Possession and Realization — The Two Prayers of Ephesians

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The First Prayer — What We Possess

Ephesians 1:15–23 has been described as a prayer of possession. Every clause points to something that is already ours in Christ. Paul prays that the eyes of the heart may be enlightened to know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are not things we are working toward; they are things we already have. Peter says our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us. Nothing can touch it.

The centre of the prayer is Christ Himself — raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of God in the heavenlies, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come. Every power, every authority, every name that carries weight in heaven or earth is below Him. And God has put all things under His feet and given Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

He is not the king of the church, He is the head of the church. A king rules over subjects from outside; a head gives life and direction to a body of which it is part. Every believer is a member of that body, connected to the head in heaven by the Holy Spirit. And that body is described as His fullness — the expression on earth of the one who fills all in all. It does not look that way now, with two thousand denominations and every manner of division among believers. But God's purpose is sure, and He will present to Himself a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle.

The Second Prayer — What We Must Realize

Ephesians 3:13–21 is a prayer of realization. Having those possessions, we need to enter into them — to realize them, to live in the good of them. Paul bows his knees and asks that believers would be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that being rooted and grounded in love they may comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

The image of an ocean without a shore has been used for this. When we stand on a shore and look out over the sea, we cannot see the other side — but we are standing on a shore. This is an ocean without any shore at all. The love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, the fullness of God into which we are being filled — there is no other side, no far bank, no limit. We will be exploring it for eternity.

The key is in verse 17: that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith. If you were invited to a great palace and went and saw all its splendour, would that fix your affections? Not necessarily. But if someone were there whom you knew and loved, and who made you feel at home — that would fix your heart. Christ dwelling in the heart by faith is what makes the riches of His glory real to us. Without Him at the centre, all the doctrine becomes abstract. With Him there, everything becomes alive.

> *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. — Ephesians 3:17–19*

Micah's House — Every Man Doing What Is Right in His Own Eyes

Judges 17–18 provides a sobering counterpart to these prayers. Micah of Mount Ephraim stole eleven hundred silver pieces from his mother; when he confessed, she blessed him and used the money to make graven images and molten images. He set up a house of gods, consecrated his own son as priest, and when a wandering Levite came by, offered him ten silver pieces a year to serve as his personal priest instead — reasoning that now surely God would do him good, because he had a Levite for a priest.

The disorder in this household was complete. There was theft unrepented of, idolatry dressed up in the language of Jehovah, a priesthood invented and purchased, and worship entirely oriented around what Micah could get out of it. This is what every man doing what is right in his own eyes looks like when it is dressed in religious clothes.

In Joshua 18, the tent of meeting had been set up at Shiloh — the divine centre for Israel's worship. Micah's house was not at Shiloh and had no connection with it. He built his own centre, staffed it with his own priest, and expected God to bless him for it. And there are things in professed Christianity today that are not far removed from Micah's house.

A Levite for Hire — and the Question He Should Have Asked

The unnamed Levite who came to Micah's door was precisely that — a Levite, not a priest. God had designated the sons of Aaron as priests; Levites had their own honourable service at the tabernacle, but it was not the priesthood. Micah did not have a priest in this man; he had a Levite whom he was calling a priest for his own purposes. And the Levite was content with the arrangement, taking the position and the pay without asking whether it was his to take.

When the tribe of Dan's explorers came past and recognised this Levite, they asked him the right question without knowing it: what doest thou here, and who brought thee hither? That is exactly what should have been asked — by the

Levite himself, before he ever accepted the position. What am I doing here? Who placed me here? Is this the Lord's appointment or my own convenience?

When the whole tribe of Dan passed through later and offered him an upgrade — from priest of one household to priest of an entire tribe — he went eagerly, never pausing to ask whether such a thing was right. His heart was not with the Lord; it was with the advancement the position offered. And the question that should ring in any believer's ears who is offered a position to conduct the worship of a congregation of God's people is the same: who placed me here?

All Believers Are Priests — and What That Means for Worship

Revelation 1:5 gives the answer to the question of who the priests are in this age: to Him who loves us and has washed us from our sins in His blood and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father. Every believer is a priest. Not the offspring of one tribe, not the graduates of a seminary, not those with a title or a credential. Every person washed in the blood of Christ is a priest before God.

This changes everything about how we think of the assembly of believers. There is no Levite to hire, because there is no such role to fill. There is no individual to conduct the worship for a room full of priests, because every priest is fitted and called to worship. When the Lord instituted His supper, He did not create an order of service or designate a leader. He gave a loaf and a cup and said, do this in remembrance of me. When the early believers gathered, they sang hymns, read the Scriptures, and prayed.

When we gather on Sunday mornings, the worship is not conducted by any person — it is conducted by the Holy Spirit, who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us and draws out the praise of each heart in its own way. The theme that emerges on a given morning is not planned by the brothers beforehand; it is the Holy Spirit gathering the minds and hearts of those present around the same aspect of Christ. To put a person in the place of conducting that

worship is to displace the Holy Spirit and say, as the Levite effectively said, I will take care of this.

Worship and service are not the same thing and ought not to be confused. Worship is not what I do for the Lord; it is what I render to Him in appreciation of who He is — sometimes entirely without reference to what He has done for me. Service is what I do in His name in the world. The Lord's table is a table of worship, not a service. And when we gather around it in simplicity, acknowledging that every one of us is a priest, we do what the Lord asked us to do — and we do it in a day of small things, without the visible grandeur that the world would associate with religion, but with the reality of His presence among those gathered to His name.

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