True Spirituality

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Date: 05 May 2024

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0:00] We're continuing our series through Ephesians this morning, looking at what the church is. And so Julian is going to come and read for us from Ephesians 1 and then Corey will bring God's word.

So Ephesians chapter 1, reading from verse 15, For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward 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 hearts 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 towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might, that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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.
And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.
We are in a series on Ephesians, working our way through the letter that Paul wrote to Ephesus. As Louis mentioned, I had really asked the question, who is the church?
And so far we have learned that the church is a people, Christians, who are blessed by God from eternity past and who are redeemed by the blood of Jesus in the middle of history.
[1:56] And though sin has really fractured our lives, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit right now, is putting the pieces back together, and ultimately one day he will put everything back together, and that one day we will see him, we will see Jesus Christ.

And so that's what we've learned so far. Paul now, for the rest of this letter, transitions to talk about life right now, your life, our lives in the present day.
And he begins that by praying. So what we've read, what Jillian just read for us, is a prayer. And he really prays that every single one of us would have a vibrant, living spirituality in our lives.
So what he wants for us all right now as a church to have is a true spirituality. And he tells them, you know, I've heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus.
He had not met all the Ephesians, so he's hearing testimonies from Rome about them. And he says, you know, I've heard of your faith, and I've heard that you have a living, vibrant love for Christ and for the people of God.
[2:59] And I really just pray that you would have more and more and more of that. So he's really just saying that the prayer that he has for the church is that the church would just grow and love Jesus and love one another more and more and more, better and better and better.

And that means that he's addressing something very real. This prayer is getting at a problem that is very real for us. And it is the problem that you read the Bible and you read about what Christianity should look like.
What it should look like when you meet Jesus. And you become a Christian and Jesus says, now go and love God with all of who you are. Now go and love your neighbor with all of who you are. Now have joy in the midst of hard circumstances. Now pray without ceasing. And you look up at some point, perhaps, and you say, I'm not sure that I'm growing and growing and growing into that type of vibrant spirituality.
And maybe you can have at least somewhat of a story where you say, since I became a Christian, there are times where I feel like my vibrancy and my zeal has gotten lesser and lesser, not more and more.

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[4:11] And so Paul's praying about something that's very real, that affects, that gets into all of us if you're a follower of Jesus today. And he's talking about Christians. And he's basically praying a prayer that tries to get underneath the problem that every human being has, which is just that we all resort to our default factory setting.

And our default factory setting is when the heart gets back to the place where you really believe, we really believe that our circumstances are the most important thing for defining our happiness.
And that's the human default setting to say, circumstances are the most significant thing in my life to tell me whether or not I'm fulfilled or not fulfilled. And Paul's trying to get underneath that and say, you've got a deeper need than that, something much more important than your circumstances in your life to deal with and to pray about, real happiness.
And one of the things you can say when you look at this is all the way back to Ephesians 1, verse 1, Paul says, I'm writing this letter to all of you and I'm writing it as the apostle of the Lord called by Jesus, set apart to speak as a mouthpiece of God with real authority.
And so if nothing else this morning, when you think about the great apostle Paul, who's got the most books to his name in all of the Bible, the mouthpiece of God speaks with real authority and he says, let me tell you, follower of Jesus, what I am praying for you to have.
[5:42] Lean in, because you can find out here, what is it that I should be praying for? What is it that I want to pray for myself and pray for the other Christians around me and pray for my local church?

And he's about to give it to us right here and it's all about having a vibrant living spirituality. And so first, let's ask what's not in this prayer. And then secondly, very simple, ask what is in this prayer? And we'll see just three aspects of true spirituality that he prays for us for. Okay, so first, what is not in this prayer? Very simple. If you just look down at these clauses with me for a second and just try to notice the language that he gives you, I'm just going to run through them.
Verse 16, he says, when he prays, he says, I never cease to thank God for you. That's the first one. And then in verse 17, he says, I'm praying that the Lord would give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.
And then he prays in verse 18 that you would have the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you would know the hope to what he's called you. And then in verse 18 as well, that you would know the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.
[6:49] And then lastly, the immeasurable greatness of power towards you. Now, those clauses are not easy to understand. You read through them and you say, okay, I don't know exactly know what he's praying for me for yet, but we're going to come back to that in just a second.

