

Praying for one another

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[0:00] A series of sermons on Ephesians 1 were put into book format about 30 years ago and this was the title and I think it's an excellent title for chapter one of Ephesians God's ultimate purpose God's ultimate purpose.

What I think is very striking as we go through Ephesians 1 is the language which is I've suggested here outrageous it's radical it's breathtaking it's extraordinary language the sort of things that are hinted at in other parts of the Bible are drawn out by Paul in strong definite clear language.

And we're so blessed to have this particular letter because of that. As an example draw attention to three verses the first is chapter 4 verse 4 where Paul says for he that's God the Father chose us in him that's Christ before the creation of the world.

We thought of that before but it's a stupendous thought isn't it? It bears pondering.

Every Christian can say verse 4 is true of me.

[1:43] I've been chosen in Christ before the creation of the world. And he goes on. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.

Which is a glorious privilege. And verse 10 says when the times will have reached their fulfillment to bring all things in heaven and on earth under one head even Christ.

When you look at the chaotic world in which we live. What an extraordinary thought.

There is coming a day when all things are going to be manifestly brought under the headship of Jesus Christ. When his rule will be absolute.

We are praying about this city of Brighton and Hove. What would it be like to have the absolute manifest rule of Jesus Christ upon the city of Brighton and Hove?

[2:56] What an extraordinary transformation would happen this night. If Jesus was to return. And to bring his rule and reign over the palace pier, the I-360, the beaches, the lanes.

Out into the suburbs of Hollingdean and Hollingbury. Into the schools, into the hospitals, into the police courts, into the family courts.

What an extraordinary thing. And that's the anticipation. That's the promise.

All things to be brought under his rule and reign. And what does this do to us?

It makes us a people of a past. Because we have been chosen. Before the foundation of the world.

A present. Because in our life history.

[4:06] We have received the adoption of sons. And we have a future. Because we are in and under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

And his destiny is bound up with ours. More elegantly. Our destiny is bound up with his. Where he is, we shall be.

Where his rule and reign is. Is where we shall experience his rule and reign. And he's taking us. Surely and certainly. To that place. And it's important for us to.

Be people of that. Broad perspective. Because. We live in a very instant and present age.

Yesterday's news is irrelevant. The future is uncertain.

[5:07] So we live in the bubble of the day. But God is working his ultimate purposes out.

Year after year. Century after century. Generation after generation. It began with. And is being worked out with. And it will end with. Jesus Christ.

And he has always been at the center of God's purposes. And Christians are intimately involved in this storyline. There used to be a.

A bit of a fad a few years ago. For having books. That you could order. That would have your name. Written in as the hero. Or the heroine. So you send away.

And you say. I'd love to have. Tim. Put into the. This book. I read it personally. And give it to one of my. Friends.

[6:07] And they would say. Oh it's all about Tim. It's all about Tim. In a very lovely sort of way. Our names. Are written. In God's.

Book of life. And his storyline. Is. Being worked out. With an individuality. Reminded this morning. Gathered. One by one. Name by name. Think and ponder. The wonder. Of your past. And future. All bound up.

With Christ. We are. Given permission. To think in that way. As outrageous.

As it appears. Even for those of us. Who've been Christians. For a long time. This is still. A most astonishing. Statement. Astonishing. Even more so.

[7:03] Because we know. The failure of our lives. The weakness. Of our faith. How often. We stumble. And fall. And fail. How unworthy. We are. To stand before God.

And yet. Paul says. We are. We are not to think. In that fashion. About these matters. We are to think. Rather of the. Glorious sufficiency. And the.

Completed work. Of Jesus Christ. Upon the cross. That makes it. Inevitably so. Every one of those. Whom he has called. Will be with him.

On that final day. And so we come to. Verse 15. And Paul sees this.

As a natural response. For the next verses. A natural response. For this reason. Because of all that we've been. Talking about here. He wants to pray.

[8:05] He wants to turn this. Into. A matter of prayer. And it's a prayer to God. About fellow Christians. I was pondering. Whether to just linger. At this point. To draw your attention.

To the Trinitarian nature. Of this prayer. It's a prayer to God. The Father. It concerns the person. Of Jesus Christ.

And involves the work. Of the Holy Spirit. And. It's delightful really. How this doctrine. Of God being one. But God being three.

Sort of leaks out. Of the pages of scripture. Again and again. And we see it here. Done in the most natural manner. And it's something that.

As Christian people. We need to honor. And respect. And grow very used to. So that we understand. That the natural way. That we should come to God. Is to come to him. As a father.

[9:03] We come to him. As a father. Because of. And through. The Lord Jesus Christ. But only. By the help. Of the Holy Spirit. And we.

We honor. And respect. The triune God. By giving him. The appropriate. Place in our prayers. Appropriate respect. Let me encourage you. To be those who. Who generally pray to the father. Through the son. And in the son's name.

But by the power of the spirit. It's a prayer to God. About fellow Christians. But it's also. A surprising prayer.

And it's surprising. Because of what Paul. Thinks about other Christians. And secondly. What Paul wants. For other Christians.

[10:02] What do we think. About other Christians. I don't want you to think.

Now about. The folk in Brazil. And India. That I was praying for earlier. Because you don't know them. I want you to think. About. The church of God. At Calvary.

Because you actually know that. I don't want you. Just to think. What do you think. About the other Christians. In this church family. What's your.

If a name. Comes to your head. If you hear about somebody. What sort of. Instinctively comes to you. In my workplace.

I'm a professional. Head of technology. And. We've all got to produce. A pen portrait. Of ourselves. On one sheet of A4. Has a little mug photo.

[11:09] That it. Just tells people. Who we are. And then it tells them about. What we're like. So that they might. Be able to think.

Rightly about us. And to know who to go to. If they've got problems. I think. I think we get little pen portraits. Of one another. We kind of.

Some people up in our heads. We think. Oh yes. And. All the experiences. That we've had of those people. All sort of coalesce. Into a little pen portrait.

Which we instinctively feel. People. And I'd like us tonight. To be comparing that. With what Paul thinks. In his words. About other Christians. And what do we want.

For other Christians. Often. We are prompted. To think about. The very practical. And problem solving.

[12:09] Kinds of things. We're concerned. About others health. And their work. And their children. And crises. And a move. And difficulties. And I'm sure.

Paul was also. Interested. And concerned. For that. But it's very absent. In this prayer. You might say.

Well Paul was just having. A bit of a. Purple patch. At the time. And. He was just thinking. Very nice thoughts. About the Ephesians. Who by the way. He knew. Because he was in Ephesus.

For at least. Two years. So he did know. A number of them. Face to face. And by name. But actually. He does seem to have.

A very different agenda. Because what you read. Here in Ephesians. You will read. In much the same. Sort of language. To the Christians. Who are in Philippi. And Colossae. And Rome.

[13:07] And in Corinth. So whether you're born in Asia. Or born in Greece. Or born in Rome. Or born in Brighton. Paul would have the same thing. To say to you.

He'd think about you. In the same sort of way. And how Paul thinks. About. His fellow Christians. Is actually spelled out. In these next eight verses. Now the first thing.

I want to. Draw your attention to. Is. The fact that he. Offers. Thanks. To God. For the Ephesians. I have not. Verse 16. Ever since I. Heard about your faith. In the Lord Jesus. Your love for all the saints. I have not stopped. Giving thanks for you. Remembering you.

In my press. It's a great thought. Isn't it? It's unqualified. It's repeated. It's unstoppable. It seems.

[14:10] That when he gets news of them. He just. Turns that news. Into thanksgiving. And. Not only is he. Sort of. Thanking God. For the work.

That he's doing. In Ephesus. But he's. Thanking God. For the people. He's. Thanking God. For the Christians. He's. Giving thanks. To God. If he had.

The opportunity. If he had a church. Diary. In front of him. A prayer diary. He would be going.

Through that diary. All 43 names. Of our current. Membership. And he would be.

Giving thanks. To God. For each one. It's rather beautiful. And it's very healthy.

For our spiritual health. Individually. In the spiritual health. The church. When Paul. Was. Very carefully.

[15:04] Trying to help. The Christians. In Rome. Sort out. Their relationships. Between those. Who he calls. Weak. And strong.

Those who had. Problems. About eating. Certain meat. And those who had. No problems. And it was all. Turning into. A little bit. Of an argument. Inside the church. And a little bit.

Of them and us. And a little bit. Of cliquiness. He writes this. In Romans. 15. Verse 7. Accept. One another. And here.

Here's the rub. Accept one another. Not just because it says so. You should. You made that promise. As a church member. Accept one another. Just as Christ.

Accepted you. In order to bring praise to God. It's a profound thought.

[15:59] Isn't it? He could have said. Accept one another. Just as Christ has accepted them. But he says. Now you know this personally.

Christ has accepted you. If you have any sense of that.

Any knowledge of the grace of God. In your own life. Any understanding. Of that which you're so ashamed of.

And can't declare to other people. And yet to know that. The son of God. Was crucified on the cross. Shed his blood.

To accept me. He says. If you have any. Knowledge of that acceptance. That you have received. Accept others.

[16:55] Accept others. It's a very high. High. High bar. He's setting here. Isn't it? And we need that high bar. Because there are all sorts of reasons.

Why we will not accept one another. Why we will not be thankful for one another. And so Paul. Gives us the biggest possible motivation.

The incontrovertible motivation. You can't argue with this. If Christ has accepted me.

Then I must. Accept. Other Christians. Others for whom. Christ died. And that brings praise to God. And so he's thankful. He's thankful for them. And I thought at the end of this meeting. Wouldn't it be so great. If in our time of. Prayer together.

[18:03] We made a point. Of thanking God. For one another. Not just. In the round. In the generality. But by name.

And maybe. And maybe that. Would influence our. Daily praying as well. And what might happen. As a result of that. And now. And now. He goes on to. The point of request.

Verse 17. I keep asking. I keep asking. I keep asking. And there are. Things that he asked God of. About these Ephesians. Things that he asked God.

And. And. As I've pointed out already. Not. In this place. He has nothing to say. About daily circumstances. Although. These are.

[19:01] Normal. People. People. This is an even more surprising thing.

Than what I've just been saying. Because there isn't anything. About their daily circumstances. But you could be quite sure. That they had exactly. The same sorts. Of daily circumstances.

That we have. Because they were. Normal human beings. Each facing. Their own challenges. And trials. And later on. In this letter. He talks to. Husbands and wives.

He talks to children. He talks to slaves. Almost all the churches. Of that. Era. Would have a large proportion.

Of people in the congregation. Who were slaves. He talks to masters. He talks about people. Who go to bed angry. He talks about people.

[19:55] Who have foolish talk. In their lives. He talks about people. Who are rubbing shoulders. With the world. As you and I are. And finding it very hard. Who are feeling.

Sort of darkness. Coming upon them. And they need to be light. In the Lord. So that all sounds. Very familiar. I think. We have fancy titles.

Now we have fancy titles. For jobs now. And the jobs that we do. Maybe. A little bit different. To the jobs that they had. But essentially. They were human beings. They lived.

They had fun. They needed rest. They worked jolly hard. And they got old. And crotchety.

And worn out. And families fell out with each other. People found it very hard. And children disobeyed their parents. And that was all part of what went on.

[20:53] And it's exactly the same now. Isn't it? So to these very normal people. And to us too. This is. What he prays.

Paul knows about all these situations. But his requests are focused on their spiritual life. And his ambition. That they should grow in their spiritual life.

I think he's caught up. In this idea. Of the unstoppable momentum. Of the rule and reign of Jesus Christ. And he's so concerned for them.

In a pastoral way of course. Don't get stuck in the side banks. Get into the mainstream of God's purpose. This is God's purpose for us. And every Christian.

Should have the same ambition. For him or herself. And every fellow Christian. So here is Paul's really ambitious prayer. But before getting into the prayer.

[21:56] You might be thinking. Is this really a prayer. That every Christian. Can and should pray. For every other Christian. My title tonight. Is praying for one another. And you might say.

That's all very well. But this is in the Bible. And this is Paul. And Paul is an apostle. And Paul has a special gift. And he's a leader. And so forth.

So one would expect him to pray. In that sort of way. For those. Who were not on the same sort of status as him. And wouldn't you love to have one of Paul's prayers.

But I think that idea. Is really undermined.

For one reason. That Paul himself. Had such a spiritual need. And such a spiritual ambition for himself. So please turn to Philippians chapter 3.

[22:54] Verses 10 to 15. Philippians 3. 10 to 15. Where he writes.

About himself. I want to know Christ. And the power of his resurrection. And the fellowship of sharing. In his sufferings. Becoming like him in his death.

And so somehow to attain. To the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this. Or have already been made perfect. But I press on.

To take hold of that. For which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers. I do not consider myself. Yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do. Forgetting what is behind.

And straining towards what is ahead. I press on towards the goal. To win the prize. For which God has called me. Heavenwards in Christ Jesus. Please note verse 15.

[23:47] All of us who are mature. Should take such a view of things. So here are some deep.

Heart words from Paul. About himself. Saying how much he wants to run the race. To press on. To get to the goal. Looking to the finish line.

How he wants to share. In the life of Jesus Christ. How he wants to know Christ. In a way that he hasn't known him yet. And he says.

All of us who are mature. Should take such a view of things. It's one of the tests. Of Christian maturity. Whether you're prepared.

To think about your Christian life. In this kind of way. He's praying for others.

[24:50] The very thing that he prays for himself. And that he'd welcome. Prayer for. From others. So as we go through.

The four things. That Paul prays. For them. This is a great thought. That hopefully. Those of us who are mature.

And those of us who are not mature. As Christians. Would all welcome. This sort of prayer. For ourselves. As much of.

All of us here tonight. Having issues. We're facing in our lives. And wanting prayer. For this and that. And so forth. I hope. We would have. A real space in our life.

A real appetite. When we come together. We might say. I would love you to pray. Something like this for me. A prayer of spiritual ambition.

[26:01] A prayer. All of us can pray for one another. So here we go. There are four things. Firstly. Paul says.

I want to know. That you might know him. Let me read this properly. 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 don't think.

Better is in. The Greek. But I think it's a. It's an inevitable. Consequence. Of what is being said here. If you're a Christian.

You do know God. God is your father. You have some relationship with him. Just as a. A little baby. Has a relationship with. His father. But Paul is saying.

[27:03] I'm praying. That you would know him. More. And. We all understand. When the word.

Know. Is used. It isn't. Used in some sort of. Forensic sense. Of being able to. To sort of. Complete the jigsaw. To sort of. Understand.

Something. In a purely. Intellectual manner. There's a heart thing. Recognizing.

And appreciating. God. His character. And his ways. God the father. God the father. We had a lovely day yesterday. At Friston Forest. Didn't we? And during that day.

I was so blessed. With three or four conversations. With people. As a result of which. I came to the end of that day. And I felt. I just know. I just know. Those people. Those people.

[28:02] Better. As a result of. The experience. Of the conversation. It's just something. Uninterrupted. Unhindered.

The sort of thing. That you don't get here. On a Sunday morning. Because there's so much. Going on. And so on. But just being able to have. A conversation. With someone. Which had a degree of honesty.

And depth. And being able to say things. That. Don't normally get to say. A result of which.

I just felt. I just know those people. Better. And I think. It's a little bit like this. We should have. That experience.

Of knowing God. As our father. That makes it. Fair to say. That. We know him. Better now. Than when we first began.

[29:02] There's a lovely verse. In. Two verses. In the book of Hebrews. Chapter 13. Verses. Five and six. Where the writer.

Encourages. The Lord's people. Keep your lives free. From the love of money. And be content. With what you have. Because God has said. Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you. So we say. He says. With confidence. The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can man do to me.

You could read this. Simply on the basis. That if God has said something. Then it's. We can say. With confidence. The Lord is my helper. But there's a richness.

About. Knowing God as our father. That puts us into the very privileged position. Of being able to see our father's hand. Upon us personally. To see his ways in our lives.

[30:05] And to be able to give testimony. As we sometimes do. At the end of a year. As we gather together in a circle. On New Year's Eve. And to say. God has been so good to me.

I approved. The truth. Of those words. I approved that. Never will I leave you.

Never will I forsake you. I'm looking at you dear Enid. Because that's exactly the sort of thing. That you would say. It's true.

And how precious and important it is. That those of us. Who are able to give testimony to this. Do give testimony to it. Not only in our prayers of thanksgiving to God.

But to. The family members. When one person is struggling in this area. And really doubting whether God can provide.

[31:03] It is very encouraging to have someone. Who's been on the Christian road a long time. Saying. I don't say this glibly. I don't say this lightly. But God has never failed me.

The father has always looked after me. He's always provided. That's good. That's strong.

That's what we need. Secondly. I'm going to come to this point.

But we are to know his inheritance. In the saints. How do we read this? I think David. Helpfully put two sides of the case.

There are some who say. Is this about our. Our inheritance. Our inheritance to come. Or is it about God's inheritance in us. And I think. The language here.

[32:05] Speaks about God's inheritance in us. Know his inheritance in the saints. It is our privilege to be caught up in God's. Unchangeable purposes. He has invested in us.

He will have glory in us. He will have praise. In fact. You might say. That the whole book of Ephesians.

Is something along this line. That Jesus Christ. Is made the head of all things. For the purpose of the church. So that in the church. Might be manifest. To the watching world.

The riches of God's mercy and grace. And God will not be thwarted in that. That's his ambition.

That's his purpose. That's his delight.

This morning we. We're given in the closing verses. Of chapter 27 of Isaiah. A picture of a harvest. A harvest. God is going to have a harvest.

[33:04] He's going to bring the sheaves in. Who is the harvest for? It's not for us. It's for him. It's for his glory and praise.

And so it was said prophetically. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. He shall see of the travail. The work of his soul. And be satisfied. He's going to be satisfied.

Because everyone. For whom he shed his blood. Will be with him on the final day. None will be missing. Remember that's what he prayed.

On the final. The last supper. That's what he prayed. That none should fall. None should be. None should be left out. Heavenly Father. That's my prayer.

That where I am. They will be also. And it will be fulfilled. Absolutely. One hundred percent. And that's God's inheritance. In the saints.

[34:07] And. Why does this encourage us? Why do we need to know this? Because it gives us an enormous sense of security. Because this is God's work.

And God's purpose. So it is that Paul writes. At the. In his well-known verses. At the. End of chapter eight. Of. Of Romans. Verses thirty-seven.

To thirty-nine. We are more than conquerors. Through him who loved us. For I am convinced. That neither death. Nor life. Neither angels. Nor demons.

Neither present. Nor the future. Nor any powers. Neither height. Nor depth. Nor anything else. In all creation. Will be able to separate us. From the love of God. That is in Christ Jesus.

Our Lord. And he says that. With. Utter confidence. Because. God on oath. Has committed himself. To this work.

[35:05] Thirdly. To know his power. Within us. What does it take. To bring a man or woman. Out of their spiritual darkness. Into his marvelous light. We'll find out.

In chapter two. But it's nothing. But the power of God. As Paul is going to explain. In such clear. And robust language. As we go through. The rest of this letter. It is only. The power of God. That can bring us out. Of spiritual death. Into spiritual life.

What does it take. To bring a man or woman. Through this world. Which is full of every kind. Of spiritual danger. And difficulty. In us. And around us. Orchestrated. By the devil.

Is nothing. But the power of God. Can do that. Do you realize. Just. How true. That is. The same power. That raised you. To life.

[36:02] As a Christian. Is the power. That needs to be exerted. In your life. To bring you through. Each day. So that you do not fall. But one day. Are brought safely. Home.

It's a constant need. And Paul makes likeness here. Between this power. That raises us. From our spiritual death. And carries us through.

To. To what occurred. In the. Instance of the Lord Jesus Christ. In a very manifest way. That power is like.

Verse 19. The working of his mighty strength. Which he exerted in Christ. When he raised him from the dead. Number one. And seated him at his right hand.

In the heavenly realms. Two. Far above all. Rule and authority. Power and dominion. And every title. That can be given. Not only in this present age.

[36:58] But also in the one to come. And then. And God placed all things. Under his feet. And appointed him. To be head over everything. For the church. Paul is saying.

Do you need to know. How great this power of God is. It's like that. It raised Jesus from the dead. It took him into glory. And set him at God's right hand.

Every other authority and power. Is brought beneath him. And one day. One day. All things will be consummated. And all things are.

Are wonderfully. Bound up. With his body. The church. And out of sequence.

But because chronologically. It feels the right place to go. There was something we missed. Earlier on. Which was. I pray also.

[38:05] