

## **Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Prison Epistles, Session 21, Prayer for a Faithful Church, Ephesians 1:15-23**

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This is Dr. Dan Darko in his lecture series on the Prison Epistles. This is session 21, Prayer for a Faithful Church, Ephesians 1:15-23.

Welcome back to a biblical studies lecture series on Ephesians.

We've looked at the background and covered some parts of Chapter 1. Now, we move to the second part of chapter 1 of Ephesians. I just hope that as we go through this, you pick up a text or a New Testament, or if your Bible is a study Bible, just open it in front of you so that as I read, if you have a different translation, you can just have a look at the translation as we address different issues. As usual, I want to get your head going, so let's think about this.

What do you think in Ephesians as we look at the prayer in Ephesians from chapter 1 verse? What do you think in Ephesians, as we look at the prayer in Ephesians from chapter 1, verses 15 to 23? What do you think prompted Paul to pray for the church? Maybe that is what you want to take a look at your passage and think about what you think is going on. What specific things did Paul hear about the church that prompted the prayer? To what extent are the qualities he mentions as we follow evident with the believers you know even today? I just mentioned to you as we went on in the early part of chapter 1 that Paul had this breathless invocation. Blessed be God, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, and he actually showed what God has done for this church.

But here, he moves from that thanksgiving and that invocation and then moves on to actually show or begin to pray to address prayer in this regard. As you follow these lectures, I have intentionally tried to remind you about things that we often don't talk about in Paul and that you want to think about—the prayer life of Paul.

Note how this is phrased in verse 15. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the workings of His great might, that He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, 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 one to come. I do not cease praying for you, Paul writes.

If Paul is not exaggerating, and he's actually praying for the churches he writes to, then even in the prison epistles alone, you may actually notice how often he prays for the church, and he mentions he prays always. In Colossians, he said he had heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and their love for the saints. That encourages him to pray for them.

In Philemon, he says he has heard of the faith of Philemon in Jesus Christ and his love for all the people, and that encourages him to keep him in prayer. Here, he says, since he heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and their love for the saints, look at the pattern; he has not stopped; he has not ceased to pray for them. That is the spirit of a leader who has worked in the same context that these Christians are, for between two and three years, understanding the context and challenges they face, and a leader who takes it upon himself to pray for the church.

He heard. Let's look a little bit at the occasion of this prayer. Perhaps that will help us.

The prayer was prompted by what Paul heard. Remember, he had not seen, he heard, and when he heard this, he believed it because he introduced the church as the faithful ones in Christ Jesus, the trustworthy, the reliable ones in Christ Jesus. So when he heard about them, he knew that it was true.

He heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The word can translate their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. When we use the word faith, sometimes we gloss over the meaning and the essence of the word faith.

Faith, in the context of the New Testament, is accent and trust. It is not only believing intellectually that something is true. It is believing intellectually that something is true to the extent that one is able to entrust one's life to that which one has believed, or one is ready to commit without reservation to that which one has believed intellectually.

When I was in a seminary, one of my professors gave an illustration. That is not a good illustration, especially when we are dealing with Ephesians, but it helps explain the concept of faith in the New Testament. And he put it this way.

It is like a magician comes in, picks up a big cow, chops off the head of the cow in front of the crowd. With the blood spilling, he puts the cow's head on one side, and he puts the rest of the body of the cow on the other side. And a magician performs magic and says, wait and see what happens.

He says, hey cow, head, come and stick to the rest of the body. And then the cow head bounces from that corner and comes in, sticks to the neck of the cow, the dead body on the other side. The cow gets up and goes, if that magician asks, if I were to kill someone, could I bring the person back to life? Chances are that some people would say, oh yeah, he took life and brought it back.

If anyone believed that, if he took somebody's life or chopped off somebody's head in the same fashion, he could bring the person back to life, that person believes in the magician. In the New Testament sense, that is the ascent, the intellectual path of belief. The second path, though, is this.

