

2023.04.16 - Ephesians - Seeking Enlightenment

So What? Spiritual boredom is cured with an unobstructed view of Jesus.

Feel What? Intrigued.

Now What? How might misunderstanding my mission, community, or influence contribute to spiritual boredom?

Welcome to Mosaic Church. I'm Josh, and I'm one of the pastors.

VISION CASTING

The mission of Mosaic Church is to unite people in the Way of Jesus. We're so glad you're here, and we invite you to follow Jesus along with us.

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we began a new series through the letter to the Ephesians. If you weren't here, or you need a brief memory-jogger, the main point of last week, and the entire letter is found in verse 4:

Ephesians 1:4, NIV: He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

And I really love how The Message paraphrases it for us:

Ephesians 1:4, MSG: Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love.

Before we jump into our text for today, I want to tell you **the story of Lawnchair Larry:** Several years ago in Los Angeles, a man named Larry Walters went to the military surplus store and bought 75 used weather balloons. He went home and inflated them and then attached them to a lawn chair. As several friends were watching, he climbed in and a friend released the rope. Instead of the nice, leisurely upward lift, he was said to have shot up like a rocket. All he had with him for the journey was a peanut butter sandwich, a six-pack of beer, and a loaded BB gun. After he broke open the six-pack, he promptly passed out at 2,000 feet in the air. LAX airport were the ones to radio in his

sitting, and the SWAT team soon pull off a rescue that would fit right into a Fast and Furious movie. Larry was asked if he would do it again, to which he said absolutely not. Then, he was asked why exactly he did what he did. And he said, “I just got tired of always sitting around.”

Do you resonate with this? Don't you wonder if there's something beyond the 9-5 grind, finding some friends to golf with, and settling down until you retire? Don't you wonder if there's possibly a way to see from a new perspective that doesn't a lawnchair and some weather balloons?

There are seasons we all face on our spiritual journey where we face boredom. It can seem to affect everything that we do—reading Scripture, praying, church. God himself seems distant. We feel like we can't keep doing the same things just to keep getting diminishing results.

I know what it's like. We read a certain passage a couple of times, we hear a sermon about it, and we think that we've got it covered because we've memorized a few basic facts about it. But we can often miss the invitation to a deeper way of becoming immersed in God's kingdom.

Because when we look at Jesus and his affect on his earliest followers, it seems like anything but boring. Anything but stale and run of the mill. Seeing his relationship with his Father, the disciples excitedly asked that he would teach them how to pray, which was in stark contrast to the distant and repetitious mumblings of the religious elites at the time who only prayed for show.

What they were hungering for what a deeper connectedness and authentically life-changing. Henri Nouwen teaches us these same principles, which seem anything but ordinary, dull, and boring.

Henri Nouwen, *The Way Of The Heart*: “When we learn to descend with our mind into our heart, then all those who have become part of our lives are led into the healing presence of God and are touched by him in the center of our being. We are speaking here about a mystery for which words are inadequate. It is the mystery that the heart, which is the center of our being, is transformed by God into his own heart, a heart large enough to embrace the entire universe. Through prayer we can carry in our heart all human pain and sorrow, all conflicts and agonies, all torture and war, all hunger, loneliness, and misery, not because of some great psychological or emotional capacity, but because God's heart has become one with ours.”

Transition: Paul demonstrates just this and invites us to do the same. So, let's look at a prayer from the book of Ephesians.

SOLUTION

Paul pens several prayers throughout his letters, two of which are in Ephesians.

Ephesians 1:15-23, NIV: For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. I pray 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 his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Paul begins this prayer by acknowledging his gratitude for their faith and their love towards the church. He tells them about the prayers he prays, specifically for the Holy Spirit to release wisdom and revelation so they may have a deeper knowledge of Jesus. He uses a unique phrase not found elsewhere in Scripture: that the eyes of their heart may be enlightened—to be fully open and aware.

Notice that Paul is writing to people who are already apprenticing Jesus. They have already had a moment where they surrendered their lives to Jesus and, now, Paul is asking God for them to have a deeper awareness of Jesus. This may be difficult for us to understand because we have the tendency to read the word “know” as a one-time event, but that's not what the writers of Scripture have in mind.

Jim Herrington, The Leader's Journey: “In the modern, Western way of learning, the student is often passive, merely absorbing information. Jesus practiced a way of learning in which his disciples followed him around, doing what their master did and learning along the way. It was an action-oriented approach to learning. The Hebrew concept of ‘knowing something’ reflects this approach to learning.

