



Forward Thinking

Ephesians 1:18 NIV

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....

Is Something Missing in Your Life?

Back before there were GPS devices, long before cell phones and just about the time we started having microwave ovens, I was asked as a student studying at the seminary to preach at a church in rural Mississippi. This particular church was way out in the country, about an hour from where we lived. The instructions to get there were like something from the 1800s. After you get off the highway, turn left at the big tree. Three miles down, turn right at the big rock. Go another two miles and when you come to a fork, keep to the right. You will see a house with brown paint on it. Turn left there. Keep going until you see a clump of four trees, and you are almost at the church. Go another mile and it will be on the right hand side of the road. No street names. No map. Just these written instructions of natural landmarks. We went back and forth on the road to make sure we had turned at the right clump of trees, come to the actual rock that they meant, turned at the correct fork in the road. When we arrived at the church, I felt like I had gained an education in Mississippi country life as well as a new faith in the Lord's ability to get me to where I needed to go. I have no idea if the sermon I shared was any good or not, I was just happy we made it to the service before it was over.

Sometimes we think we know, and we don't. Other times, like our little trip to the church in Mississippi, we know but aren't so certain. The Apostle Paul realized that many Christians don't really know what they should. Hope was important to him and it is to the Bible. In every letter Paul wrote other than 2 Timothy, he used the word hope somewhere. His prayer in our key verse is that we begin to have a particular kind of hope. The implication is that many Christians lack this hope. **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...** (Ephesians 1: 18 NIV) Hope, in the New Testament, is always derived from what Jesus accomplished by dying on the Cross. There are plenty of things we hope will happen. We hope the smoke will clear away and it will turn cooler. We hope we don't catch Covid-19. We hope we pass an exam or get promoted. The hope Paul is praying we have is something much more transcendent. It is for all of us, rich or poor, young or old. From rural Mississippi to cosmopolitan Moscow, we need this hope.

Paul calls it the hope of the "**riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...**" Many have hoped for an inheritance that would change their lives but almost always they are thinking of financial gains. This is not that sort of hope or inheritance. Now imagine a very poor relative promises you a great inheritance. You probably wouldn't put much hope in it because it seems unreasonable. That is how this inheritance of God seems to many. Suppose now that there is another variable in place. Perhaps you aren't too sure you can trust the word of the one promising you an inheritance. The strength of your hope in this case is based on how trustworthy you think the messenger is. When the disciple Thomas heard from the other disciples that

Jesus raised from the dead had met with them and was alive, Thomas didn't maintain hope that it had happened because he thought the story was preposterous, even when it came from his friends. He then concluded that his fellow disciples were not trustworthy, they couldn't be counted on to give a truthful account of what had happened. Many are like that. They don't have the hope Paul is praying we have because they don't believe the Bible, or they don't think such a great thing as the inheritance promised there is possible. Just as Thomas eventually found out that the hope being offered him was in fact wonderful and true, so too you will see the hope of this Scripture is also. Just because someone doesn't think a hope is valid doesn't mean it isn't.

Now here is the most important point regarding the hope that the Apostle Paul is praying we have. It is not our inheritance; it is the inheritance of God that is our hope and that is strange to ponder. The Bible calls it a rich inheritance, one that is glorious. God considers His inheritance immense and spectacular. We aren't used to thinking this way, of God being happy about the inheritance He possesses. It is always the other way. The talk is on our inheritance. It is of heaven, eternal life, no diseases or death, mansions, and streets of gold. Not one thought is given over to how our Lord thinks of what He gains by having died on the cross. Yet here it seems the Lord thinks quite a bit of it! Remember, God's inheritance is "in the saints". It's in you and that is quite a wonderful thing to consider! God lives with eager anticipation of being with you forever. Hope for God is the coming time when you and He are together with nothing to separate you. That's His hope.

Let me illustrate this with an account from the Old Testament that you may find familiar in order to explain this difficult thought. When Abraham left his father and relatives behind in Haran, he did so, not on a whim or to get away from his overbearing 140 year-old dad. He moved away because God called him, just as He has called you to salvation. Yes, Abraham left much behind, but it was an inspired leaving, an invitation leaving. You might say that the eyes of Abraham's heart were enlightened by God just as you may have found yours to be. Somehow Abraham knew God spoke to him about traveling down to Canaan, how, we don't know. The same is true for you, when you gain that hope found in Christ, you may not know how you know it is so but somehow you do. With Abraham, the call led to a hope, a life that would be wrapped around God, an uncertain life, a life not yet lived. All hope is like that, it is built on something not experienced. The hope of Abraham, that was God given, was that the LORD had a place for him that would be his home with God.

As soon as Abraham reached Canaan, the LORD spoke to him, and told Abraham that the place he reached would be for his descendants, a home for his family. At the time, Abraham had no children, no reason to think that he ever would as he was seventy-five and his wife sixty-five. Hope is something not yet and Christian hope is built on God. Hope changed for them both. First it was in the sort of place where they were going, a distant place they had never been. Now it was a hope built on the word of God that they would have descendants. First a home and then descendants became hope for Abraham and his wife Sarah.

Now look at all of this from God's perspective. There was an inheritance for Abraham and Sarah, a hope promising something to come that God placed in them with His word. However, there was also an inheritance for God, and it was that He would build Abraham's life with Him. The LORD would build His life with Abraham's descendants. God also had something to look forward to having, if we can put it that way and not sound irreverent or in any way demeaning to the vastness of God. Does God need us to be happy? Of course He doesn't. And yet, for some reason He put us together, knowing full well how much hurt we would cause and without any reason to do so, He loves us. Could it be, that it was not only a hope that God gave Abraham, the promised land and all that came with it, but also Abraham and Sarah and all who followed them were a hope for God too? The LORD's love for Abraham and Sarah was undergirding the hope He had for them.

There are countless places in the Bible where God's limitless love is revealed for you and the rest of His people. Two verses come to mind that give us some idea just what God thinks of His inheritance. The first is so well known we often gloss over it. **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** (John 3:16 NIV) If God loves you that much that He willingly let Jesus Christ die for you, don't you imagine He looks forward to the time when He and you are perfectly united in every way? The second verse is nearly as well-known but with a little twist to it. **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.** (1 John 4:10 NIV) What we are not told in John 3:16 but are reminded in 1 John 4: 10 is that we did not love God at the time He loved us. A better way to translate this is that we ourselves did not love God when He loved us, sending His Son to be butchered as a sacrifice for our salvation. Consider that for a moment. When we had no desire for Him, God loved us and gave all He had for our lives, for our love.

You might wonder what guarantee you have that your life is settled for eternity and that heaven is forever your home with God. How about this thought? God is looking forward to being with you, that you are His cherished prize for sending Christ to die on the Cross. His hope is set on you and you are His great and dear friend. Think of it this way. It is almost Christmas, and God is counting down the days until He has you with Him as His very own, His beloved and wonderful friend.