

God's Love Changes Everything
God's Love Changes our Perspective
Ephesians 1:15-23

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We live in world of change. Everywhere we look things change; Seasons, people, careers, hobbies, relationships, the economy, sports dynasties, clothing styles. (I wish I had kept more clothes from high school; so many are coming back in style) Everything changes! Some like it; others no.

The Harvard Business Review published an article, "Ten reasons why people resist change." Some reasons were: We like control and certainty. We don't like surprises. We've had bad experiences with change and fear the ripple effect that one change would lead to many others.

We're in a series God's Love Changes Everything, and the change God's love brings is for the better! Throughout this series we've seen how God's love changes people, a whole city, and our identity, all for the better. This week we'll see another positive change that God's love brings.

And to illustrate this change, I'm going to need everyone's participation. I've used this illustration once before, and it requires a bit of coordination. First let me demonstrate what you'll need to do: You will point a finger up to the ceiling. Then make a continuous clockwise circle in the air. Now here's where some coordination is involved. When I say go... while you are drawing the clockwise circle, you'll lower your hand to chest level so you're looking down at it. Now draw your circle! Is it going clockwise? Now keep the circle going and lower your hand and look down at it. Which direction is the circle going? If you did it right, the answer is counterclockwise. What changed? The direction of the circle didn't change but your perspective changed, and a change of perspective makes all the difference.

Friends, we need a change of perspective concerning God's love for us. And here's the new perspective I pray we'd see from our time together: Everything we need, we already have. In a chaotic world of constant change, uncertainty, anxiety, and challenge, everything we need, we already have.

So, let's dive in. We're in Ephesians chapter 1. Paul is writing to a church in a town called Ephesus and the first three words of our text in chapter 1:15 are: For this reason. So everything that Paul's about to tell them is based on what he's already written. And last week we saw that we are chosen by God, predestined for adoption into God's family, redeemed, given grace, shown the mystery of God's will, given the Holy Spirit, and we are God's treasure.

So Paul writes: For this reason, (new identity) ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.
Ephesians 1:15-16

Word has gotten back to Paul about this church's reputation of faith and love and he hasn't stopped thanking God for that.

Typically, when I meet someone in the community and I tell people I work at The Creek they say, "Oh yeah, that's the big church across the street from the high school." Many people know us by the number of cars in the parking lot on a weekend or our location geographically. But there's a growing number that know us for much more.

People connected to Thomas Gregg Elementary School know us by our care for students and their neighborhood. People who've been blessed by over two million dollars given in the orange buckets or the "Baskets of Hope" know us by our generosity and sacrifice. A growing number know The Creek as a church

that cares for local law enforcement officers through various ministry partnerships. Franklin Township Elementary Schools know us because of the morning Bible studies some from The Creek are leading. Local athletic sports and their families are being positively affected by coaches, who call The Creek home, as they intentionally instruct young people with the Love and Grace of God. And I could go on and on!

So, I just wanted to pause for a moment and celebrate the growing positive impact we get to have in the community through God, and for His Glory! (Join me in thanking God for that)

Now imagine if everyone knew us, not by number of people in worship, or where we're located, but by our faith and Love? "The Creek? Oh yeah, that's the church that loves God and loves people." We are certainly headed in that direction, and Paul commends this church in Ephesus for their good reputation and thanks God for them in his prayers. But then Paul shifts from thanking God to asking God for specific things for them: He says, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." Ephesians 1:17

Paul keeps praying that they may know God! This word, know, means to be certain of something and convinced it's true. Paul's prayer is that they would know in their minds beyond a shadow of doubt, the nature and character of God.

And then Paul continues; I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you. Ephesians 1:18

What's interesting is that this word know, is a different word in the Greek than the know in the previous verse. While the know in verse 17 is about certainty in the mind, this word is about knowing by experiencing something relationally.

The first four times this know in vs 18 is used in the NT, it's in reference to Jesus knowing what people are thinking or feeling before they even say a word. And I'm guessing you know a few people this way. I can tell, by a look on my wife's face how she's feeling. I can tell by a look or by how they're walking or by their tone of voice what kind of day my kids had-how they feel or if there's something going on. It's the kind of deep and intimate knowledge that only comes with relational experience.

The problem is we live in a culture of shallow knowing. Easy access to news outlets and social media have fooled us into thinking we really know people. We see a series of posts and think things are going great, when maybe they aren't. We see headlines, or posts from "well known" celebrities and we think we have intimate knowledge of their life, and we don't have a clue. More than ever we can know facts about someone without really ever knowing them at all! And friends, superficial facts without intimate knowledge is not real knowing!

So Paul, after telling them seven ways their identity has changed because of God's love, prays for them to have certainty in the mind that God is real and intimate knowledge of the nature and character of God through personal, relational experience!

