivered unto**” him! When did this happen? This happened in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned. At that point, mankind was delivered unto Satan. Man, who had been given dominion over this earth, forfeited his dominion to Satan. In a certain sense, Satan received dominion over this earth, and mankind. That is why Scripture calls him the “**god of this world**” and the “**prince of the power of the air**”! That’s also why the Bible says that Satan takes lost people “**captive at his will.**” That is why Paul said that God desires for lost people to be turned “**from the power of Satan unto God.**”

The horrible truth is that until a person receives God’s gift of salvation, he belongs to Satan! “But, Pastor, do you mean to tell me that the sweet little lady who lives down my street, and who always smiles and waves at me when I drive past her, and who bakes biscuits for me at Christmas time, belongs to Satan because she hasn’t put her trust in Christ alone for salvation?” Tragically, yes.

But here’s the good news. The good news is that Satan’s power was broken when Christ died on the cross for our sins. Satan is a defeated enemy. If you have received God’s Son (repented of your sin and put your full trust in Him), you have been delivered back to the Father. **That means that you are His inheritance!** That is why Paul called it “**his inheritance in the saints.**” The saints are His inheritance. *You* are His inheritance, Christian. You have been delivered to the Father; and He will come into His full inheritance of you when His Son appears in the clouds, and gives you your glorified body. You are like a precious jewel to Him; and one day, He *will* gather up His jewels!

Read Malachi 3:16-17.

Every Christian is part of God’s inheritance. But is there anything else? Does the Father have any other inheritance? Yes, He does. The rest of the Father’s inheritance is *the earth itself*. When Christ returns to earth after the end of the Tribulation, He will cast Satan into the bottomless pit for 1,000 years, and will rule on His throne in Mount Zion for 1,000 years; and we who are saved will rule and reign with Him! Think of that! God will actually allow us, unworthy though we are, to rule with Him in His inheritance (the earth)!

Christian, have the eyes of your understanding been enlightened to *this* spiritual reality? Do you really understand just how much God values you as His inherited possession? He bought you back at a tremendous price. He gave all He had to redeem you, and to snatch you out of Satan’s kingdom. If you like to cosy up to temptation, and hang onto sinful habits which you know grieve God, you are causing great pain to the heart of God.

I would also ask this question: Have you been delivered back to God *at all*? In other words, have you been saved? Either you have been delivered back to God, or you are still in Satan’s kingdom. There is only one way to be translated from Satan’s kingdom into God’s Kingdom: you must repent (change your thinking about your sin), and turn to Christ. You must believe, with your heart, that His sacrifice for you on the cross is all you need to be saved. If there have never been such a time in your life, won’t you repent and believe on Christ today?

The third spiritual reality that Paul wanted the Ephesians to see was...

III. The exceeding greatness of the Father’s power in their lives (vv. 19-20)

(Read verses 19-20 again.) The third spiritual reality that Paul wanted the Ephesians to see was ***“the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe.”***

We so often find ourselves saying (or thinking), “I *can’t* do this thing that God wants me to do. It’s beyond my power. Serving God in this area of my life is so *hard*.” Yet, God says that He has given us ***“the exceeding greatness of his power.”*** In Christ, we have all the power we need to live the Christian life. I can personally testify that anything that I have ever truly done for the Lord, the Lord gave me the power to do it. There was a time in my life when it didn’t look possible that I would ever come to this country as a missionary, because I was so deathly sick with ulcerative colitis. Even my mission bard, BIMI, had doubts, at first, as to whether I would be able to make it through deputation with my health issues, and endure the mental and physical strains of being a missionary church-planter overseas. They had to deliberate seriously as to whether or not to receive me as a candidate. After I *was* received as a missionary with BIMI, and began deputation, it looked as if I would never be able to raise the support that I needed, because most churches would not consider supporting a man who was single. (And with my health issues, it looked doubtful that anyone would *want* to marry me.) After the Lord brought Katie and me together, and brought us to Ireland, and we began the work of planting Redemption Baptist Church, it seemed as though we would never see anyone saved. Over the years, there have been many times of great discouragement because of the hardness of people’s hearts, and the slowness of the work. Yet, God has empowered us every step of the way. If He hadn’t continually encouraged our hearts, and empowered us, we would have gone back to America long ago; and a number of you would still be lost and on your way to hell.