But just notice first what's not there. And what is notoriously absent is that he says nothing about health, circumstances, or the political scene.
He doesn't pray about circumstances. He doesn't pray about people's health. He doesn't pray about the politics of the day. And that is striking. He says, the most important thing I want to pray for you is different than that.
And it's striking because Paul is imprisoned in Rome as he writes this. He is a man in chains and he is living under the emperor ship of Nero. Nero came to power in 54 AD and now Paul's writing this around 60.
And this from 60 to 62 are the biggest wave of what we call neuronic persecution that happened in the first century. Nero's great persecution. Nero was an evil emperor and he killed many, many people, many Christians and people of other religions as well.
[8:00] He was a brutal man. And Paul is living in his city under his imprisonment and it's so striking. There's not a word about it. He doesn't say anything about Nero.

He doesn't say anything about his health and his circumstances. And he doesn't say anything about the Ephesians' health and circumstances or the political scene. Not at all. And the point is not to say that it's wrong to pray for these things.
No way. It's very good. We pray about these things every single Sunday, actually, in here. And Jesus in the Lord's Prayer, remember, he says, pray every day, Lord, give me today daily bread. So we need to pray and ask that God would provide our food for us every day. That's circumstances. And we read in 1 Timothy 2, pray for the king, pray for the emperor so that there may be peace for the church and the land all across the Psalms.

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Pray for the political scene. It's all over the place. 1 Peter 5-7, cast your cares, your anxieties upon Jesus. Pray about your circumstances. The point is not to say don't pray for your circumstances or your health or the political scene, but it is to see that maybe that's not the first order of business in prayer.
[9:07] And the first order of business in prayer that Paul gives us is to get deeper than that, to pray something that is underneath circumstances. And it's really just, this prayer is really just to pray for your heart, our hearts.

And there's a big reason for that. It's exactly because of circumstances that Paul wants you to pray for something deeper than circumstances. You know, if you've got great circumstances, you need to pray for your soul more than your circumstances.
You actually need to pray for your soul more than anybody else probably when your circumstances are great. Because when your circumstances are really good in your life, it is so easy to get very comfortable and to say I'm doing just fine and to not see the deeper need, to not see the thing that really gives you happiness.
And how many stories do we read over and over and over and over and over again? I can say it. Of people who have gotten everything they've ever wanted out of life, every circumstance they've ever wanted, but they're miserable.
And Paul is saying there's something deeper than that. And you know, the other idea is that if your circumstances are bad, boy, your circumstances can be great, but they can change in an instant.
[10:18] And it really is true that for every single one of us, one day the saying will be true for us, you're here today and gone tomorrow. Every one of us, the circumstances are going to fail at some point.

And Paul is saying you need prayers, you need something in your soul that is deeper than that, that works in good circumstances and bad circumstances, something that can give you an anchor that can hold you above the water line no matter how good it is or how bad it is in your life.
And that's what he's praying about. And the answer is you need true spirituality. So secondly, and finally, what does he pray for? We'll spend much of our time here.
What does he pray for? He prays for a living, vibrant, true spirituality. Now what do I mean by that? In Edinburgh, it's very normal to talk about being spiritual.
So ever since the time of the Enlightenment, the Scottish Enlightenment right here on our streets, Edinburgh, this city, this great city has been a place where people more and more for many seasons have stepped towards what you might call crass secularism.
[11:21] And I don't mean that in a negative way, I simply mean by that a feeling, a belief that there is nothing more than the eye I can see. All that there is is matter in motion.