Genesis 4:1 says that Adam ‘knew’ his wife, Eve. That is, he experienced her sexually. In Hebrew thought, we ‘know’ something or someone by experience. Having information is not enough and, in fact, is quite dangerous. Proficiency with information tricks us into thinking that we have truly mastered practices for living the life to which Jesus calls us. Experience, on the other hand, is the thing that awakens us from this illusion. Those who have truly mastered the art of Christian living have not only internalized information, ideas, or concepts; they have also practiced applying them in a wide variety of settings. As a result of this practice and reflection, learned skills and acquired values naturally flow from the person’s very way of being (i.e., they have achieved mastery).”

Twice in this passage, Paul uses the word “know,” and what he is desiring is that his readers have an experience unto mastery of these concepts. Something that makes this passage so powerful is its usefulness to us today: We all still have room to grow in our mastery of apprenticeship to Jesus. So, we can take these Holy Spirit inspired words Paul has written and pray them for ourselves and each other, just as Paul has prayed for the Ephesians and other Christians have prayed for others throughout history. We can say, “Holy Spirit, release to me the more wisdom and revelation so I can know Jesus more experientially. I want to become an apprentice that strives toward mastery in love, kindness, and goodness, and I need your help to transform me. Open the eyes of my innermost being and enlighten me at the deepest level so I’m filled with your truth.”

Transition: To gain a better understanding of this prayer, let’s look at the three specific things Paul prays for them to experience.

APPLICATION

Paul first prays for them to experience **“The hope to which he has called you”**

We all have three callings to respond to and walk out in our lives. The first is the call to know God. It’s the open invitation to place our faith in Jesus that Paul and the other writers of the New Testament spend much ink describing. It includes the plan of salvation—how one surrenders their lives, admits their sin, and embraces the sacrificial death of Jesus so they are welcomed back into God’s family and can spend eternity with him. It also includes the day-to-day pursuit of placing our lives under the leadership of Jesus as his apprentices so we can be with him, be like him, and do the things he does.

The second is our calling here on earth. Each of us has a purpose for which God created us to fulfill in this life. Many of us spend our entire lives discerning and refining it over many, many decades. And your calling is bigger than your family and it's bigger than your job. It's got to be because if you think the sum total value of your work is in raising kids, what happens when they move out? Or if it's job, what happens if you get downsized or you retire? You have to have something larger than yourself to live for as you follow Jesus. You can think of your purpose as the overarching narrative that is being slowly unveiled with each passing year and, as you look back, you can see yourself functioning out of that calling even though you couldn't make sense of it at the time. When I look back at roles and jobs I had in my teens and 20s, even when I wasn't a Christian, I notice that I would often want to help people with deeper issues of their lives and I often worked my way into a leadership role, even if I wasn't seeking it out. I notice that conventional ways of education didn't really keep my attention, but I had a self-motivated hunger to learn and grow. I notice that I couldn't stand injustice and unfairness. What does that add up to for me? Well, I'm still on a journey of understanding God's call on my life, but there's not coincidence that I'm a pastor who spends a lot of my time with God and connecting with people to help them experience freedom and transformation.

Our third calling is in the age to come—and this is something that we don't often talk about. In Jewish thought, our lives on earth now is a kind of womb that forms us for our lives in God's fuller kingdom. In other words, our lives now are a 70 year internship for our realer, fuller lives in the Kingdom of Heaven. You have your life now to learn what it's like to follow Jesus during hardship that will etch and shape you for bliss when he returns. And when Jesus returns to rule physically over planet earth, we will all live out of our roles that have been developed over this lifetime. There's a misconception that heaven is our final destination and we live in this disembodied state that is like one unending day off—just floating around, kicking our feet up on a cloud. But that's not true. In the age to come, there will still be learning, discovery, and invention. Artists and teachers will still have jobs to do because we won't just suddenly know everyone and everything all at once. We will still need cafes where we can grab a resurrection flat white and meet historical figures like the Apostle Paul or Mother Teresa and learn about their experiences first hand. Scripture says there will be rebuilding that occurs, so there will be engineers and construction professionals. We will eat together, just like Jesus did after he was resurrected—how do you think that food will be prepared? Don't you think there will be recipe sharing in the age to come? So know that what you do and learn

and create here in this life will have some carryover to the next—though we're not certain how much and the multidimensional changes that will be in effect when God's kingdom fully comes. But you will play a part in shaping what that looks like for all of eternity.