And there are three specific things Paul prays for them to know this way; and we read the first one already in vs 18. That you may know the hope to which he has called you. Ephesians 1:18

Hope is the expectation that change for the better is possible. Everyone needs hope! Yet many are struggling with anxiety and depression because they lack hope, they feel hopeless! Many believe there's no way for things to get better, there's no expectation that tomorrow will be any different than today. And when we find ourselves in what feels like a hopeless situation what do we do? We try to manufacture hope on our own:

- If I look good, I'll have more confidence, and maybe things will get better.
- If I accomplish things, I get recognized and maybe I'll feel better.
- If I get a certain number of follows, I'll be accepted and valued, and maybe I'll feel better.
- If I can be in a relationship and feel loved, maybe things will get better.
- If I can get promoted, perhaps things will get better.
- If I could just be happy, it seems I'd make better choices.
- If I can numb the pain, at least I'll feel better if only for a little while.

The problem with manufactured hope is

1. It never lasts, it's a bucket we have to constantly refill.
2. It's a symptom of not remembering or realizing what we already have!

You see, God's plan was for us to walk intimately in relationship with Him: God with us! But our desire to do things our own way and walk away from God's plan, what the Bible calls sin, caused a gap to form between God and us. You see a perfect, holy God, and sin can't go together, so there's a separation that formed. And sin isn't a small gap that can be easily bridged. It's a Grand-Canyon-sized chasm that separates us from God.

We can't jump that gap; we can't earn our way across. So, what did God do? God sent Jesus to pay the price for ALL sin, forever bridging the gap so that once again we might walk with God in deep relationship! God with us now in relationship while we live on earth and God with us for eternity! Friends, this is the hope to which God calls us! That everyone, everywhere has a chance at having hope, no matter the circumstances. I've heard someone else say, Followers of Jesus can live in today, with the future in mind, because God made a way through Jesus to rescue us from our past! That's real lasting hope!

Paul wants this church to know that: The gift of Jesus means everyone can have hope! But Paul also prays they'd know "the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people."

My stepdad passed away back in 2001. My family was living in Florida at the time, and my two sisters and I met at his home in Memphis, TN to settle his affairs. And we discovered that my dad had taken out some extra life insurance through work and left the money to my sisters and me. Now it wasn't a huge fortune, but it was a decent amount that helped pay off school loans and a car loan. I'm so thankful that my dad cared enough to want to leave us an inheritance.

And typically, when we see the term "inheritance" in the Bible, it's referring to what we get because of what God did for us. But Dan taught last week this verse is not about what we get through Jesus, but what God gets! You see while we get hope God says he gets us! Think about that. God sees us as a treasured inheritance He receives back through Jesus.

Back in March, an old car was discovered in a garage in Germany. This Bentley built in 1952 originally sold for about \$335. It had a rotted-out interior, and was literally falling apart, but was only one of six ever made and this car sold, in this condition for \$600,000. Something was lost and when found was a broken mess: but still had tremendous value! Guess what? That's us! And Paul wants people not only to know in their minds, but experience in their lives that God sees them as his inheritance. Paul wants them to LIVE like they are truly treasured by God!

If Jesus' gift of salvation means everyone can have hope, then as God's inheritance, everyone has value! Everyone everywhere is treasured by God. Imagine if we lived that way? But Paul's not done. One more aspect of God that Paul prays for them to know is his incomparably great power for us who believe.

I love the meaning of the word incomparable. It literally means to “throw beyond” someone! Both Josh and Megan liked to play catch growing up. And when you first start out playing catch, you stand pretty close so they can catch the ball, but also so that they can reach you when they throw it back. Until suddenly the day comes when they wind up and wing the ball way over your head! I remember with both of them thinking; “Wow, where did that come from?” Suddenly, they have enough strength not only to reach you, but to throw beyond you!

That’s the kind of power God has all the time! God has the power to “throw beyond” any circumstance or need, and Paul says that same power is available to those who believe in Him! He goes on to describe this power: That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:19-23

Recently I was walking through the church when some of our high school students were having a discussion (in light of the movie Avengers: Endgame) who their favorite Marvel superhero was. Then I got asked “who’s your favorite Marvel Hero? I said, “Thor, or Ironman”. My answer was based on the characters themselves, and also because of the cool powers they had. And we can’t help but see hero movies and think, “Wow, it’d be awesome to fly, be that fast, or be that strong.” It’s natural to imagine all the cool things we’d do with special powers.

Which is what makes these verses so critical: Paul tells this church they have access to the same power that rose Jesus from the dead, and then quickly points them back, over and over to Jesus. Paul’s not only showing them an example of the power God gives, but who it’s supposed to be used for! Look at the last few verses again: And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

The church is supposed to be the fullness of Jesus here on earth and the power God gives us is ultimately not for us to use for ourselves but so that as the Church we might together accomplish the purposes of the church. Worship God and point people to Jesus. If the gift of Jesus means everyone has hope, and as God’s inheritance everyone has value, then the gift of God’s power means everyone has purpose. You don’t have to search for purpose; in God and through Jesus you already have one!

