

A Thanksgiving Prayer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 July 2021

Preacher: Malcolm Macdonald

- [0 : 0 0] We're going to begin with a Gaelic psalm. We're going to sing verses from Psalm 21, Psalm 21 and from verse 3. You can read them in English.
- For thou with blessings him preventst, of goodness manifold, and thou hast set upon his head a crown of purest gold.
- When he desired life of thee, thou life to him didst give, even such a length of days that he for evermore should live. In that salvation wrought by thee his glory is made great, honour and comely majesty thou hast upon him set, because that thou for evermore most blessed hast him made, and thou hast with thy countenance made him exceeding glad.
- A biannoch o'ch do'r a'chish fôr, shynhugwgah, g'moch. A biannoch o'ch do'r a'chish fôr, shynhugwgah, g'moch.
- A biannoch o'ch do'r a'chish fôr, shynhugwgah, g'mochwgah, g'mochwgah.
- [1 : 5 6] Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.
- Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.
- Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.
- Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.
- Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh.
- [3 : 4 1] Oh, oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh. Oh, oh, oh.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- [5 : 5 3] Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you.
- [8 : 2 3] Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you.
- Thank you.
- [1 2 : 0 1] Thank you. Thank you.
- Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[14 : 09] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. the angel of God, only God, I join you in a day of joy, through times of life and turn us again or turn us again to be that we may be found at the throne of grace like we've been for a long time remember, Lord the young and the youth of the parish of the congregation of the Romans and the Romans and the awareness beside the Lord that we come to know the Lord as they say there is no other how they say because we can never be but they can know these because they were speaking to us every day every month every year when they were young young many days

I'm old when I'm a child and I'm not a child but I'm not a child but I'm not a child but I'm not a child if we are for a and we we we we we brought home to the heavenly kingdom so be with us all to remember all those that have lived with us from their surveillance to our conservation and strength and strength all that they will do with them all as they go through these times of time be with them and that they will be available but they will all close they will all come even though they will go to all over the loss of love be with them all the most that are in God's peace in the earth wherever they are

Lord we ask all your ancestors be with us now Lord and bless thy world and through thy spirit that thou wouldst apply to help us so that we would be growing in grace even in from the old mountain as so often we see ourselves so with all your things and to all we can only look to thee let us not be looking at our signs but looking to all all that things go before us and bless us which are never even and we ask the Lord we can forgive us by the Lord and we do so yes we are going to hear God's word this evening from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians in chapter 3

I'm going to read the third chapter of this epistle for this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you word how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery as I wrote afore in few words whereby when he read he may he may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ he may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

[19 : 01] Whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, 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, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do, exceeding abundantly above, all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, and to him be glory, in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen. May God add his blessing to this reading of his word, and to his name be the praise. I'd like us to turn now to the first chapter of this epistle, Ephesians chapter 1, and we can read at verse 15, Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

Whenever we say that we are going to engage in a study of God's word, perhaps with a focus on a book of the Bible, or a particular doctrine, or as in this case, a chapter, there are many who are inclined to lose interest, even at that intimation, because some have an understanding of how God's word works, and they perhaps relate to the effect that God's word has upon us in the context of a sermon, and the emotional stimulus that preaching has upon us, more so than perhaps when we engage in a more structured Bible study, or structured consideration of a passage of scripture.

[23 : 16] not everybody is like that, and clearly everybody has their own taste, as it were, with regard to the kind of presentation of the gospel that they favour.

very often, I very rarely get to hear the preachers that I invite to preach to you in my absence, so I'll ask how so-and-so got on, and very often, somebody will offer an opinion as to the preacher's preaching style, or maybe the content, and somebody will say, well, it was easily seen that he was a teacher, and the way that they present the gospel is very much as if they were teaching class.

I'm not saying that they're saying that in a negative way, but mentally, the distinction is made between the preacher who teaches and the preacher who preaches.

Now, well, that's a real understanding, or an understanding that is imagined. I leave it for yourselves to judge.

Speaking about the Apostle Paul, Martin Lloyd-Jones says often, that he teaches in order to encourage, enlighten, enthuse, fellow believers, so that they might go on together.

[25 : 12] Whatever method he uses, he uses, the end product, is what he has in view. He wants the hearer to benefit from what he has to say.

And in this epistle, at this point, Paul is writing, not as a theologian, although that's what he is, he is writing a letter to fellow believers in order that they might go on together in the Lord.

If you remember how the epistle began, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus, grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. Now, at this point in the epistle, having gone through this 12 verse outpouring from verse 3 to verse 14, there is a statement made concerning his purpose for them which is based upon what he knows to be true about them.