And there's a lot of people in our city who still believe that. Maybe you're here today still believing that. Ricky Gervais style secularism. There's nothing more than science. Science is the God. Science is what we have.
And I think that more and more over the last decade, many, many people in our city have moved away from crass secularism and are willing to say, I'm a spiritual person. So 65% to 68% of our city says I'm spiritual but not religious or self-identify as having no religion but also still believing in something.
And spirituality, modern spirituality is just a vague spiritualism. It's I know there's more than I can see but I'm not sure what it is. This happens in the Bible too. The apostle Paul goes up, Marcel in Athens in Acts 17 and he says, I see you are very spiritual.
I see that you even worship and have statues towards unknown gods. Just to say there's gods out there that we don't know that exist and so we're going to make a statue to an unknown god. And what he does is he says, look, in a way that's a step in the right direction to realize there is more than your eyes can see.
[12:38] But he says, let me take you to true spirituality. What the Bible does is it comes and says, it's not just vague spirituality, God really has revealed himself.

And you don't have to be merely spiritual, you can be truly spiritual. You can have a real object to place that spirituality upon. And so what he's teaching us here and praying for us is that we would have a vibrant Christian spirituality, a true spirituality.
And here it is, it comes with three aspects to it. And the first is this, who can have true spirituality? What is Christian spirituality? Who is on the road to being truly spiritual?

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And that's the first thing he prays about. It's in verse 16, he says, I thank God always when I pray for you. I thank God, I remember you in my prayers and thank God for you.
Okay, thank God for what specifically Paul? And he back up to verse 15 and he says, I thank God because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints.
[13:40] Now who can you say today that you are on the road of true spirituality? Here's how Paul says first, you have to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that word faith there is a word for deep personal trust. Not just a vision of spirituality that there is something more than meets the eye, but a trust, a personal relationship.
And what does he say is the object of faith. Now if you've been a Christian for a long time, you've been in the church for a long time, don't pass by this because you've heard it many times. But faith he says in the Lord Jesus Christ.
And have you thought about every one of those words before? Lord, he uses this word Lord Kirios in Greek and it's the word Kirios. He picks it very specifically because in that time Nero the emperor was the one who was called the Kirios.
They would say Nero is Lord and Kaiser Kirios Caesar is Lord was a phrase that had been spoken by the Roman Empire for generations. And when Paul says no in a time of under Nero the emperor, he stands in the city of Rome under Nero's chains and says Jesus is Kirios.
[14:58] He's making a massive statement because what people believed about Kaiser Kirios Caesar as Lord is that the Caesar is divine. And so when you say Kirios what you're saying is I believe Jesus is God because people believe that Caesar was God.

And Paul saying here first are you on the road to true spirituality? Well can you say have you said have you professed like our new members today? Jesus Christ is Lord meaning when you say that I really believe that this human being who came in the middle of history is God.
And then he says not only is he Lord he's also Christ and that's the word savior or Messiah and you put it all together and you say look if you think you're a spiritual person if you want to be on the road to true spirituality if you say I'm a Christian you're not yet on the road you're not yet a Christian until you have professed Jesus Christ is Lord.
Jesus is the Lord and the Christ. Jesus is God and Savior redeemer of the world. That's what it means to be a Christian. And so is that you today?
And if it is then you are on the road a living spirituality. And then he says secondly I've heard also about your love and then he uses this phrase for all the saints very important don't pass by it.
[16:19] Your love meaning he said look when you have faith in Jesus you're saved you're redeemed you're a Christian you're part of the family of God and then he says but I've also I pray and thank God because I've heard of your love as well.