If the magician asked who would come forward for him to kill the person, put the head on one side, put the rest of the body on that side, perform the same ritual, and let the head bounce to the rest of the body and let the person get up and say, yeah, who will come forward? The one who is ready to come forward for the magician to kill is the one who trusts the magician. In the New Testament understanding of faith, those two components are vital. Now, yes, in the light of the magician illustration I just gave you, some people may say we believe that he can take life and bring it back, but I will not go forward and ask that magician to kill me and bring me back to life. That means I don't have faith in that magician. But if you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins, he chose you, he redeemed you, and he sealed you intellectually. The faith that Paul has heard about is the faith of this church that says they not only believe intellectually, but they have entrusted their whole life to the care of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He heard about their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, their trust in him, and their readiness to put their lives in his hands, and he also heard about their love for the saints. In terms of relationship, their readiness and willingness to love each other. Maybe I should pause to say this is a church where Paul is going to talk about unity.

A major ingredient for unity is love. Love in the Christian understanding of love that does not hold anything back. Love is not based on condition or one's status or one's blood relations or one's tribal linkage, but love that is big enough to reach out to all.

Paul said, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for the saints, I have not ceased to give thanks, praying for you. Wow, that reminds me of something I should draw your attention to because I will not be able to stop in the course of the studies on Ephesians to show you bit by bit, but the word love that is mentioned here appears several times in this letter as a theme. I would encourage you to take your time to look at them.

Sometimes, I have said that if the Bible you are using is yours, underline some of these words with a specific color and use that color to match the appearance of that

particular word throughout the book. You will notice in the case of love, you will actually find out that the love for the saints theme will be developed, and you see Paul actually touching on God's love.

For believers in chapter 2, verse 4, chapter 3, verse 17, and chapter 6, verse 23. You will also see that he will move on also to address Christ's love for the believers in chapter 3, verse 19.

He will also touch on the believer's love for Christ in chapter 6, verse 24, and then you will see how often he uses the word love to talk about the relationship that should be evident among the followers of Christ Jesus. Love is what prompted God to send his son to pay that big price that I mentioned in the previous lectures. I guess you remember that quotation.

I remember that famous quotation. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

Yeah, but 1 John 3:16 also has this to say as we talk about love. This is love that a man lays his life down for his friends. Paul said I heard of your faith and your love for the saints.

The love theme is going to be developed in this letter, and it's going to show how love, true love, can help bring solidarity or what I sometimes call internal cohesion within the community of faith. Let me pause and ask a question. By this time, you probably are wondering why this guy likes to throw up all kinds of questions at me. Yes, I like us to think together, and I really would have wished that we were even in the classroom physically together. So, let's ask this question. For what things or areas does Paul pray for the church and why do you think these are necessary for the status as believers in the world with several challenges? Think about it.

Just pause for a moment and think about the areas that Paul will bring out. Looking at verse 16, you notice that Paul starts with a petition for the church. In this petition for the church, he highlights two key areas.

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He prays for illumination, and he prays for knowledge. So let me let's just look at verses 16 to 19a to refresh our minds so that we can unpack what Paul has to say about prayer for illumination in verse 16.

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers that the God of

our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in him. Having the eyes of your heart enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

Let me warn you some of my illustrations here will be a little bit scary if you have children watching this. Maybe at some point, you move them away in a couple of minutes because I'll show you. I want to make it as vivid as possible for you to be able to catch this: the prayer for illumination in Paul's praying for the church and the prayer for illumination he touches, specifically praying that God may give them the spirit of knowledge and wisdom to know him.

Paul wanted them to be able to have that knowledge because knowledge is power. For lack of knowledge, the people perish, and for lack of knowledge, people live in fear. Imagine having a great treasure hidden in your bedroom under that wooden floor that is polished nicely and still because you don't know is hidden there.

You are worrying and getting depressed about a debt you owe for lack of knowledge. You could have headaches not knowing what you are sleeping on. Paul prays that they may have the knowledge to know what they have because that should make a difference.

And he prays that seeking knowledge, the spirit of knowledge and wisdom to know Christ, their eyes may, the eyes of the heart may be open. And here I should pause to say check your translation a little bit because some translations don't know how to handle this awkward expression in the eyes of your heart. So, they say eyes of your hearts.

In Greek, though, it is eyes plural of your heart singular. Strange expression isn't it? Kick the children out, and let me illustrate to you. Imagine, imagine what Paul is trying to say about the eyes of your heart.

You have the heart, and you get eyes coming out of the heart.

