

16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. **17** 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. **18** 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, **19** and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength **20** he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, **21** 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. **22** And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, **23** which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Overwhelmed

Three weeks ago everyone in the house got sick. Really sick. It started with our youngest, and moved it's way up through each one of the children. Fluids were lost from both ends. The kids were lethargic. We were doing double duty running buckets and pedialyte. The only ray of hope was that our youngest recovered after two days but we were overwhelmed with the thought that one of us was going to be next. We didn't know what to do. We just wanted to be done and I know I'm using the word "We" a lot but I'm mostly referring to Angela who took care of the children while I was out of town at meetings. Mothers are overwhelmed and sometimes all they can do is make do and carry on. Can you imagine what it would be like if mother's everywhere suddenly stopped? We're talking about the worst case scenario and yet that's what it looks like for the disciples.

In some ways it looks like Jesus is just walking away from it all. It's like mom's leaving. She's had enough. The one who's cooked, cleaned, and cared for them since the beginning - ascends into heaven and instructs his disciples *The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.48 You are witnesses of these things.* That's just the beginning and if Jesus' disciples understood where Christianity would take them and the amount of work to be done - I imagine they would be left overwhelmed at the Ascension.

Mother's are often overwhelmed by the amount of work that they do. We all know what it's like to be overwhelmed and to be met with failure. That leads to exasperation as the work doubles and then that can follow into depression when we realize that no matter how hard we try to make things go the way we plan they often go wrong. This happens not only in church but in life and work. Is there any hope? Paul knew that life doesn't always go as planned but rather than offer the Ephesians a linguistic shrug "Welp - nothing more that we can do" He is rather overwhelmed in awe at God's promise.

Paul writes to the Ephesians and he encourages them not to lose hope. They are a church that doesn't have any serious problems or issues to write about - there are unity issues between Jew and Gentile but Ephesus certainly isn't anything like Corinth which required multiple letters. Paul writes a letter full of thanksgiving and praise, a doxology. Paul leaves no room for complaints, no room for no hope. He prays, "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... that your eyes may be enlightened, that you may know the hope to which he has called you and the riches of his glorious inheritance... and his great power for us who believe." Paul prays that the Ephesians receive wisdom, knowledge, and insight. He doesn't want them to give up hope and walk away because Mom left. They could easily come to that conclusion by looking at the life of those around them.

They could easily have seen little hope for the world. The government was far from perfect. Trouble was brewing. Claudius had expelled all Jews from Rome and Aquila and Priscilla arrive in Ephesus because of this. Rome's patience with the zealots was wearing thin. Even Paul found himself under house arrest in Rome. The devil seemed to be winning on every front. The news was bad all around and if that was their only focus they could easily conclude: God has given up. He's too busy tuning harps to care. There is no hope.

If you're watching the statistics of America you'd probably see a decline. The church is supposedly dying in America. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people explain that it's because, "We've changed worship" or "We're not relevant anymore." If all you hear about Christianity is the bickering and complaining, if all you are doing about Christianity is saying, "It was better than... the grass was greener..." Will

God preserve his church? Is he really watching out for her? Is there any hope for Christianity? Is there any hope for us?

If all we do is focus on the trouble brewing, the laws changing, if we only watch the garbage and the amount of work ahead of us - you're likely to be overwhelmed, exasperated, and even depressed. But Paul shares with us the wisdom, knowledge, and insight of his inheritance and his great power. The sad part, however, is that most of the negativity comes from Christians who are so busy complaining about how bad we have it. The ship is sinking and we're bailing water like everyone else but God's power and our inheritance give us hope that we won't go down with the ship.

The world could care less about the church but they're still asking, "Is there hope for me?" The hope placed in cars, country, health and the wares of this world fade away. People are getting older, but we know how the game ends. Don't we know where our hope is and remains? They why would we let the short term victories of the devil keep us from sharing that hope? *Paul specifically prays for the Ephesians, "that you may know the hope to which he has called you.."*

There is hope but once again another hope is another word ruined by the English language. In our language hope has come to mean "a lack of certainty or wishful thinking." Biblical hope is more than just wishful thinking. It's the confident expectation, the stake your life on it, deep seated confidence in God's character, kind of hope even when you have no idea what God is up to. There is hope. Always has been. Always will be.

For Paul, that is the hope that keeps him from giving up. Hope is what keeps him praying and giving thanks even in prison. Hope is what gives Paul the ability to proclaim to the people gathered in Ephesus that this is the work of God. Paul saw the problems coming long before they arrived. He knew he would be arrested in Jerusalem. He knew that this may lead to the end of his life. On his way back he had the Ephesian elders meet him at Miletus. Where he encouraged and warned them, *"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples."* Paul knew the problems. He was well aware of them. He wrote of them but he wasn't about to give up. But rather than focus on his work and how he could keep plodding along taking one step at a time he kept his focus on God's power.

Paul was also aware of God's power, *"his incomparably great power for us who believe."* God has the ability, energy, strength, and brute force to accomplish what he

wants and when he wants. He has the power to overcome any obstacle that stands in his way. Nothing can stand in his way. Not even death or the world working against him. It was that same power that ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ 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.

Jesus was raised to life never to die again. The devil and the world did everything they could in their power to tear him off his throne but now he sits and rules the world for the good of his church. *“God placed all things under his feet.”* Today we celebrate the Ascension, the coronation of our king. Mom’s not leaving. He’s not giving up his role as savior. He is taking up his rule. He has all authority now. *“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.”* He isn’t fighting to gain control over the evil of this world it’s already defeated. Nothing will defeat his church not even unity issues between Jew and Gentile.

In the face of our failure, the massive amount of work, the never ending laundry train, dishes, or maybe just another dinner because the children have to eat again remember the devil has lost, your failures are forgotten, and see God’s power at work. If someone asks, *“Is there hope for me?”* You can confidently respond, *“Absolutely. Jesus has ascended hasn’t he?”* He wouldn’t leave with work unfinished. That’s overwhelming.

He hasn’t left anything unfinished. Because of the Ascension we see God undo everything. There is no need for a comeback he’s already won. Nothing can or will defeat God. We are not helpless victims. It’s finished. He said it. Our emotional ups and downs won’t affect our inheritance. You can respond to those drowning in doubt with hope.

So what are you afraid of? Sick children? Extra work? Another meeting? Another hospital stay? The Word won’t work? The Sacraments won’t forgive sin? The devil has won? You’re still going to hell? It doesn’t matter how bad you look, this world, or even America, nothing, not even unemployment, cancer, or war, can take us from our God. Jesus preserves his church. Always has. Always will. He wants to preserve his church. He can preserve his church. He has preserved his church. Rest secure in that he has ascended because his work is done. Amen.