And what he's saying is not only did I hear that your believers I also heard that you have a faith that is visible that your faith is not dead faith your faith is full of vibrancy it's loving and he says love for all the saints.
Why does he say that all the saints what is a saint a saint is no special Christian though the words been used and understood like that many times it's not a Christian that's done particularly valiant deeds or something like that a saint is just anybody that believes in Jesus.
And he says I've heard for your love for all the saints every saint meaning that in Ephesus in the Roman Empire there were all sorts of ethnicities all sorts of religions and they did not mix with one another.
And you had this very interesting thing happen that when Jesus and the gospel came along all of a sudden people of different ethnic backgrounds and different religions were joining together on these Sunday services in people's homes and people said what is going on here these people are all mixing with one another and that's what he's talking about he's saying I heard that when you came to faith in Jesus you got past the bounds of separating because of ethnicity separating because of socioeconomic division separating by your previous religions all of a sudden I'm seeing all these people together and I've heard that you love Jew and Gentile equally and so he's saying I see the vibrancy of your faith that it's really changing you it's really affecting you it's doing something in your life.
[18:07] Now listen are you on the road of a growing vibrant spirituality one of the ways Christian friends that you can know that is if you have love for all the saints do you love people because of Jesus Christ in your life that are not like you do you love people of the opposite political persuasion and do you love them because they believe the same gospel that you believe in do you love

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different ethnicities and nationalities it's not only love in the local community but it's really saying love for the global church and are you able you know one of the ways you know that you're growing in a vibrancy and living love is when you can interact with Christians from all different backgrounds and really love them and really want to listen to them and really want to say I love to see what God is doing in your life and in your church despite what they might think different differently than you than us about secondary secondary stuff that's one of the ways you know you're really growing when you can say you know these these people they move a little bit too much in their worship service but boy I love what's what God's doing in their life you know you say I don't care about the secondary stuff I love to see what's going on what God's doing in them and that's a vibrant living faith now that's that's the first act faith and love he wants you to have a living faith in Jesus that's the first step on the road to true spirituality the second and this is really the main point of this whole prayer it's found in verse 18 it's the grammatical center and it's this that he says I pray that you would know that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you now that's the grammatical center that's really the heartbeat of the passage his prayer is that you may know that's where you get to the main verb of this long sentence this is also a long sentence like the last couple weeks and the one of the ways you can understand the prayer is then to move outward from that you may know in sort of concentric circles and realize that everything else he says is that you may know that you may know something more and more and so you take a step back and he says I want you to have the eyes of your heart enlightened that's just another way of saying I want you to really know in your soul so you have to you have to have a light come into your life to be able to see with your physical eyes right and he's saying but I want you to have light into your soul so that you can see spiritual things too that's just that that you may know that you may see that you may desire that you may more and more want it's desiring language or take a step back from there he says I pray that you would have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in your life that you would know God that word he uses for knowledge there has a little prefix on the front it's not the normal word for knowledge it's epi knowledge is what he puts up the prefix meaning more deeper that's what he says so in all these different ways he's saying I just want your soul to know who you really are more and more and more that your your soul would be enlightened by the spirit so you could see now let's summarize it what is true spirituality for Paul it's walking down the road of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ with a love for the church a love for the people God's people and then this is all it is he says growing growing growing is knowing more and more over time what God has already given you growing growing growing is just knowing more and more over time who you already are so a lot of times people will talk about Christian spirituality Christian life Christian growth as climbing a ladder there are certain forms of mysticism in the history of the church that have talked about the Christian faith is all about climbing the ladder to God you've got to grow and grow and grow more and more and get closer and closer and closer but actually Paul teaches the exact opposite idea which is to say that Christian spirituality true spiritual life is really about seeing that God walked down the ladder to you already

and growing more and more and more in the realization of that that you already have everything you need that you already are everything that Jesus wants to give you and is going to make you that it's yours already that you have it that's true spirituality and so as we step towards the end just to he gives you two main ideas about this that you may know know what in the first one is he says that you may know the hope to what you've been called verse 18 that you may know the hope that he has already called you to now you already says he says that you would know the hope you've already been called to and that's not the normal way that we think about hope so we might ask do you have hope do you have something to hope in and what Paul is saying is no you do have hope but do you realize that so what is hope hope is just a certainty that you have a secure future in Jesus Christ and he's saying you've already got it but I want you to know that you have it that's the prayer