Some of my students say that is creepy. So, I don't want you to have all sorts of dreams even though I'm encouraging you to stay strong and firm in the Lord. Let's go on to look at the language that Paul uses here and what heart means in his world.

The heart is literally a physical organ, but the word is used metaphorically to refer to the seat of moral reasoning or intellectual life. The heart is the seat of feelings, emotions, or volition. In terms of the usage of the word heart in the Bible, sometimes the word is used to refer to the seat of feelings or emotions, as we find in Deuteronomy 28:47 or Psalm 34 verse 18.

Sometimes, when the word heart is used in a biblical text, it refers to the place of divine or God's residence, a place where God resides in the heart. In other words, the individual allows God to dwell in the innermost being, and the word heart is used to express that. Sometimes, it is used to refer to the seat of religious or moral conduct, the heart from which morality and moral principles come out and express themselves in real life.

Is it possible then that Paul is thinking about praying that God may enlighten the hearts of these believers, the eyes of these believers' hearts so that they may find that high degree of illumination, encouragement, and their whole sense of being and feeling will be full of light? For example, we have ancient texts that show when some of these references are used in religious circles that, people will say things like, there are certain things you don't see with your eyes, but you can see some spiritual things with your heart. Some will talk about the ability to be able to actually perceive certain spiritual things, not with the physical eyes, but with the spiritual eyes or the heart.

This is why I and some other scholars are likely to say that Paul is praying that the center, the seat of their emotion, and their moral life may be so enlightened and be so light, so much so that they can see and discern the good things that are in Christ. If so, Paul is praying that any darkness that will consume the seat of their emotions, any darkness that will inspire moral behavior leading into a life of darkness, may vanquish as the spirit of God enlightens the eyes of their hearts and give them the ability to see things as Christ would like them to be seen. He petitions for the church for illumination.

The second thing for the petition for the church is for knowledge that they may know, he prays, the hope of their calling. For Paul, hope is still, again; I will say it here: it's not something you are not sure about. It is something that is tangible, that is there for you to grasp.

That God may open their eyes, the heart of the eyes of their heart, so that they may know with certainty the hope for their calling, that which they have been called for, the hope of the inheritance that we read about in verses 13, 14, and 15. That they may know, he prays, the wealth. I like the word Plutus.

I like the word because the word riches of his glorious inheritance in the sins that word appears several times in Ephesians. The riches, I mean, his glorious inheritance for the sins, are abounding. God does not have a limited warehouse.

He prays that the believers would know that which God has for them. Because if they know what God has for them, they will not feel jealous or attracted to those minute things around them.

They will know that they serve a great God who has great resources on their behalf. And they will begin to live in a light where darkness ceases to occupy their heart or their emotions. Where their life will no longer be consumed with darkness, but they will be enlightened to live to the glory of God, praying for knowledge.

He also prays that they may know the greatness of God's power. Oh yeah, this is one of my favorites that they will know the greatness of God's power.

And when he says that they may know the greatness of God's power, he says he prays that they may know the greatness of God's power. That same power which was at work in Christ Jesus. In other words, this is a matter of equivalence.

To say that, if only they would know the greatness of God's power. The power that is at work in Christ Jesus. The power that is also accessible to them.

Then they will realize that when you're talking about spiritual powers and all that, nothing compares. But because they don't know, they may live in fear of what all these pagan deities will throw at them. What magic or astrology will bring at their doorsteps.

And look at how it is put. Let's read that from verse 20. I love that.

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.

You see when this power was working, this is what happened with Christ. He placed him far above all rule, authority, and power, and dominion. And above every name that is named.

Not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet. And has made him the head over all things for the church.

Which is his body. The fullness of him who fills all in all. Wow.

Wow. That they may know the greatness of God's power. And this is the power that was at work in Christ Jesus.

What is he trying to do? He is trying to show them that if they think about God's power. They should not think about it in abstract terms. Because this is what God's power looks like.

And he shows in these verses what the power looks like. Before I go on to unpack the details of that, pardon me.

The African in me calms out when we get to this God's power part because I have served and ministered in areas on my continent.

Where evil spiritual powers are a real threat. That people are scared to give their life to Christ. And I have also seen where the power of God is so strong.

Some of the fetish priests tell us when we try to harm you guys. We know that there is something around you. That we cannot come beyond to harm you.

