

## ALIVE WITH CHRIST – Eph. 1:15-23

Easter, 2006

There have been many self-imposed critics who have tried to make a name for themselves by degrading Christianity during the past 2,000 years. Some have been quite brilliant from a purely intellectual standpoint. Others have been very ambitious for power and fame. Still others have been politically motivated. But no one has been able to answer the simplicity of the silent empty tomb. The church started a month and a half after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ within walking distance of this empty tomb. All anyone would have had to do in order to nip this infant church in the bud was to produce the dead body of the Lord Jesus Christ. And there was tremendous motivation to do so. The Romans wanted to do it to avoid the political problems. The Jewish leaders wanted to do it to avoid the religious problems. But nobody was able to do it because there was no body to produce. The tomb that everyone knew and recognized was empty. The body was gone. It was no longer there because Jesus Christ had rose from the dead.

Thus the resurrected Christ became the theme of every early message preached and this pattern has continued for some 2,000 years now. As the church of Jesus Christ continues to expand and permeate every nation and tribe of the human race, the powerful miracle of the resurrection continues to be a central theme of the gospel that is proclaimed.

During these past Sunday mornings, we have been looking at the importance of Practicing the Presence of God in our lives. As we live with the practical realization that at the moment of our new birth into the family of God

through faith in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God Himself comes to dwell within us so that we will continually have the very presence of God Himself within us for the remainder of our lives, our daily lives cannot help but be permanently changed. We will worship in a different manner, we will treat others around us differently, we will view sinful practices in our lives differently, we will serve God differently, we will study the Bible and pray differently, we will represent the Lord Jesus Christ as His ambassador here on this earth differently, and we will even view trials and suffering differently. We have already looked at all of those subjects during these past weeks. Now this morning, we conclude this series by seeing the practical implications of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives as we realize our position of being alive with Christ, as we experience the power of the risen Savior in our lives.

In the first chapter of Ephesians, we read a prayer that the Apostle Paul offered for the members of this church located in the city of Ephesus. Now this church was located in one of the most influential cities in 1<sup>st</sup> century Asia Minor. The ruins that can still be viewed today in Turkey continue to give a silent testimony to this town's influence back in Biblical times.

\*the central street called Curetes reflects the beauty of this city in its heyday. One can imagine the hustle and bustle of the travelers and merchants back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

\*the remains of the library of Celsus reveal the fact that this was a seat of learning, a city proud of its intellectual heritage.

\*the great amphitheater that has been excavated there shows that the citizens knew how to have a good time. This was a city that enjoyed its recreation.

\*the temple ruins betray the religious fervor of the city. The citizens of Ephesus had the reputation of being very religious people.

\*As the Apostle Paul prayed for these Christians who lived in Ephesus, we might think that he would be concerned for their continued prosperity or health or happiness. These are the kinds of requests that we so often bring before the Lord in our prayers.

So it is somewhat surprising to us to see that the Apostle was concerned with some other requests in his prayer for these people. But as we reflect upon Paul's prayerful concerns, we realize that he was addressing some of the most basic and fundamental needs in our lives. These should be our concerns for ourselves and our family and friends as well. For if these are realized in our lives, we will be most fulfilled people indeed. But if we have all of the prosperity and health and happiness without these, we will still be very poor people.

I would invite you to look at these prayer requests with me this morning.

**The first request was for wisdom and revelation so that we might know God better. READ Ephesians 1:15-17:**

EPH 1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. <sup>17</sup> 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.

The Bible tells us that God created the first members of the human race in his own image. He then gave to them the ability to pass on that divine image to their descendants. So each of us sharing in our common bond of being members together of the human race bear the very image of God in our being.

Now one of the greatest concerns that people have today is knowing who they really are. Self-image, self-esteem, self-awareness – these are among the major psychological buzzwords of our day. In a world where medical and technological and scientific advances have reached heights never before achieved by humans, why are we having so much difficulty finding out who we really are? The answer is really quite simple. If we want to know who we really are in our inner beings, we must get to know the one whose image we bear. That one is God, our creator.

I would guess that every one of us looked in a mirror at least once as we were preparing to come to church this morning. We all wanted to make sure that our face was clean, hair was combed right, tie was straight. If we happened to look in the mirror right after showering, we might have had a problem. The mirror often clouds up with the humidity of the shower so that we can't see ourselves clearly. If we can't see ourselves clearly in the mirror, the mirror doesn't do any good, does it? It fails to achieve its purpose if it is all fogged up. So we have to wipe it with a towel or turn on the exhaust fan or open the door so that it clears up before we actually can get a good picture of who we are.

Without a clear knowledge of God, it is as if we are looking into a cloudy mirror. Because we bear the image of God, we must know Him to really know ourselves. The better we know Him, the better we can understand ourselves. That is the reason for Paul's first request being for wisdom and revelation that we might know God better.