I want you to know what you've already been given in other words he's saying I'm praying for you that you wouldn't default to your factory setting which is to believe that right now the most important thing in your life or whether your circumstances are good or bad and he said no you can you already have a hope that you've been given that is so much deeper than that hope the way the Bible puts it a big metaphor a lot of times hope is attached to language about the seas about sailing and things like that throughout the Bible hope is really hope is a life vest hope is a buoy that keeps you above the waterline when the tsunami of your circumstances are trying to suck you under suck

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your heart underneath the water and drown you hope is that thing that's keeping you above the waterline in the soul that's keeping you afloat and what Paul is trying to say is look you've got a yacht to sit on you know you've got a yacht that is anchored that is not going anywhere no matter what your circumstances do to you but you're but in your heart you think that all you're wearing is toddler floaties you don't know what you have you know you've got a hope that's never going to go away but in your heart you're letting your heart be like wearing toddler floaties in the midst of a tsunami but you're standing on a yacht and it's anchored you have a hope that anchors your soul and it can't be taken away from you and he's saying really true spirituality is just growing more and more and more into the knowledge of that and then he says and here's how you can see that more and more and it's the last one that you would see the power that's at work in your life so he says in verse 19 and I pray that you would see the immeasurable greatness of his power at work in you now he says do you see the hope the yacht the anchor of the soul that you already have in Jesus Christ that your future is secure no matter what your circumstances are but then he says and it's because you've got power in your life and you but you've got to see it you've got to look for it you've got to know it's there and the language he gives is really important because he says do you see the immeasurable greatness of his power in your life and he chooses I think his words really carefully there because he uses this word immeasurable also can be translated incomparable and that's important there are there are many powerful people in the world right now I've looked up Forbes list of the most powerful people in the world right now I wonder if we all took a poll who are the five most powerful people in the world right now what everybody would say you know there really is a way to quantify that to some degree although it's it's it's always an open question but the three most powerful people that Forbes says are in the world right now is Xi Jinping in China and then and then Donald Trump and then Vladimir Putin that's what Forbes says are the three most powerful people in the world now I don't know if that's true but there there is in some sense a way to quantify that and measure it come up with a calculation perhaps of what how do you qualify power that's why Paul is in chains under the emperor Nero who was a very powerful person and that is why Paul says I want you to know the immeasurable greatness of Jesus power because he wants to say listen every single way you've seen power in this life is not like what I'm talking about there is a sense in which you can quantify the power of these people but you cannot quantify the immeasurable greatness of the power of
Jesus Christ but you've got to have the eyes of your soul enlightened so that you can see it because right now you're looking out at the world and you say I don't know that I feel that way I don't know that I see that and he's saying my prayer are you praying this for yourself Lord give me a vision for the greatness of the power of Jesus Christ that is at work in the world right now because sometimes I can't see it I can't see it with my soul I've got on toddler floaties I want I want the yacht I want to be able to see it all the way and he goes on to use these this language where he says Jesus Christ power is so big that it is ever since he was raised from the dead he has power above every rule every authority every dominion every name that is named and so he's saying that Jesus Christ is powerful above all the invisible powers Satan the demonic the spirits the angels and he's saying he's saying Jesus is so powerful over all the visible authorities to like Nero and like all this big list of names we could name of the most powerful people in the world every government it's nothing it's small it's apples to oranges and he's saying this is his prayer for all of us for you today follower of Jesus he's saying I just want you more and more each day each year to be able to know that the power of Jesus Christ the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead really is the power in your life right now the Holy
Spirit that that's the power that's at work in your soul do you know that do you see that walking down the road of true spirituality is just growing ever more into the knowledge of that now let me close let me close with something even more astounding even more important in this passage and it's the hardest thing to I think the hardest couple lines to interpret they tell you in seminary you don't you don't end a sermon with the hardest thing to talk about but we are today because you've got it you don't you don't want to miss this even though it's easy to pass by and it's this that if you want real spirituality in your life true spirituality to move beyond the vagueness to grow as a Christian vibrancy and the most important thing you can see is two little clauses that he adds in this passage that are easy to pass by and they're in verse 18 and 22 and in verse 18 he says he says that you may know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and I'll miss this he says I want you to know what are the riches the treasure the wealth not right noticed because when you first read it you'll think this way not of my or your glorious riches it's not your glorious riches your