What a great thing. I love that. And when some of them become Christians.

And they tell the stories like how much they work hard to harm Christians. To destroy some churches spiritually. And couldn't succeed.

Because anytime they wanted to do something. They saw the prayers of the church. It was destroying things one by one.

And they like power. So, when they realized their power could not work. To destroy the other power.

They thought maybe. If they come in, they will get that power too. So, normally, they give their life to Christ.

And then we start telling them. We don't have any power on our own. Power is in the name of Jesus Christ.

If only we would give our lives to him. He is not going to give us some magical power to walk around and to show off. He will do his job.

He will take care of his own. That's all we can tell them.

But think about this great power as I pose this question. Does the mention of the rulers and authorities and dominions refer to evil spiritual powers? This is a discussion in scholarship. Does Paul have political powers in mind, like government? So, some scholars will say, you know, these are not references to spiritual powers.

Some say these are references to evil spiritual powers. Some say no; these are references to political powers. The majority of scholars now, though, say these are references to spiritual powers because if only you know the context of Ephesus and the vicinity, these are references to spiritual powers.

But that leads me to my third question. To what extent could a distinction be made between spiritual powers and political powers in the Greco-Roman world? I think



that is the question that scholars don't often ask. And I would like to submit that though the reference to these names is to evil spiritual powers, it is not to the exclusion of political powers.

Because political leaders always use spiritual backing for their rulership. In other words, to be a political leader is also to function with some degree of perceived spiritual support. Not to mention that among the Romans, there is already going to be a system where even emperors would like to be called lords or worshipped, be worshipped.

Something that will become imperial worship, we call it, which will become common in the Greco-Roman world where peoples of high power and authority literally want to be worshipped because of the interlink of religion and culture and how belief their belief in deities and powers go hand in hand with how they think they are able to function well in their roles as leaders of society. So yes, I would say those lists refer to evil spiritual powers. But I'll also add that we may not want to exclude political powers in the Greco-Roman world.

A politician may have an astrologist. They may consult all kinds of powers to let them do well. Remember, every major city had a patron deity.

So, if you're a political leader, you also know that there's a spiritual power that is also ruling over that. So, that distinction may be pushed too far when we try to drag it too much into scholarship. Whatever those powers are, though, this is the good news.

Christ. Christ has been exalted above them. They have no power.

They have no power to control or to thwart or interfere with where Christ rules and with those Christ exercises his worship. They should relax. And Paul just prays that the church may know the greatness of this power of God that is available to them.

Perhaps I should illustrate it further this way. In Paul's prayers for the greatness of God's power, we look first at verse 19, the extent of its magnitude. Paul says it is the surpassing greatness of God's power.

Not just greatness but the surpassing greatness of God's power. And this power of God is manifested in this way from verses 20 to 23. He displayed the power in Christ, verses 20 to 21.

He subjugated all things under the feet of Christ. And he gave Christ head for the church. It is this power that actually was infused in the dead body.

When Christ died, Paul was trying to tell them that this was the power that worked in his dead body and brought him back to life. That is the surpassing greatness of God's

power. And it is the power that did not only raise Christ from the dead, but it is also the power that exalted him and gave him that ability to ascend.

Wow. Wow. He prays that they may know about this power.

Before I get on to talk more about what this power in his exaltation and this imagery of Christ is going to do in the next chapter of Ephesians, let me just comment a little bit more on the exaltation. When we talk about the exaltation of Christ, Paul points out that he is seated at the right hand of God, the right hand of authority. In the course of these lectures, I explain to you, even today, in places like Africa, how the second in command to the paramount chief sits at his right hand.

The right hand is a place of power and authority. The right is a symbol of authority. Jesus is seated in the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, in the spiritual realms, in the unseen world.

He is exalted above every evil conceivable spiritual power. And not only that, for those who use magic and are interested in magical names, Christ is exalted above every name that can be named in heaven or on earth or underneath. He is exalted above them all.

In other words, he has power over all of them. And as if this power is temporary. Oh no.

Paul points out that this power and the demonstration of this power is not only for this age but also in the age to come. Paul, Paul will pick this particular test in terms of prayer. As he goes on, he gives a hint of what he's going to do in chapter two.

