

Title: Illumination Rocks
Date: January 22, 2023
Subject: Prayer for illumination
Scripture: Ephesians 1:15 - 23

Illumination Rock is a shoulder of Mt. Hood in Oregon which is the tallest peak in the state. Illumination Rock has been called “The hardest (technically) summit to reach in the Pacific Northwest” (summitpost.org). The area around it has been used as a launching point for fireworks displays. Our interest is spiritual fireworks and attaining illumination from God, gaining wisdom, insight, enlightenment.

READ 1:15 – 23.

I. The importance of giving thanks. Vv. 15, 16

William Randolph Hearst was a savvy businessman, newspaper publisher, and politician. He developed the nation's largest newspaper and media empire. He was worth about 30 billion in today's economy. He used his wealth to build a mansion in Beverly Hills. The 29,000 square foot estate was listed for sale in 2007 at 195 million but finally sold in 2021 for 47 million. He also built a castle near San Simeon, California. It took 28 years to build eventually winding up at more than 90,000 square feet. Part of the reason it took so long was he bought entire rooms of European castles, had them disassembled, shipped to California and reassembled.

Hearst also dabbled in art, accumulating one of the world's greatest art collections. One day he found a description of items he wanted. He sent his purchasing agent overseas to acquire them. After months of diligent searching, the agent reported to Hearst he'd found the treasures. That was the good news. The bad news was Hearst already owned them. So, it's not completely bad news, but then again it is as Hearst had wasted a lot of time and money to look for something he already possessed.

Sometimes followers of Christ do the same thing. They forget what they have and look in other places for the things they desire and think will help them. We need to realize we already have immense treasures. The spiritual blessings belonging to Christians form the basis for the prayer that begins in Ephesians 1:15.

Why is it important to keep in mind our God given spiritual blessings when we pray? They remind us we have a loving Father, not someone like Scrooge. Recalling our blessings can change our attitude. They serve as an anchor for our souls. They're a reference point for our lives.

Thankfulness is the background for the request portion of the prayer. How does giving thanks and praise affect praying? It helps us focus. Puts needs in perspective. Enables us to take our eyes off ourselves and place them onto God and others.

Paul knew many people in Ephesus as he'd lived there three years. He was instrumental in bringing them to faith in Christ. So, what does he mean by saying he'd heard about their faith? Likely there were new people and this letter was intended for a larger audience than the church in Ephesus as was the case with the way most of the other letters were to be circulated.

The apostle asserts he hasn't stopped praying for them. He remembers them. He keeps asking God for things for them. He hasn't come to the point where he thinks he's prayed for them enough.

Isn't it nice to know people are praying for us? That was the case this week with Jeff and Teri.

For what are we to continue to remember to pray?

A. Thankful for faith in the Lord Jesus

Paul says he's grateful people have placed their trust in Jesus Christ, grateful for the fact they have a relationship with God as adopted children, grateful they've committed their lives to Jesus, grateful they've come to Christ to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This is the vertical part of a person's spiritual life.

B. Thankful for love for the saints

This is the horizontal part. It's the prescribed conduct based upon what we've received from God. Receive love. Give love. It's a love for all saints. There are no exclusions, no ethnicity requirements, no income requirements, no social status requirements, no marital status requirements, no age requirements, no intellectual capacity requirements. It's a love for anyone and everyone who claims to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

II. Who praying to

The receiver is addressed in two ways. The first is "God of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus was fully God and fully human. There were times during his life he addressed the Heavenly Father as "my God." On the cross he cried out, "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

The recipient is also noted as "glorious Father." Paul again uses the word glorious here and in v. 18 - a glorious inheritance. Its use serves to emphasize the character, position and status of the Father. He is glorious. He is filled with glory. He is absolute perfection.

Jesus shared glory with the Father when he was in heaven. On the night before he died, he prayed the Father would again share his glory with him (John 17). While on earth he put a temporary hold on fully displaying it. Once was to the disciples when he was transfigured. Paul got up close and personal with it on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. He gave testimony, "I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions" (Acts 26:13).

Thinking of God as glorious leads to awe for him. We won't treat him as some random person from whom we're making a request.

III. Requests VV. 17-19

A. To be tuned into the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. V. 17

Christians have the Spirit from the moment they're born again. Jesus promised to give the third person of the Trinity to his followers for the purpose of teaching and reminding of what Jesus said (John 14:26, 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:12). He is the revealer of truth about Christ. He instructs how we're to live as believers. He provides insight and understanding. He grants the ability to see - illumination. Those who don't have the Spirit within them don't have the capacity to understand truth.

The essence of the prayer is gaining wisdom, insight, understanding is so we can know God the Father better, for the relationship can deepen. It's a desire to be grow closer in experience. People grow in relationship as they spend time with one another. The same is true with God.

Warren Wiersbe: "The believer must grow in his knowledge of God. To know God personally is salvation (John 17:3). To know him increasingly is sanctification (Philippians 3:10). To know him perfectly is glorification (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). Since we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28), the better we know God, the better we know ourselves and each other. It's not enough to know God only as Savior. We must get to know him as Father, friend, guide, and the better we know him, the more satisfying our spiritual lives will be" (Be Rich, p. 32).

B. Enlightenment vv. 18, 19

This builds on the previous request. It has a unique phrasing as it speaks about the heart having eyes. Obviously, it's not talking about our physical anatomy. The biblical use of heart doesn't just refer to the emotional center of a person – Valentine hearts flying in all directions.

Besides being the seat of emotions, the heart is the place of intellect which allows us to understand and the will that puts life into motion. Heart is the whole person which is the inner being. All three are in view in the passage with a stronger emphasis on the mind.

