

6-7-20 Scripture and reflection

Ephesians 1:13-17

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

For this reason, 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. 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.

It is that spirit, the one that Paul asked God, the glorious Father, to give to the people - the spirit to know Him better - that is where we find the hope that God wants us to have. Hope that he has called us to live in and share with others. Now, currently, in the midst of COVID-19 and racial injustices that are BOTH so prevalent in our world, hope can be a hard thing to find, much less live into. It would be a great thing if we could just snap our fingers and wish all the death and destruction away, but we cannot do that... Bummer right? So if we can't make it all go away, what can we hope for? How can we live the hope for which we have been called when we can't see the light in all of this darkness?

Sometimes it is really hard to feel that hope - to even know where to look for it. Especially in times like we are living right now - How am I supposed to live hope when I don't know what is happening all around me? When I don't know what it is I'm supposed to do? How do I find that hope in the confusion of all the different perspectives and points of view that come at me from all directions? How am I supposed to react to all of the chaos around me right now? What am I supposed to do about any of this- I am only one tiny little speck... And what difference could I possibly make? And sometimes, as selfish as it sounds, I get so tired of trying to "do" or figure out what to do that I think, "Heck, Diana, you are 60 years old, just keep your head down till you get to the finish line." That doesn't sound very hope filled at all does it?! And some of you are thinking "Umm, no! And this is the pastor, what chance have I got if *she* can't find God's hope?" Don't worry, we ALL have both the opportunity and the ability to find that hope. We just need to slow down. Because when we slow down just a little bit and stop spinning in all the different voices around us, something happens. When we slow down long enough to stop and start looking for answers - even if it is only an answer to despair and not a "how to change the world" answer - we find that it all works its way back to God. If we stop looking at our world through the lens of social media, of worldly news, of our human eye, and instead look at our world through the lens of scripture, we can not only see the light in the darkness all around us, but we can feel the hope... and we can see how to live in that hope and share it with others.

Through the lens of scripture we come to know God better and we are reminded that God oversees this world and there is great hope in that - He has called us to that hope. Through scripture we remember that God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1) according to His eternal plan (Ephesians 3:11). We remember that God is sovereign (Isaiah 46:10); His heavenly throne is fixed and firm (Hebrews 1:8); His Kingdom rules (1 Timothy 6:15) over all things seen and unseen (Colossians 1:16). He is the breath of life (Job 12:10) and while He often allows us to experience many things by chance (Ecclesiastes 9:11), during this bitter, frightening, difficult time, He is still in control and promises us the strength (Isaiah 40:31) to not only endure, but to receive good things by His hand during this season in our lives (Romans 8:28). THIS is what we are called to hope in and hope for and we can see all of this

clearly when we allow the spirit to guide us and we look at our world, at our lives, through the lens of scripture.

In Paul's letter, just a few verses before our reading today, we can read: "In love He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:4-5). This predestination is the foundation of the hope to which He has called us. In verses 13-14 we are told, "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (a guaranteed inheritance until those who belong to God are redeemed)

In **John 7:38-39** Jesus said: "'Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.' By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

So God gave YOU and ME a promise that no one in the Old Testament had. A promise found in the glorification of Jesus and realized in the Spirit; a promise that calls us to hope; that gives us hope for the time we will be resurrected with Christ. Can you imagine?

[Special music: "I Can Only Imagine"](#)

"Surrounded by His glory" - just that simple phrase brings such an amazing feeling of lightness, of light.. That is what we have to look forward to - that is what our hope is all about... Let's hear a bit more about that hope to which he has called us...

Ephesians 1:18-21 New International Version (NIV)

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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. 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.

That "enlightened heart" that Paul speaks of can only happen if we truly know God; if we take the time to truly know Him as the loving, patient, kind, just, merciful, gracious, joyful, creative, generous, etc. etc. etc., God that He is. .

We need to know though, that our knowledge of God does not end with knowledge of His character, all those adjectives I just shared with you - it is extremely important that we have a knowledge, an understanding, of His character, but we also need to have knowledge about the work He has done for His people, for us...

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in today's scripture includes his prayer that the Lord give them knowledge of the hope to which they have been called.

What then, really, specifically, is this hope to which we have been called? Galatians 5:5 says we await the "hope of righteousness"; Colossians makes reference to our "hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27); Timothy tells us that Jesus Christ is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1); and Paul tells us that God has given us the "hope of eternal life." Each one of these expressions of this hope that we have been called to really refer to the same thing. All of our hope is in the eternal, resurrected existence we will experience, we

will enjoy, in the new heaven and earth, there with God - right there with Him - as a people who cannot sin because of the redemption Christ bought for us.(Revelations 21). That's what God did for us - It is important to know that He chose to buy our salvation through the life, the death, and the resurrection of His son.

This hope to which we have been called is a hope not born of the uncertainty of the world in which we now live; but rather, this hope to which we have been called is really a synonym for the confident anticipation of what God has promised.

Earlier I told you that sometimes I question what it is I am supposed to do; that I wonder what difference I could possibly make. And the answer to that questioning is found in the hope that God has called me to live.

Through the lens of scripture, each one of us can find the strength to do His will here on this earth. God can use us to make a difference in this world - IF we let Him. IF we allow His Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, to help us know Him better. The wisdom and the revelation to know that He has shown us the way. It is found in the words Jesus told us in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life..." We find our strength in Christ. We find our way in Christ. We find our hope in Christ. In Christ, God has given us the assurance of salvation - and he has called us to the hope of that salvation.

Let's go back to the words of Paul's letter in verses 18-19:

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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

We have been given every opportunity to know that hope through scripture, and we have been given every reason to live into that hope, the hope to which God has called us - a confident hope in His promise for our salvation - and He has the power to make that happen - an incomparably great power for those of us who believe. I pray that we can all come to truly know God so that we can learn to trust and live in that hope, and so that we can share that hope with others, because that's how we make a difference in this world, that's how we can have an impact on what is happening all around us right now - by both knowing that we were called to hope, and then living in confident assurance of what that hope brings. AMEN