

**NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024 am**  
**TITLE: "Praying big!" SERIES: How to pray for my church Part 5**  
**TEXT: Ephesians 1 verses 3-23**  
**Scripture references from the ESV**

**Ephesians 1: 3-23** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, <sup>4</sup> even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us<sup>[b]</sup> for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, <sup>8</sup> which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight <sup>9</sup> making known<sup>[c]</sup> to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. <sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee<sup>[d]</sup> of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it,<sup>[e]</sup> to the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love<sup>[f]</sup> toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

If we had a life-threatening illness which meant that we had to take medication every day because otherwise our life on earth would end, we would make sure we took the medicine on a daily basis. For the church, prayer, and particularly praying together,

is the medicine we need to take so that we do not fall apart in the battle we are facing.

The battle is not against human enemies. It is not a battle to win arguments with other people, to earn more money so we can live a comfortable life or to live healthy lives on earth and avoid suffering.

**It is a spiritual battle against dark spiritual forces:**

- dark forces that are so powerful that, without God's protection, they would easily overthrow us
- dark forces that are so set against the church (each one of us) that, left to ourselves, they would utterly destroy us.

Paul describes it thus: **For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.** (Eph 6:12)

- Do you believe that Satan is out to destroy you?
- Do you believe that there are hoards of demons who are hell bent on undermining your faith in Christ, leading you into gross sin and robbing you of your joy in God?
- Do you believe that these cosmic powers over this present darkness actually exist and want to destroy this church and undermine our witness in the community?

If you really believe this, then there is both good news and a warning:

**The good news is that Christ has defeated those enemies and one day will put them into the eternal fire of hell**

**The warning is that, until then, we need to heed Paul's message and take the fight seriously**

You need to:

- **Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil (Eph 6:11)**

- **Pray(ing) at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.**  
..... keeping alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, (Eph 6:18)

Paul wants us to know that the battle we face is so serious and the stakes so high that: **We must pray in the Spirit at all times not just as individuals, but together as a church**

- How do we pray for the church in a way that goes beyond asking God to help us with temporal issues?

We so often limit our prayers to the things we can see – help to have the right things to say to people, for God to give us enough money to live on, or to be healed physically or emotionally and stop our suffering.

Paul shows us a different way to pray in this letter to the Ephesians. Later in the letter (3:14-20) he models praying for spiritual strength, but in this passage (vv15-23), he models:

- How to pray that we will know God better
- How to pray for us to know the reality of everything that is unseen.

At the start of his prayer, when he says **for this reason**, Paul refers back to what he has written in vv3-14 regarding

**the sovereign grace of God to save people from sin**

He reminds us that without God choosing us, sending his Son to purchase us, and giving us his Spirit to make us alive, none of us would be saved. Our election, redemption and regeneration are all of God. Paul wants us to understand:

**God is sovereign in our salvation, and he saves us to put the glory of his grace on display.**

Who God is and what God means to do are his motivation, and the reason why he is praying for the Ephesian church. When we have the same motivation, our praying will take on a very different character to the type of prayer that begins with us!

**When we meditate on who God is and what he means to do, we too will pray big prayers.**

**We will give genuine thanks to God, make spiritual intercession and offer heartfelt praise**

**1. We will give genuine thanks to God (vv15-16).** When someone becomes a Christian, we thank God not the person, knowing that, without God, no one is converted (vv3-14). Paul gives thanks continually to God when he hears about these people who God has changed to become those who trust in Jesus Christ and show love towards all the saints. What God has done in the lives of the people is Paul's motivation.

What does that mean for us? It is easy to look for the faults in God's people, but instead:

**We would do better to look for how God, through the gospel, is shaping the people around us**

- Look for the way God's people show confidence in Christ and commitment to him
- Look for the way God's people show love for Christ and for other people, both within and outside the church
- Look for the way God has been at work in other churches around us, and further afield

We are meant to look for what God has been doing in his people and then give thanks to the God who has been sovereignly working in their lives. If we did that, we would be set free from bitterness towards those we find difficult and set free from envy towards those who seem to be doing better than us.

**We are all only what we are because of the grace of God**

**2. We will make spiritual intercession to God. (vv17-19).** When we pray for others, what are we to ask God for? It is notable that Paul does not ask for the believers to have the right things to say to people, for God to give them enough money to live on, or for healing and the end of suffering. Instead of praying for temporal

things, Paul is praying at a spiritual level. It is not wrong to pray for those things.

