

The Importance of Wisdom and Revelation

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¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ 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 age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:15-23)

Good morning everyone! It's really great to see you all again! I was preaching here in this pulpit almost exactly a year ago, and I'm glad that I'll be able to join for a couple of Sundays next month as well.

For those who are curious, I thought I'd give a little update on what I've been up to for the past year (and it will relate back to today's passage). I've also included some visual aids because I always find those helpful. As many of you know, I live in England, and I recently received my PhD in New Testament from the University of Cambridge. I had my graduation ceremony last year in October – here's a photo of me with my parents and my aunt and uncle who were able to come from Korea. (Some of you have met my aunt and uncle.) PhD graduates wear a funny mushroom-looking hat, and my friend said that I looked like the German scholar Martin Luther!

I'm not nearly as brilliant as Martin Luther, who translated the entire Bible into German and is one of the main reasons why Protestant churches exist. But I am officially *Doctor* Ahreum Kim, the biblical scholar, which, as I've mentioned in the past, is in large part thanks to all of your prayers and support. I definitely would not have made it through all the researching and writing during the pandemic if it

wasn't for all of you cheering me on and supporting me. So thank you again – I'm very grateful.

I don't care too much about the title of "doctor," but I do recognize the responsibility that's attached to that. And I'm trying to live up to what God seems to have called me to do – to help people understand the Bible (i.e. God/Jesus) better. And in relation to that, one of the fruits of your prayers as well, is that my dissertation is being published. It's called *The Countercultural Victory of 1 John in Greco-Roman Context: Conquering the World* – a rather long title, but hopefully gives you a sense of what it's about (I've preached on this previously, and so the recap version of my book can be found on the church website). It's being published by T&T Clark/Bloomsbury and coming out in October. And I'm the official editor of another book that's coming out in November which is a compilation of the work of retired Cambridge New Testament Professor Morna Hooker, who is the first female theology professor at Cambridge, and one of the first female theology professors in all of the UK. She turned 92 this past weekend, and she is still preaching and putting out great work. This is a picture at my graduation lunch with Professor Hooker and George van Kooten who was my dissertation supervisor. I've also worked on three other books in the past year, which I can speak more about later for those who are interested.

For my dissertation, I wrote about the First Letter of John, but what you might not realize is that First John is thought to have been written to the Christians in Ephesus, just like the letter of Ephesians from today's passage. As I've mentioned in the past, it's really important for us to try and learn about the original context of Bible passages and to think about the original audience whenever we read scripture because, otherwise, we might misunderstand the passage and, in the process, misunderstand God as well.

When we read the letter of Ephesians, the first thing we want to consider is that Ephesus (now in modern-day Turkey) was one of the biggest cities in the Roman Empire, estimated to have had a population of more than 250,000 people, which is bigger than every other city in Massachusetts except Boston. By contrast, the number of Christians in Ephesus was very likely to have been less than 1% of the population.

So imagine that you're a Christian in Ephesus, and you're a part of this church group of a few dozen people. When the First Letter of John was written around 100 AD, there would have been more people in the church, but this letter to the Ephesians is a few decades earlier, when the church is still much younger – around

65 AD, about 30 years after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. The church leaders receive this letter from Paul, and it's read aloud to everyone since many of the church members can't read.

Within the first part of his letter, Paul says, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason, I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers." (vv. 15-16). How great is that? The church of Ephesus was known for being faith-filled Christians and for loving other Christians (that is what he means by "saints") really well. The Ephesian Christians are so loving and faithful that whenever Paul is praying to God, he is telling God how thankful he is that the Ephesian Christians are like this. Every church would want to be like that right? To be known for how faithful and loving we are. But what I find really interesting is what Paul says next:

He prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him" (v. 17). Wisdom and revelation – that is what Paul prays for. The Christians in Ephesus are famous for their strong faith in Jesus and their loving attitude towards other people, and what does Paul say he is praying for them? A spirit of wisdom and revelation. What does that mean? Well, it doesn't mean that he wants them to do really well in school and know everything. Someone can be wise without having a PhD. And having a spirit of revelation means that you are open to seeing what God is trying to reveal. You're looking out for God and perceiving what He's doing.

There's a funny cartoon which shows a little bit about what having wisdom and revelation looks like. There's a guy praying "God please protect me" and then he gets hit by a rock, and he cries out, "Why God? Why?!" Then he turns and realizes that Jesus was blocking a bunch of rocks, and one had slipped through. Jesus says, "I'm sorry, did I miss one? Are you alright?" Of course, this is meant to be a funny cartoon, and it doesn't mean that Jesus is imperfect at protecting us. But it does illustrate the point about wisdom and revelation. Without that spirit of wisdom and revelation, we can't really see clearly what God is doing. We don't realize that God is doing a lot in us and around us.