He's actually going to show that Christ died physically. The believers are actually dead spiritually in their trespasses and sins. The power, the great power of God, infused the dead Christ, brought him to life, and exalted him.

For the believers who are dead in sin and trespasses by the grace of God, God will actually save them by his grace and raise them up and seated them with Christ in the high places. And they will be with their senior brother. I call a big brother Jesus.

They will be with him in the heavenly places. In other words, the power at work in Christ is the power available for the believers in Christ. It is for this reason, as he prays, that he hopes and anticipates that this church will not be a church that will be trapped in fear in any way of what evil spiritual powers can do.

But it will be a church that is full of knowledge of what God is able to do and what God has done. There will be a church that is filled with light, enlightened by the Holy

Spirit, and not filled with darkness. Because God, who called them, is a God who has given them all these resources.

When we get to chapter two, you will see how the discourse will unfold. But let's try to see all this in one picture: how Paul's petition for the church unfolds. You see that from verse 16a to verse 23, Paul actually picks up and starts praying for illumination and praying for knowledge.

When he prayed for illumination, he prayed that God may give the church the spirit of knowledge and wisdom to know him. He also prayed in praying for illumination that God may actually grant that the eyes of their heart be open so that they will not be consumed with darkness. And then, in the second part, praying for knowledge, he prays that they may know, they may know the hope of the calling that Christ has offered.

He prays that they may know the wealth, the riches of his honor, of his glorious inheritance in the saints. And now he prays that they may know the greatness of his power. Wow.

You see, efficiency prepares the church from the very beginning so that if they are consumed with fear, they can relax. Paul will set a stage to go on to chapter two, chapter three, and then in chapter four, he can call them to moral responsibility, bringing chapter one to a close. Let me draw your attention to what Paul has been doing here.

After greeting the church, he issued what I call a breathless invocation. Blessed be God, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, for he chose us. He redeemed us.

He sealed us. And when we finish that, now he's going to take his time to write. And then he paused and said, ever since I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for the saints, I have not ceased praying for you.

But just in case they are not sure, he tells them what he's praying for them about. Yes, he's praying that they will be illumined. They will have illumination, and they will have knowledge.

Note what is going on here. His prayer is directly addressed to how God changes things in their way of thinking and how that affects the rest of their Christian life. Resiliency is not all about how I feel.

How I feel is important. In fact, Paul is one of the first to talk about how I feel when he says in Philippians, for instance, rejoice. And again, I say rejoice.

But it is also true that Paul is consistent that the knowledge one has in Christ affects a whole lot of how they live their lives as Christians. Be it how they feel, how they are filled with darkness or light, how they conduct themselves in a Christian community, or how they conduct themselves in the wider society. Knowledge is important.

But he did not place them as if the knowledge that is acquired by reading a lot of books. But it's knowledge that is acquired by seeking to know Christ and drawing the divine empowerment of the Holy Spirit to give you the enablement to do so. Having prayed this prayer, Paul ended for prayer that they may understand the surpassing greatness of God's power, the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

I will close this session by drawing your attention to actually how Paul will begin chapter two so that when we come back, we will stop looking at chapter two carefully. He will start chapter two like this. And you, plural, you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sense of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved. And he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Wow. By grace, we have been saved.

And this is what happened. When we come back and talk about this, you will notice that we who were dead, we who were lifeless, in other words, not able to take the full benefit of what the true essence of life is because of our sins and trespasses, the great power that was at work in Christ, in fact, the surpassing greatness of God's power that was at work in Christ, will be our portion. And that will enable us, through the grace of God, to come alive and be seated with Christ.

But let us not boast as a result. Let us understand it is by grace we have been saved. Hold the thought of being by grace we have been saved.

And maybe you will find a reason to thank God for his grace because when we come back, you will understand the richness of God's grace, which saves sinners like you

and me. Again, thank you for studying with us. And I hope that you are finding these studies useful.

And I also hope that even after following the lectures, you take time to pick up your Bible, read through this test, explore because these lectures are only beginning. You will be exposed to all kinds of things now that you have this information as you look through the test. And I pray that God helps you to know him and to know the greatness of this power at work in Christ and available to us as believers in Christ.

God bless you. And I look forward to continuing these studies with you. Thank you.

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