Jesus himself taught us to pray for our daily bread – the temporary things we need for our life on earth. We are not to stop praying for those things, but

**we need to lift our praying to pray on this spiritual level**

The heart of Paul's prayer is that we would know God and know the spiritual realities that God has for us (v17). These believers already know God through Christ, but Paul is asking that they would come into a deeper, more experiential knowledge of God, so that by the Spirit, they experience the reality of God in their lives on a daily basis. God means us to be exposed to the glory of his grace both now and in eternity (vv5-6), and Paul shows us that knowing this truth should shape our prayers.

**If God wants us to see the fullest revelation of himself and his grace,  
we must pray for the Holy Spirit to give us an ever-increasing revelation of  
this eternal, sovereign God of infinite grace**

- If we really love God, we will want to make it our highest priority to get to know him more intimately

**God is an infinite ocean to swim in**

Paul is encouraging us to pray together as a church that we, and others, will experience the Spirit of God revealing the glory of God to our hearts. As that happens, we will know more of the unseen things, and Paul prays to that end (v18 - 19), calling us to know:

**The hope to which we have been called – eternal life in the presence of the living  
God**

**The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints – believers (the church) are  
eternally precious to Christ**

**The immeasurable power of God's greatness- the same power that raised Jesus  
Christ to life**

**is at work in us to enable us to live godly lives**

Do you **really** know:

- how wonderful it will be to see Christ and to live in his presence
- how eternally precious the church is to Christ
- how great God's strength is to keep us

Paul wants us to know this in our hearts, not just our intellects, so that our whole lives are shaped by these truths.

**He wants the eyes of our hearts to be enlightened so that we are transformed from the inside out.**

These invisible realities need to be real and tangible in our hearts. It is likely that we do not know these realities because we spend far too much time praying for that which is visible and temporary.

**We need to pray spiritual intercessory prayers**

**3. We will offer heartfelt praise to God (vv20-23).** As Paul thinks about God's sovereign power at work to raise Christ from the dead, he offers up heartfelt praise, as will we when we see the reality of the glory of God. Much more could be said on this, but that is for another time.

**When we begin prayer with who God is,  
we will give genuine thanks to God because he is the one who sovereignly saves us  
we will make spiritual intercession because he sovereignly saves us so we might know  
him  
we will offer heartfelt praise to God because he sovereignly saves us so we might  
know him  
to the praise of his glorious grace**

You might be wondering how this is of any practical help to you in the light of the difficulties you are experiencing,

or how it can help us in the spiritual battle we are facing. Here are two examples:

**a) It will help us in the battle for church unity.** Satan wants to destroy this church, and one way he will try to do this is to sow seeds of division among us to split the church apart. Those seeds include:

- Grumbling to one another about other people or even open verbal hostility towards one another
- Gossiping behind the backs of others
- Envy because we do not have what others have, or we are not being used in the way others are

We fight against that by asking God to open the eyes of our hearts to know **what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints**, so that we can grasp with our heart how precious the church is to Christ, and know that:

- The church is the body of Christ and when we attack its members, we attack Christ
- The church is seated with Christ in heavenly places and is therefore glorious
- The church will one day reign with Christ in that exalted position

When God answers that prayer and gives us a heart that sees the glory of Christ reflected in the church, then we will truly love one another, and Satan will not be able to use us to divide the church.

**b) It will help us in the fight against suffering.** We suffer in many different ways and Satan will use this to cause us to question God's love. He might say to us - if God loves you then:

- He would not let you suffer in that way, or taken that person from you
- He would not have let that individual attack you
- He would have protected you from this trial

We fight against that by asking God to open our eyes to know **what is the hope to which he has called us (v18)**. We ask God to help us grasp with our hearts what it will be like when the suffering of this current life is over, and we are in the presence of Christ, who suffered far more than we will ever suffer so that we can enjoy the eternal fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Imagine the difference it would make if, in our trials and suffering we asked God to make himself more real to us. What if we not only prayed for ourselves, but also for and with others as we gather together, that he would help us:

- to know how wonderful it will be to live in Christ's presence
- to know how eternally precious we and the church are to Christ
- to know how great God's strength is to keep us in our current trials

If we prayed like that, then when God answers, it will be life transforming for the church.

**Life is hard and we face opposition**

We will not make it unless we pray, not just as individuals but as a church

All hail the glorious Christ  
Oh praise the Lord of Life  
For by Your sacrifice  
You won the victory  
Now over all You reign  
You overwhelmed the grave  
And rose again on high  
All hail the glorious Christ

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