So when we get a bigger view of our calling—salvation from Jesus, our purpose on earth, and our role in the age to come—we will have a deposit of hope due to the bigger vision of God's grand plan for us and the cosmos.

One relevant question you can ask yourself is, ***What is my mission? For what purpose has God created me to fulfill?***

Next, Paul prays for them to experience "His inheritance in his holy people"

It is true to say that we have an rich inheritance in God. Our meaning, purpose, and delight flows from God.

So, while God is our inheritance, Paul writes here is that it's equally true to say God has a rich inheritance in us, his people.

This delight and enjoyment that we have in God, he has in us as well. This relationship is two-way, as any connection is.

God enjoys his people. And the anticipation Jesus has to be united with his church is likened to the anticipation that a groom has when he sees his bride on their wedding day—the awe, the delight, the celebration.

Revelation 19:6-8, NIV: Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

The challenge for us is to see ourselves and others in this light. Community can be messy. People are often difficult to deal with. But we are surrounded by God's people, and we will spend eternity together. Right now, we have the opportunity to find and form community in the midst of all the difficulty, even when we ourselves are the difficult ones.

But ask yourself is, ***Where is my community? Where do I find support, enjoyment, and celebration in the midst of others?***

Finally, God prays for them to experience "His incomparably great power"

Paul ends his prayer by saying that the same power that raised Christ is the same power he now exercises from his place of rulership over every other authority. And that same power is available to us, his church.

Although, I will say that power is a contested word in our culture today. The abuse of power has become headline news as the halls of government, multi-million dollar business, and even churches have been credibly accused of mishandling power. So we have to be very careful in how we think about power and how it's used, which is why we must look to the example of Jesus to see how it's properly wielded.

Ben Sternke & Matt Tebbe, *Having the Mind of Christ*: “Everyone has some measure of power. ...Power is held in many ways in culture, and each of us has ways we possess cultural power and ways we do not. Often, we don't recognize the power we have until someone points out to us that they don't have the same power. ...In every situation, Jesus *recognized* how worldly power was at work, used the power he had to *redistribute* power inside the current system (what we might call restorative justice), while simultaneously seeking to overturn the entire system of power, *redefining* the very nature of power itself (what we might call transformative justice). These aren't three distinct activities for Jesus but facets of one impulse.”

Jesus always used his power to benefit others, never to prop himself up, prove himself, or create a sideshow spectacle for people to gawk at. He always used it to point to the glory of the Father and to lift others up—never for himself.

Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power*: “Every time we treat someone with dignity rather than shame, respect rather than disregard, concern rather than exploitation, kindness rather than brutality, and careful attention rather than turning away, we are doing things that are the reverse of trauma and evil. God will restore a place of safety and laughter and blessing. In the meantime, he has called us to do the same for one another. Have we actively worked to repair the desolations of generations? Or do we say, ‘I was not there. It is over. You should be fine now.’ Do we spend our efforts to ensure safe streets for the vulnerable in our towns and cities? Or do we let ‘them’ live wherever they live and feel grateful we live elsewhere? Has our presence as the body of Christ in this world blessed the nations, both around the world and at our door?”

It may be easier to understand power if we simply think about it as influence. I can exert influence in my immediate surroundings, whether at work, school, or in my home. You

have influence—you have power to do something, and it's not just up to you because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to you right now.

So, finally, let's ask ourselves, ***Who am I influencing? How am I using the power, position, and privilege God has given me to help others?***

Transition: There is one concern I want to speak to, that you may be having:

INSPIRATION

One final thing I want to say is that this will most likely not cure any spiritual boredom overnight. It most likely took a while for you to get here, and there's no quick-fix solution to deliver you from it. But what I do know is this: Jesus says,

Matthew 13:12, NIV: “Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance.”

meaning that if you begin with where you are, no matter how small and insignificant, he will add to it. If you begin with weak and frail prayers, but you seek him consistently you can trust that the Holy Spirit will use that.

Transition: As we close, let's look to put this all into practice by asking ourselves this question:

CONCLUSION

Put This Into Practice:

- How might misunderstanding my mission, community, or influence contribute to spiritual boredom?

Communion

Matthew 6:9-13, NIV: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.”