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glorious inheritance now it says it's
[29:42] I want you to know about his treasure who's he talking about he's talking about Jesus and he's saying what I hope you will see that will help you to grow as a Christian is that you'll see not your great inheritance and you have one in Jesus but his treasure his great inheritance and then he says and that is the saints now what is he saying he's saying this one of the ways to grow in your faith is every day to wake up and realize that that what this little clause says is that Jesus Christ has a great treasure a wealth that's standing in front of his face his treasure is his inheritance what God the Father wants to give to him and the answer is the saints he's saying I hope that you'll know that this is Jesus's world and you're living in it and he's becoming more and more and more the visible king and he's got a glorious inheritance that God the Father is giving him and that treasure is you that's his inheritance that's his treasure he he's saying one of the ways to really grow is to be able to say every single day that Jesus Christ delights in me and his opinion of me is so high that he calls me his treasure and in verse 22 he does it again this is the only definition of the church we have I think in the whole New Testament he says God has put everything under Jesus' feet and given him as head over everything to the church and the church is what his body the fullness of him now you read the commentators on this and they will all say the same thing nobody knows what this means the church is his body the fullness of him what does that mean it's mysterious but we all know the right direction that we can go into what it means and the right direction is it somehow means that though

Jesus is the king of all the world and he is the fullness of all things meaning he fills everything up fills everything up with power he's holding it all together right now somehow Christians the church his bride the saints those who follow him fill him up we fill him up as he's filling up the whole world now it's metaphorical language it's mysterious language the best way I can think to describe it is simply this as we close imagine the greatest king that's ever lived the king that that everybody wants to live in his land the king of the kingdom who's got so much authority so much on his plate so much power and you know he's protecting us this king and he's everything's coming into his court and he's dealing with so much business you know he's so busy there's a lot to do when you're king of a great kingdom and he's in the middle of the work day and you know there's so much on his plate but then all of a sudden around all of his advisors and all of his staff his little children run into the room and you know he just sweeps him up into his arms he just gathers him up and as he is filling the whole land with his dominion he turns to the kids and says but you know what you fill me up you you keep me going you know you're my joy you're the apple of my you're you're my heart you are the thing that makes me want to rule this land I want to give you everything I want to give you an inheritance and that
I think that's what it's saying Jesus Christ we for him we are his heart we're the church is the apple of his eye and true spirituality is every single day grasping to new depths Jesus Christ came into this world to die for me so that I might become his future joy Jesus Christ came into this world to give everything away for me so that he could delight in me and that'll grow you up let's pray father we thank you for this prayer and we just pray it now so we do pray Lord exactly what Paul tells us here that deeper than circumstances deeper than health deeper than the political scene we want hearts that are vibrant and awake true spirituality and we want to be able to admit that there is so much more than our eyes can see and we want to wake up every day really knowing that and not in a vague way but with our eyes set on you God we want to know you better so I just pray Lord that throughout our church as we've received new members today and that all of us would be reset reset to knowing that we exist to grow and know God more and that's our fundamental vocation in this life and so I pray that you would strike our hearts now as we come and sing to the Holy Spirit Holy Spirit come give us the spirit you are the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the growing knowledge of Jesus Christ so we pray for that now and Jesus's name. Amen.

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