And there are two things he has heard about them. First of all, he has heard about their faith in Jesus Christ and the second thing is he has heard of their love for the Lord's people, for the saints.

[27 : 08] And there are two things he says about himself. First of all, what he has heard has made him come with thanks to God.

He prays but his prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving for them and for what he has heard about them. And the second part of his prayer is that what he wants to establish, I suppose, I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

so that there is the thankfulness of heart that is his own and the content of the prayer that brings him to remember them before God.

So that's a might be the same thing but two different sides to the same thing.
Thankfulness to God for them but prayer for them in particular.

prayer. And I want us to think about these four things. First of all their faith in the Lord Jesus. It is very often said that Paul has written his epistles and he repeats this detail.

[28 : 47] he does not speak to them as someone who is remote from them but someone who is knowledgeable as to who they are and someone who delights in hearing good things about them.

One of the commentators says that when the apostle hears these good things about these people to whom the epistles are sent that it is one of the apostles greatest joys to fellowship with these saints and to delight in sharing further good things with them in the gospel.

And very often in various passages if you remember if you go over the epistles that he write he seems to always make this point at the outset of his epistles always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.

In Colossians the same thing again we give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have to all the saints.

In 1 Thessalonians the same again same emphasis that he has we give thanks to God always for you all making mention of you in our prayers remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[30 : 47] So Paul in a sense wants these people to appreciate the affection that he holds them in and it's not just a fondness but something that necessitates that he remembers them before God in prayer.

Now perhaps the cynical would say that Paul is just doing this as a matter of course. He is the archetypal evangelist someone who wants to draw this audience in and he does that by making this connection by making this emphasis of interest in them.

I was recently watching a documentary about Manchester United and some of their players and I remembered something of this being said before was speaking about the management skills of various football managers and the point that was being made was that there were so many different players and some of very great skills some less so but it required that the manager be able to harness that skill and deal with them in a way that they would all work together as a team and sometimes there were what we call prima donnas or those who were temperamental and they needed to be handled carefully so

I've heard it said by some of these players that they couldn't understand why one player would get favourable treatment over against the others in the case of Sir Alec Ferguson when he was bringing young players on he would insist that they had good timekeeping that they arrived properly dressed and that they all adhered to a strict code but one or two would be given leeway when others weren't and it was put down to the man management skills of the manager now some people would say about the apostle Paul when Paul writes his epistle this is one of the strategies that he adopts he's writing to a fragile congregation of different

Christians who have different gifts some are more gifted than others but he needs to bring them all on collectively so he brings them all together in this arrangement that he has at the beginning of all his epistles by saying that they're all this one group that are contained within his prayers and they're remembered in that way I think that's probably doing Paul an injustice I don't think there's anything manufactured about what he is saying I don't think there's anything other than deliberate in his actions but for the reason that he does care about those who are Christians and those who are part of the Church of Christ and that collectively together they are remembered as one at the throne of grace and people of all sorts are remembered but all of them are God's people

[35 : 03] I'll quote the words of Brian Edwards Paul ever the model of balanced Christian theology and experience was sufficiently realistic to admit both the tragedy of fallout and the encouragement of faithful workers in the course of my ministry that's the ministry of Brian Edwards he says I see so much petty squabbling unnecessary divisions harsh criticism and downright sinful behaviour among Christians sometimes those who have been battered and bruised by brothers tell me it is always like this sadly that just the way Christians are but I can tell them it does not have to be like that now

Paul knows that he's dealing with Christians first and foremost he knows that he's dealing with all kinds of Christians sometimes he has to write to congregations that are on the brink of fracturing because of discord amongst them sometimes he has to write to congregations that are making advances in the cause of Christ and their progress is to be celebrated sometimes he is broken hearted by what he hears sometimes he is greatly encouraged but he can do no better for them than to remember them as he says at a throne of grace and Martin Lloyd Jones writes we must never forget that this is a pastoral letter and that its purpose was thoroughly practical the apostle must not be thought of as a theologian who sits down to write a theological disquisition his object was to help

Christians to strengthen them to encourage them in their daily Christian living so when we understand that when we remember that when we appreciate that and read these words we understand what Paul is doing when he is commending their faith and commending what he is hearing about them their faith in Christ and their love one for the other so Paul recognises their faith in Christ and we may dismiss the reality of a person's faith in Christ when they don't live up to expectation when they don't live up to the standards that we believe the scripture has set them but what we must remember is that they who have made a profession of faith in this

Christ are recognised by the way that they have put their trust remember he has spoken about this trust before that this is what he has recognised and the assumption is that they have acknowledged for themselves the faith that they have in the Lord Jesus their faith in him their trust in him their belief that he is their saviour and they accompany that with the acknowledgement that he is sovereign that he is their lord and that they are to serve him he is sovereign and his role is one that they submit to and that is one way not the only way of course but one way in which their faith is recognised as a genuine entity as a grace that the

