

Sermon Title: "A Prayer for the Church"

Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:15-23

Pre-Sermon: This is to help you prepare for hearing from God's Word.

- Please read Ephesians 1.
- What did you enjoy from this chapter?
- What do you think is the connection between verses 3-14 and verses 15-23?

Sermon Discussion Questions: This will help you think through what you heard.

- How has your attitude and perspective on the significance of the church changed over the years?
- What does the church have to do with the book of Ephesians?
- Where is Paul as he writes this letter?
- What is Paul doing in verses 3-14 and what is he doing in verses 15-23?
- What is someone doing when they give thanks? Why is it surprising to find Paul doing that? What is the reason Paul is so thankful?
- One reason we are often not more thankful is because we don't have a big enough perspective on what God is doing. What is the big perspective that helps us understand what God's accomplishing through the church?
- What was Paul's attitude about the significance of faith in the Lord Jesus? How is that different from many people's attitudes? Why should we be more thankful for this kind of faith?
- What was the evidence he heard about the Ephesians that demonstrated their faith in Jesus was real?
- What are some demonstrations you have seen in Cornerstone Bible Church over the years of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for all the saints?
- What does Paul ask God for regarding the church?
- What stood out to you specifically from Paul's prayer requests?
- Why can we be sure that God is able to do what He's promised He would do through the church?

Sermon Outline: A sermon is much more than an outline, but perhaps this outline will help you follow the sermon.

It's been twenty five years, Cornerstone! So we are going to take a minute and think about the past, the present and the future.

1. What are we thankful for?
2. What are we asking God for?
3. Why are we confident?

Sermon Goal: This is a VERY short explanation of what I'm praying God will achieve through this message.

I want us look at Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church so that we will have a better understanding of the significance of the church in God's plan, what is most exciting about what God's doing in and through the church, what should be important to us as a church, and what we need most right now as a church.

Self-Evaluation Assignment: These are some questions to help you evaluate yourself.

- What can you not stop thanking God about? What does that say about where you are putting your hope?
- What is your attitude toward the church? Do you think of the church as significant as the apostle Paul does? What would it look like for you to have as big a view of the importance of the church as he does?
- How precious is faith in Jesus Christ to you?
- How important is loving ALL the saints?
- Does hearing about other people's faith and love cause you to rejoice?
- Consider what you prayed about this past week. How often have you prayed for the church? Why or why not?
- How important is the knowledge of God to you really?
- Does the gospel seem like old news to you? Are you content with that?
- Do you believe God can supernaturally enable you to understand the gospel more and more clearly?
- Would you say you are characterized by hope?

To Think About: This is a quote related to the sermon to consider. Do you agree or disagree about the way we are right now? Why or why not?

"Whereas to the Puritans communion with God was a great thing, to evangelicals today it is a comparatively small thing. The Puritans were concerned about communion with God in a way that we are not. The measure of our unconcern is the little that we say about it. When Christians meet, they talk to each other about their Christian work and Christian interests, their Christian acquaintances, the state of the churches, and the problems of theology—but rarely of their daily experience of God. Modern Christian books and magazines contain much about Christian doctrine, Christian standards, problems of Christian conduct, techniques of Christian service—but little about the inner realities of fellowship with God. Our sermons contain much sound doctrine—but little relating to the converse between the soul and the Saviour. We do not spend much time, alone or together, in dwelling on the wonder of the fact that God and sinners have communion at all; no, we just take that for granted, and give our minds to other matters. Thus we make it plain that communion with God is a small thing to us. But how different were the Puritans! The whole aim of their 'practical and experimental' preaching and writing was to explore the reaches of the doctrine and practice of man's communion with God."

Sermon Flow: This is a basic summary that might help you understand what this sermon is doing and where it is going.

1. Introduction:

- a. I begin by telling you the subject we are going to think about and why.
 - i. We are talking about the church.
 - ii. Because this is the special 25th anniversary of Cornerstone Bible Church.
 - iii. Because the church is the single most important thing God is doing in the world right now.
- b. I explain what passage we are going to look at and why.
 - i. We are going to be looking at Ephesians because Ephesians is a letter written about the church.
 - ii. Specifically we are going to be looking at Ephesians 1:15-23 and considering the way Paul prays for the church because this passage helps us understand what is truly exciting and what should matter most to us as a local church.

2. Body:

- a. First, I want us to think about what we are thankful for.
 - i. In verses 15-16 Paul tells us what he is thankful for.
 1. The phrase for this reason sends us back to verses 3-14 where we discover the church's role in God's big plan of salvation.
 2. Then we look at the two specific things Paul heard about the churches around Ephesus that convinced him they were part of that big plan.
 - ii. I am hoping as we consider what Paul was thankful for that you will develop a bigger perspective of the role the church is designed to play in this world right now and that you will be reminded what we should really be excited about when it comes to what God's doing here at Cornerstone.
- b. Second, I want us to consider what we should be asking God for.
 - i. In verse 17, before Paul shares what he is requesting, he describes who he is talking to.
 1. Remembering how we come to God and who God should give us hope as we make the following requests.
 - ii. In the middle of verse 17 and 18, we consider what Paul is asking God for.
 1. I start with the general request in verse 17.
 - a. And we will think about the phrase, in the knowledge of Him.
 - i. And here I want you to feel that the most important thing in life is knowing God.
 - b. We then talk about the Spirit of wisdom and revelation.

- i. And we will think about what wisdom is, what revelation is, and what Spirit Paul is talking about, but primarily I want you to be reminded that the primary thing we should be longing for as a church is a supernatural work of God in our hearts to have deeper and deeper intimacy with Him.
 2. I then have you consider the specific requests:
 - a. "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, finally, "what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe."
 - b. But, I want you to come away from these requests sensing that we as a church are part of something really huge and understanding how absolutely important it is that we are hopeful and confident about God's ability to do everything He promised.
 - c. Unfortunately, we are not going to have much time to consider the third point, why are we confident about all this?
 - i. The answer to this question is found in verses 20-23.
 - ii. But we'll come back to this on Easter Sunday, Lord willing.
 3. Conclusion:
 - a. Hopefully by this point, you will be reminded of why the church actually matters and have more clarity on what is important in a church and for the church and walk away with a renewed commitment to the work of the church and a desire to give thanks and pray the way Paul does for Cornerstone Bible Church.

Application Questions: We can't just read these passages, study them. It's vital we respond.

- What should you believe as a result of this message?
- What needs to change in the way you think about the church?
- What should you want or do differently as a result of this message?
- What can you give thanks to God about as a result of what you heard?
- What should you be praying for?

Sermon Notes: This is a place you can record your own notes and thoughts as you listen to the message today so that you can think about them later.