The request can be for light bulb moments or in terms of spiritual surgery to remove cataracts or a film that has clouded our vision. The intent is to have clear vision so we can know as in comprehending and experiencing. Then we can take action on what we understand and the emotions may follow.

The other day Jean made a shopping list for me go to grocery store. No, this time I didn't get anything beyond what was on the list as I very often do. The list said to get two Eggo waffles, then butter -- one only for \$1.49. I didn't ask her about the list and I hadn't seen the circular so I was curious about why only one butter at that cheap a price. As I strolled up to the butter bunker, a sign said butter was that price when Eggo waffles were purchased. Light bulb. I gained more understanding. I took action and it felt pretty good.

The prayer is further broken down.

1. May know the hope V. 18

It isn't the kind of hope where we cross our fingers, get a wistful look in our eyes, bounce up and down and say "I hope. I hope. I hope." It's hope as in a certainty of something that's been promised and we know will take place. There's an assurance because we understand and believe the Holy Spirit is in us.

It's the difference between football fans at the beginning of the season saying they hope their team is going to make it to the Super Bowl and when only two teams remain after the other 30 have been eliminated. These last fans have hope based on knowledge.

Christians have hope based on knowledge. The Bible is full of promises about what's ahead for followers of Jesus Christ. God is calling us toward the fulfillment of eternal life with him forever in heaven. That's where this train is headed. Our eternal destiny is to impact our lives now.

2. May know riches V. 18

REREAD last part of v. 18.

Some think this is an inheritance God will receive but that doesn't seem to fit the context. I think it's best to understand it as the inheritance God gives. It's his riches that he shares. It's his people whom he gives to each other. The inheritance is what Christians have in one another. The saints are a precious and valuable possession. In other words, we need to look around us and view each other as part of the riches of God's inheritance in the saints. Each one you see increases your bank account.

3. May know his incomparably great power. V. 19

It seems Paul is emptying the thesaurus to get the right word to describe God's ability - power, power, working, mighty and strength. Some of the terms are connected to dynamite and dynamo or energy. They combine to refer to the power inherent in God and only God, his ability, and the expression of that power.

Vv. 20, 21 speak of the demonstration of God's power. He raised Christ from the dead. Christ ascended to be at the right hand of the Father, which is the place of power and authority. Everything in the heavens and an earth were placed under Christ. Christ was appointed as head of the church. There is no other power on heaven or earth that could accomplish these things.

Scottish minister and Bible expositor Alexander MacLaren (MacLaren's Expositions, biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/1-19): "that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon us, though it be immeasurable, as it's measure; Though it be, in its depth and fullness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known." he went on to say that we don't need a thunderstorm to experience electric shock as it can be provided by a battery. We don't need to travel the entirety of a new country to be sure that it exists and have a vague idea of the magnitude of its shores. Though we have a limited knowledge of God we can still rely upon it as being valid even though it's partial.

MacLaren: "We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass but yet it is the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither I nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch and breadth and a foot or two and height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passes knowledge...We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above us. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there. We try, but slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff, and say, 'We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below?' Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us, and lifts us, and sets us there...I am a poor, weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to

fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him...we can have as much of God as we want” (ibid).

A Jeremy Camp song puts it more succinctly: “the same power that rose Jesus from the dead lives in us.” We go from sinner to forgiven saints, from death to life, from being guilty to being justified, declared not guilty and in right standing before God.

English preacher and biblical scholar John Gill: “this power is that which is exerted in the implantation of faith, and in the continuance of it, and in the finishing of that work...displayed in the work of conversion and faith appears, if it be considered what the work itself is called, a creation, a resurrection from the dead, a regeneration, and a transformation of the man into another man...some things are removed, Satan is dispossessed, the stony heart is taken away, the enmity is slain, the old man is put down from his throne, and put off with his deeds; and there are some things wrought, Christ is formed in the soul, his grace is implanted, his image is stamped on, a new heart is given, and principles of light and life, of grace and holiness are put; the understanding is enlightened, the will is subdued, the affections are set on other objects, and the mind and conscience are cleansed and purified;...delivering believers out of divers temptations; in assisting them to discharge their duty, and in their final perseverance:” (Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible, biblehub.com/commentaries/ephesians/1-19).

IV. The place of the church Vv. 22, 23.

Christ is Head over everything for the Church. The Church is pictured as his Body. It’s one of the ways the church is portrayed in Ephesians. More on this word picture in the rest of our study. As head Christ is the command center. He’s the boss. He gives directions to the rest of the body.

The church is the expression of Christ to the world. Christ uses the church, his body, to make himself known and extend his kingdom. People form their opinion of Christ from what they see in the church, those who claim to have placed their trust in Christ. The church needs to make sure it makes a good impression.

To do so the church needs to be filled with Christ. John Piper: “Christ fills the universe with his glory by showing the universe his body—how he chose her, how he destined her, how he came for her and taught her and suffered for her and died for her and rose for her and reigns for her, how he called her and justified her and cleansed her and kept her and will raise her and glorify her and satisfy her forever and ever with himself” (desiringgod.org/messages/his-body-the-fullness-of-him-who-fills-all-in-all).

He pictures the Father saying to Jesus “Now, my Son, you and those with whom you are united as head to body, go forth in the universe and fill it with all that you are in your body. Let everything, from the highest heaven to the lowest hell, be filled with a revelation of your glorious perfections in the form of a chosen, destined, blood-bought, called, justified, holy, glorified, and infinitely, everlastingly satisfied people, your body, the church of the living God. Amen” (ibid).

That’s a fitting way to articulate the prayer. God gives spiritual blessings and his power so we can enjoy the blessings so we can showcase Jesus Christ to the world.