Everyone everywhere is looking for hope, value, and purpose. And Paul prays that this church in Ephesus might know in their minds and experience in their lives that everything we need, we already have! And this is not a message just for a church 2000 years ago, but for “us who believe” here on the southeast side of Indy, in 2019. Hope, Value, and Purpose are already ours through Jesus.

So a couple of questions: If Hope, Value, and Purpose are gifts available to everyone, everywhere:

1. Why don’t more people come to know these gifts of God?
2. Why don’t we see more people, who profess to follow Jesus, showing fruits of these gifts in their life?

I think the First reason is: We don’t believe it! We are told in verse 18 that God’s power is available for us who believe. For one reason or another, some simply don’t believe in God, or that, if there is a God, “he certainly doesn’t want a deep relationship with me.”

I find it interesting that as Paul wrote another letter to a church in the town of Corinth, describing what love looks like, he wrote; “And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”¹ Corinthians 13:13. I don’t think the order of those was an accident. Truly knowing the Hope and Love of God starts with faith. And some people just don’t fully believe in God.

If that’s you, sincerely - Thank you for being here. You are in a safe place to learn and explore. I pray that you keep coming and seeking and that eventually you will take God at His word and “step out in faith” and test if God’s word is true by applying it to your life. But if you want to know real hope, value, and purpose in your life - It starts with faith in God.

For others, we believe in God and what life in Him looks like but, we don’t want it. We maybe think surrendering to God’s will change us for worse, not for better. We still like doing things our own way even though it’s gotten us into trouble in the past. Some have the false idea that God’s going to “take all the fun away” if we say yes to Him. So instead of trusting Him to be all we need we try to manufacture Hope, Value, and Purpose on our own terms.

I keep thinking back to something my kids say they learned in Student Ministry here. “God’s idea of better is always better than our own!” And even if we believe that, you’ve got to want God’s idea for your life more than you want your own. And some of us just don’t want it.

For others, we believe in God, and we want to know the Hope, Value, and Purpose that God has for us; but we think we can earn it! From birth we learn that if we do something good, it gets rewarded. As children – we achieve, we get recognized. Then as adults, we work hard, it often pays off. It’s no wonder why we think we can earn what God gives. So go and show up, and check things off the spiritual check list of what we read but experience no more intimacy with God and no change for better in our character as a result.

The sad truth is some of us have been lifelong followers of God yet feel less hope, worse about our walk, and are more lost in the purpose God has for our lives than ever before. Why? Maybe because we think we can earn our way into a deeper relationship with God. Remember the chasm between us and God because of sin. If we couldn’t earn our way into a relationship with God, what makes us think we can earn our way into a deeper relationship with Him. Many don’t know God deeply because we try to earn it!

For others, we say we want the deep relationship God calls us to, but we don’t cultivate it! This past Tuesday, May 21st, my wife Laura and I celebrated 25 years of marriage! I can honestly say we are different and better today than when we first started out because we intentionally cultivate our relationship. We’re not perfect by any means, but over the years we’ve tried to learn how to honor and sacrifice for one another. Going on regular dates, setting time aside to be with one another, vacationing sometimes just the two of us so that we don’t stall, or drift apart, but actually continue growing!

Some of us believe in God. We say we want what He has already given us, and we know we can’t earn it; but we don’t cultivate a relationship with Him. We don’t read his word regularly. We don’t spend time in prayer. We don’t shut off the noise of the world to listen to Him. We don’t cultivate the relationship. It’s no wonder why we find our hope fading or question our value and get distracted about our purpose. If we want to know in our mind and experience in our lives the deep relationship God calls us to, we have to cultivate it. (Set time aside for the relationship.)

For others, we don’t know or experience a deep relationship with God because we try to rush it! Have you ever started dieting and then a week later you don’t see a difference and you get frustrated? Or start to exercise, don’t see change quickly and quit? Anyone else ever feel that way? We approach our walk with God this way. We want to see and feel a difference immediately. And anything worthwhile, including deep

Relationships - takes time! It takes time to truly understand the hope that comes from salvation, the value that comes from being treasured by God, and the purpose that God's power gives. It's a lifelong journey. It cannot be earned; it must be cultivated; and it takes time.

There's a photographer named Dewitt Jones. And one day he came across this rock formation. It made for a pretty picture, but nothing special. Then he had this crazy idea of going inside the rock. He climbed down, looked up and took this picture. He later said, "By dropping down into that slot canyon and looking back the other way, I could find a perspective that would transform the ordinary into the extraordinary." Dewitt Jones.

Friends, God's love changes everything, and it certainly changes our perspective. Like the church in Ephesus, God invites us to know in our minds and experience in our lives the Hope, Value, and Purpose that only come from Him. Everything you need, you already have.