

“A Great Inheritance”

I have always found Paul’s prayers for his churches to be moving and revealing. In his prayers, Paul reveals his deep pastoral concern for the churches that he has planted, while also planting some seeds relative to future issues in his letters to each particular church.

In [Ephesians 1:15-23](#), Paul prays that the church in Ephesus would be enlightened (have their spiritual eyes opened), so that they can know three things: The hope to which God has called them, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of the power God possesses.

Now it is imperative that we understand what Paul meant by the word “know.” The Greek word for know does not simply refer to intellectually understanding the above three completely. The Greek word for know means that a person, in a deeply personal manner, understands something in the sense that they have experienced that reality in their lives. Think of it this way: A person could understand everything there is to “know” about the process of parachuting out of a plane. But does that person really “know” what it means to parachute out of plane if they have never actually parachuted out of a plane? If you want to understand what it would be like to parachute, who would you listen to? Someone who has actually parachuted out of a plane? Or someone who has read extensively on the process of parachuting from a plane, but has never done so? In the Greek, to know entails both an intellectual as well as a personal or existential understanding.

Back to the three things Paul wants the Ephesians to see more clearly. I want to focus on the second. I have been thinking a lot lately about the privilege of being a part of a church community. I think realities like the COVID-19 pandemic cause many of us to reflect on the good and the bad in life. Paul said that he prays that the Ephesians, who themselves were facing a crisis, would know deeply the “riches of his inheritance in the saints”.

When we hear the word saints, we are conditioned to think in terms of these almost super-spiritual people (like Mother Theresa) and not ourselves. But in Paul’s letters, he used the term saints to refer to those who were followers of

Jesus. They were saints in the sense that they had been called out from the world to live holy lives and be witnesses to the world. The church is a community of saints, not perfect people, but those who have been called out by Christ and are following his ways.

Paul wants the Ephesians to appreciate the stunning reality of the inheritance that Christ has prepared for them in the saints. Note, this is not a stunning inheritance that will come after our deaths in heaven. Paul is not filling them with “pie in the sky”, but rather with pie in the here and now. Paul wants the Ephesians to understand that through their faith in Christ, they became a child of God. And as children of God, they are entitled to an inheritance. This is the third time just in Ephesians 1, that Paul has used the word inheritance. In 1:11 the Ephesians received an inheritance in Christ, in 1:13-14 the inheritance is in the Holy Spirit, and here, in 1:18, the inheritance is in the saints. In other words, the inheritance is experienced in the ebb and flow of Christian community in the here and now.

What could such a stunning and glorious inheritance be? Well, first and foremost, it is love. Being part of a community of believers that shares love with one another is a stunning and glorious inheritance that we experience with fellow children of God. Such love is not just a feeling or just warm thoughts for other people. Love in its most pure form, is expressive. Love acts in concrete ways to support and encourage and help. Love puts the other first and works to satisfy their deepest felt needs.

Our inheritance as followers of Jesus in the future will be quite amazing. Lions and lambs lying down together, new heavens and new earth, a place of no more tears. But as amazing as that inheritance will be, Paul never wants us to forget the amazing inheritance we have right here, right now, with one another in the fellowship of saints. I'm thankful that I'm not walking through this pandemic alone. I have an inheritance!