Lord alone is able to endow a person with now the second thing he highlights is their love to the saints did you notice and I'm sure you did he says I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints we know the apostle John says that we have passed from death into life because we love the brethren and there are times when we would want to change these words because John says without equivocation not the brethren that you want to love but the brethren those who are your brothers and sisters in the Lord you are recognized because you love them again just like

[40 : 34] John Paul doesn't qualify it it is love for all the saints we might want to take that out and we might want to simplify it for ourselves and say well they're not as easy to love and they're not as lovable as some others are that may well be the case but Paul is here highlighting the love that they have for all the saints whoever they may be and amongst them just as there is in every congregation there is a vast few of different kinds of Christians there's Christians who are easy to love Christians who may not be as easy to love there may be prickly characters there may be lethargic Christians there may be lively Christians there may be all kinds of

Christians but it is a genuine test of our Christianity how much we love them we quote John again in chapter 2 he says he that saith he is in the light and hateth his brother is in darkness even until now he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goes because that darkness blinded his eyes and it is a challenge to all of us when we do discover that the bitter spirit rising up in us against any person who's a Christian that we go on our knees before God and ask forgiveness and ask for grace in order to deal with it that's our duty to do that where there is faith we are told there are works and the love of the brethren is an accompaniment that comes into that category in that passage we read last there from 1st

Thessalonians we give thanks to God always for you all making mention of you in our prayers remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ that word has always made me wonder where is the labour in love where is it that we find a labour in love surely where there is love there is an ease in fulfilling that duty but I think this is one area where there is a strain put upon us love but if we have sight of God then that love is operative we must remind ourselves of the love that is in Christ and how he has loved to the other most and it is something that is not easy for us to do but something that we must do and the best way to deal with it is by looking to someone who loves us in spite of what we are rather than because of what we are these are the two things that

Paul has heard first of all that make him pray they pray for them he has learned of their faith in the Lord Jesus he has learned of their love for the brethren so that stimulates prayer and the first part of that prayer is thanksgiving he thanks God for them that there are well I was thinking what is it that Paul might be thankful for there are several things I would imagine that could be part of his experience he's thankful that he has fellow gospel believers remember he said at the outset that Paul was writing not as a theologian although he is a theologian but he wants the believers in

Christ in Ephesus to go on with him in the Lord he wants them to grow with him in the Lord his teaching has this end in view and he is like any preacher of the gospel delighted to hear even though they might have nothing whatsoever to do with it themselves delighted to hear of believers coming to faith in Jesus Christ people who have come to faith because of the gospel maybe Paul is thankful if he himself is the one who preached that gospel and he thanks God for that gospel to be blessed by God Paul prays a prayer that may or not be our prayers and we should always pray for the Lord's people fellow believers that they go on with us that we go on with them and that the number of them increase and prayer you have to understand it's not something that comes easy and

[46 : 27] I suppose the people who are Christians understand that that it is a hard graft especially if you are wanting to get to the heart of what prayer is you're not tying together words that are prayer like we know what prayer sounds like and we can plug words and phrases and sentiments almost from the air and say well there's my prayer but what you want is your prayer to be owned by God for him to be the source of that prayer and for him to be the hearer of that prayer and the answer of it prayer is never easy and we should never think it is something that is easy I'll give you two quotations one from Martin Lloyd Jones he says every preacher will

I am sure agree that preaching is comparatively simple as compared with praying because when one is praying one is speaking to God when one is preaching he is speaking to men maybe you don't follow Martin Lloyd Jones there because many of you haven't preached and it's certainly something that made me think well is what he is saying there is it a truth that applies to every preacher do they find it easier to preach than they do pray and certainly there's two things coming to mind I remember writing down a quotation and I wasn't really I was a bit flabbergasted when I read it and wrote it first of all it's a story told about

Rabbi Duncan some of you will know the name Rabbi Duncan he was a professor in the Free Church College a professor of Old Testament a Hebrew scholar Moody Stuart was a preacher contemporaneous with with Robbie Duncan and he invited Robbie Duncan to come to preach in his congregation and this is what he said I'll be glad to preach if you'll take the prayers I am not able to pray at present but I can preach a bit and would like it I'm not able to pray at present but I would like to preach now maybe you don't understand that but it sounds as if what Martin Lloyd Jones was saying there was certainly true as far as that eminent professor of theology was concerned