**But let's move now to a 2<sup>nd</sup> request.** This request is for hope. Notice it with me in verse 18:

18 I pray also 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 the saints.

Now this request builds upon the first one. For as we learn more and more about God, we are filled with more and more hope. Without God, there is no hope. With God, there is always hope.

One of the great failures of many in our generation is their attempt to find hope and meaning in life without God. They have tried desperately to remove God from all arenas of public life. The creative hand of God has been taken out of our classrooms and has been replaced by the impersonal process of evolution. Our children are taught that they are just branches of the evolutionary tree, here on this earth by pure chance. There is no basic qualitative difference between us and the animal kingdom around us – we just happened to take a different fork in the evolutionary tree. Then having done our best to indoctrinate students in the theory of evolution, our society wonders why our young people are so filled with despair and hopelessness. I was talking with a Christian Psychologist just this past Wednesday at our local

ministerial association meeting and he was bemoaning the epidemic of teenage depression and suicide in our nation today.

We need to realize that our knowledge of who God is forms the foundation for hope in our lives. As we have the confidence of being a member of God's family and as we grow more and more in our knowledge of Him, we begin to understand more and more the glorious inheritance that awaits each of God's children. We begin to understand that this world isn't all that there is – we aren't born by chance as some kind of twig on the evolutionary tree destined to live a meaningless life only to be snuffed out by death like some squirrel run over on the road. On the contrary, God created the human race alone in His likeness and image. This present life is the place where God has designed for us to prepare for an eternity to follow. As we see ourselves as the reflection of Almighty God, we are filled with hope and meaning and purpose in life.

**Finally, Paul prayed that these Christians might experience the resurrected power of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives.** Notice this 3<sup>rd</sup> request in verses 19-20.

I pray also . . . that you may know . . . his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, <sup>20</sup> which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

We have gathered this morning to celebrate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the grave. In doing so, we all recognize the awesome, miraculous power that must be necessary to conquer physical death. To bring

warm life back into a body that has stiffened with cold rigormortis, to start a heart back up beating again after it has become like stone, to see lungs expand and fill long after the blood has ceased to flow to them, to actually reverse the aging process that has caused the body to completely deteriorate, this is something that humans have dreamed of doing for thousands of years in vain. Even with all of our modern technologies, no doctor could even think of bringing a body back to life that had been dead for 3 days, a body whose organs had completely ceased functioning for a length of time allowing every organ to grow cold and stiff like stone. We all recognize the divine power necessary in such a resurrection – that is the reason for our coming to honor and celebrate our living Savior today.

What we need to realize is the simple fact that this divine power is within every person who is the member of God’s family through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When a person trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ and is born again into the family of God, that person becomes a partaker of God’s own divine nature according to the Scriptures. That person has the very power of the resurrected Savior indwelling within him or her.

Sadly, few ever realize the full potential of that power in their lives. Just like a darkened room that has electricity coursing all around it but fails to experience light because the switch has not been turned on, so many Christians live their lives relying solely upon their own strength and power rather than tapping into the unlimited divine resources that they have within through faith. It’s not that the power isn’t there – it’s that we don’t avail ourselves of it. Paul realized this sad fact and prayed that these Christians in Ephesus would

experience that divine power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead in their lives.

So Paul prayed that these Christians might have wisdom and revelation to know God better, that they might be filled with the hope of the glorious inheritance that God was preparing for them, and that they might experience the resurrected power of the Lord Jesus Christ in their lives.

Most Americans of the past generation remember the name of William Randolph Hearst. This very successful publisher of magazines and newspapers passed away shortly after WW2. At one time, he owned and operated 25 of our nation's largest newspapers. Needless to say, Hearst amassed a fortune through his successful business ventures. Partly motivated by keen investment sense and partly due to his interest in the arts, Hearst decided to spend a good portion of his money collecting rare and valuable art. Always in the market for a new painting, Hearst read the description of an artist's work and was intrigued by it. He determined that he must have this piece of art for his collection. So he hired a private investigator to track this painting down so that the newspaper magnate could buy it, whatever the cost might be. The private investigator searched and searched for the painting. He went back and traced sales records and transfers. Finally, having completed his research, he gave this rather embarrassing report to his employer. William Randolph Hearst already owned this painting. It was stored in one of his carefully guarded warehouses. Here was a work of art that Hearst had so desired, and he already owned it. He had never seen it, but it was sitting there in his warehouse, just waiting for someone to enjoy it.

There are many Christians who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal savior, they have received God's gift of forgiveness and salvation offered through the death, burial and resurrection of the Savior, but they aren't experiencing the power of God in their lives. The beauty of potential relationship with God remains hidden in the warehouse of their heart.

Paul's concern for the Christians in Ephesus was that they might have the wisdom and revelation to know their creator better. This knowledge then would give them great hope in their lives. And their growing relationship would also enable them to experience the resurrected power of Christ in their lives. It's a good thing to come on Easter Sunday and celebrate the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the grave in power and victory over sin. But it's far better to experience that resurrected power in our lives every single day, power to give us hope over despair and victory over sin.