Christian, the Father has provided you with *all* the power you need for Christian living. It seems that Paul went out of his way to make this point. **Verse 19** is packed with references to “power.” First of all, Paul speaks of ***“the exceeding greatness of his power.”*** That word ***“power”*** comes from the Greek word *dunamis*. We get our English word “dynamite” from this word. (If you want to know just how “powerful” this “power” is, just think of the word “dynamite”!) The next “power” word is the word ***“working.”*** Our English word ***“working”*** is translated from the Greek word *energia*. Of course, we get our word “energy” from *energia*. This word emphasises the actual *operation* of God’s power. God’s power isn’t theoretical. It is constantly in operation in people’s lives. God’s Word gives us example after example of men and women who did great things through the “working” of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

The next “power” word that Paul uses is the word ***“mighty.”*** The word ***“mighty”*** is translated from the word *kratos*. This word refers to *power excited into action*. Lastly, we see the word ***“power”*** again (in the phrase ***“the working of his mighty power”***). Actually, Paul is *not* using the word *dunamis* again: he is using a different word. This time, he is using the word *ischus*. This word refers to *possession, or ability*. *Ischus* refers to a strength that a person *has*, but which *he may or may not actually use*.

You know, that’s really the bottom line. The issue is not whether we *have* the power to live the Christian life: the issue is whether we will *use* the power that is available to us. All the power that you need is in the Holy Spirit, who lives within you. **But you must let Him work.** If there be sin in your life that you want to hang onto, and you are not submitting fully to Him, He cannot *work* His power in you. If you be not praying, reading the Word, and communing with God, He cannot *work* His power in you. You have the power abiding in you, in the Person of the Holy Spirit; but you must submit to Him.

Many times we pray that God would give us *more* power—as though we were a torch, and the last “battery” that God put in us were dying, and we need a new one. That’s not the idea at all! The truth is that the power Source is *always* inside us. The Holy Spirit is our Source of power; and His power never wears down, or wanes. The only question is, “Is there something in my life that is hindering the Spirit from working His mighty power?”

The Power residing within the believer is *exceedingly* great. How great is it? Well, let’s put it this way: **It is the same power by which the Father raised His Son from the dead! (Read verse 20 again.)** That pretty powerful! Yet, if you think about it, Paul *could have* said, “according to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought when He parted the Red Sea.” Paul could have said, “According to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought when He made the sun and moon stand still.” He could have said, “According to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought when He made the sun to go back ten degrees.” He could even have said, “According to the working of his mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He created all things.” Why didn’t Paul mention one of *these* stupendous miracles? Why did He say that *Christ’s resurrection power* is the power that energizes the believer? After all, which is harder for God to do—to create the universe out of nothing, or to raise Christ from the dead? (Obviously, *neither* one is harder for God to do.)

Well, here’s the answer. The reason that Paul was constantly talking about Christ’s resurrection power in our lives is **that Christ’s resurrection is the basis upon which God was able to redeem us.** God’s creation of the universe was not the basis upon which He was able to redeem us. The *resurrection of His Son from the dead* is the basis upon which He was able to redeem us, impart a new nature to us, and conform us to His image on the resurrection day! That is why Paul said, **“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformable unto his death” (Philippians 3:10).**

Conclusion: God has spiritual truth that He wants you to understand, Christian. It’s all right here. Do you see it? Are the eyes of your understanding enlightened to the hope of His calling, to the glory of the riches of His inheritance in the saints, and to the exceeding greatness of His power in you? I would also ask: **Are you saved?** If you be trying to get to heaven by your own righteousness, you won’t make it. Salvation is a miracle of God. You can’t save yourself anymore than you can raise your body from the dead. Christ *did* raise Himself from the dead; and by this same power, He can wash your sins away, give you spiritual life, declare you “justified,” and one day present you faultless before God with a perfect, sinless body. Won’t you let go of your own righteousness, and believe on Christ today?