Paul Paul is here however he is praying for them as someone who knows it to be his duty but also his delight to thank God in the first place for them as fellow Christians it perhaps confirms to him his own Christianity it creates a channel for his love to God because he is able to pray for them with enthusiasm and with delight but it is not always easy to do that it is not always easy to enter into the spirit of prayer even though we know it to be our duty I covet your prayers as a preacher of the gospel I would like to be able to shoulder the burdens of a congregation as the preacher of the gospel who has the concerns of soul of my congregation at heart sometimes it's not easy to do that sometimes you're not very sure what you're praying for or even who you're praying for there's a story

I read recently of someone it was speaking about the relationship that existed between two Christians and they lived in the highlands many years ago but they lived a great distance apart and one of these Christians felt burdened for the other Christian and he couldn't get this other Christian of his mind and he was praying for that Christian he was praying earnestly but he couldn't understand what the problem was and he was praying to God that God would reveal to him what the problem was to make it easier for him because he knew the burden of having to pray but there was a deeper need in that he couldn't understand what the problem was so eventually what he did was he set off early in the morning and he had to walk the whole day across

[51 : 57] Moor and it was during the winter and there was constant rain all the time that he walked from his home to the home of his friend and it was dark when he arrived and when he arrived at the house of his friend and friend was quite surprised to find him there especially this person standing on the doorstep dripping wet and he had to invite him in and then after just blessing the day to each other the man whose home was being visited began to cry and his cry came from the fact that having his friend travelled so far a distance that there was nothing in the house that he could prepare for him by way of sustenance he had no food in the house absolutely nothing it wasn't just the cupboards were bare they were totally bare he was at the end of his tether as far as his means were concerned and at that moment his friend realised that is why the

Lord sent me here because I didn't know that and in the morning when he left the house he made a point of stopping at every home of Christians and those who weren't Christians he knew that were better off and he told them of the straitened circumstances of his friend and through that the food was sent to the home of this Christian gentleman who was greatly admired and respected in the district but nobody knew of his straitened circumstances now the Lord had put that upon his heart and yet the Lord saw food to keep from him the reason for it you know sometimes we have burdens and we don't understand them we can't interpret them and God is not obliged to reveal them except in his own time it is what I want to say is this that Paul's prayer for this people is a prayer where he is delighting in being able to pray for

I think that has to be said the season of to give thanks for you making mention of you in my prayers that's not just an aside just not a passing comment it's a privilege to be given someone to pray for it's a privilege to be prayed for by someone and the commentator American commentator John MacArthur says that every Christian should have a prayer list that they should have a mental list even a written list of people that they make it a point of a burden to pray for them whoever they may be whether it is certainly family would come on that list but friends neighbours whoever that we make a point of coming to the

Lord for them and make that make that appointment with God on their behalf and when you do that it's a rewarding thing it's something that God chooses to bless us through you and I believe that's what Paul is speaking of here for himself when he tells him that what do you think what do you think if you heard that the apostle was praying for you oh I'm sure you would say to yourself that's a wonderful thing that the apostle Paul is praying for me well it doesn't matter whether he's an apostle or not if any one of the Lord's people has you whoever you are as someone that they pray for constantly and pray for as someone that they want to pray for and remember always it's a great thing it's a great blessing and it's a great blessing to do it and to think of it being done for us well may God help us to learn from what Paul is doing and to be encouraged by what he has the relationship he has with this church and all the other congregations that he writes to let us pray most merciful God help us to bear one another's burdens we know that there are always burdens we carry them ourselves and sometimes they weigh us down and sometimes they make us weak and sometimes they depress us and sometimes we think that there is no one who knows about them and because they don't know about them that they cannot carry them with us but that is not so whatever they may be you have given to us this facility by which to remember each other may we be able to do that with your help that we may be free and easy in your presence remembering one another for your name's sake remember all that we entrust to your care and keeping this night it's not something that we should omit we remember in our congregation those who are unwell those who are going through difficult times who may be challenged as to their faith and who may find that their faith is something that needs to be visited with grace that it may be strengthened and nurtured and nourished we would remember all such and we pray for those who have illness to contend with the frailty of the body and the mind we are all fragile creatures of the dust who are progressing through this world and sometimes progress we feel there's no progress at all we feel as if we are time bound there is no sense in which we are heading to the great eternity but the reality is that it's a deception of the devil wherever we are and whoever we are we are making our sojourn in this world and each one of us at their own pace and we give thanks that there are those who walk with us for a while others who have walked with us for a long time and that those that we have come to know in the Lord Jesus and those that we esteem most precious bless all such we pray remembering the grieving and the sorrowful remembering the gospel that is preached in whatever way it goes out may we fulfil our calling in seeking your blessing upon it hear us and pardon us go before us now in Christ the Redeemer's name we ask it and now may grace measure and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all now and always Amen