Paul explains why we need wisdom and revelation: "so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints" (v. 18).

Notice that Paul says that we need wisdom and revelation so that our hearts will wake up and be able to perceive two things: 1. To perceive the hope that God's called us to and 2. To realize the rich, glorious inheritance God has for us.

Paul mentions hope and calling a few times throughout the letter to the Ephesians. Earlier in verse 12, Paul reminds us that we set our hope on Christ, and we live for the praise of his glory. Our eyes are fixed on him. And later in chapter four, we see what it means to live out that calling and to live in a way that gives glory to God. Each of us has a calling on this planet. God didn't make a mistake in making any of us. Each of us, whether we're aged 5 or 95 have a chance to fulfill our calling on this planet every single day. And we need to pray continually for wisdom and revelation so that we can get a sense of what that calling is and how to live it out.

When we have that spirit of wisdom and revelation working in us, we start to notice what gifts that God has placed in us and how to best use them. And we start to listen better when other people point out those gifts in us too. Just like my parents and 5 different professors who came up to me and told me that they thought I was called to be a biblical scholar. When my parents first told me that, I resisted the idea because I knew that it was a tough calling and one with a lot of responsibility, but when 5 professors separately came up to me too and said the same thing, I thought *okay, maybe I should pray into this and really consider it*. I know some of you have experienced something similar.

But living out our calling daily doesn't mean that each day has to be a grandiose thing. Every day is an opportunity to exercise our gifts, whether it's sending a card to someone or calling up an old friend, or writing a poem, singing a song, or building something, or praying for someone. Of course, I learn a lot from my professors who are living out their callings each day as biblical scholars. But I also learn from my three-year-old nephew who is thoughtful, observant, joyful, and has the memory of an elephant. Just by being his full self that God created him to be, Caleb is being a blessing, living out his calling every day, and with the help of God and his family, he will hopefully continue to increase in wisdom and revelation and be the growing blessing that he's called to be on this planet.

Now, remember the second reason that we need the spirit of wisdom and revelation? It is so that we can perceive the rich, glorious inheritance God has for us. What does *that* mean? Well, we know what an inheritance is in general – we might receive money or perhaps some property from a parent or grandparent. But some of us might not realize that we also receive an amazing inheritance when our former self dies and we have a new life in Christ! Unfortunately, we won't be able

to perceive how rich and glorious it really is if we don't have God's wisdom and revelation in us. We won't realize all the great things God has for us not only in this life, but also in the life to come which has even more of the blessings and benefits of being in a close relationship with God for eternity. This doesn't mean that before we were Christians God didn't want to give us those things. On the contrary, He was desperate to give them to us, but just like the guy in the cartoon who didn't recognize all the rocks that Jesus was protecting him from, before we were Christian, we were turned away from God. We couldn't receive from God because we weren't open to it. We needed to have an open heart so that we could perceive and receive the gift of knowing who Jesus is and what he did on the cross.

There's one final thing Paul mentions when praying for wisdom and revelation for the Ephesian Christians. Paul says that those who have the spirit of wisdom and revelation can perceive "what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe" (v. 19). Sometimes we put God in a little box. We forget or don't even realize how powerful He really is. There are some people in this world who think that it's all a coincidence that we are on this planet that just happens to be the perfect distance from the sun, which just happens to allow this planet alone to be teeming with life, which all just happens to have a perfect cyclical pattern in nature. But surely when we look at the intricacies of the human eyeball or notice the mathematical Fibonacci sequence appearing in a pinecone, we begin to perceive how amazingly powerful God as our Creator really is.

Today is Ascension Sunday – what is that and why do we take time to remember it every year? On Ascension Sunday we remember the greatest work of God's power which Paul also talks about in the letter to the Ephesians: "God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places" (v. 20). Sometimes we forget that Jesus is sitting next to God in the heavenly places, rooting for us, praying for us. That he wants us to have wisdom and revelation so that we can live out our calling on this planet and recognize the glorious inheritance that we have because of the powerful God who loves us so much.

So if it's alright, I'd like to pray for us in a similar prayer to what Paul prayed for the Ephesians. Heavenly Father, we're in awe of your great power that is able to create and sustain everything on this planet. We're stunned by the power demonstrated in Christ who was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven. I ask now for the spirit of wisdom and revelation to descend upon us and to remain in us so that we can perceive your great power, and to realize the glorious inheritance you have for us. May we be inspired to live out our callings each day

with the same sort of faith and love that the Ephesian church members had. And may we not miss out on what you're doing and, instead, be able to perceive it all with hearts that are awake and filled with hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.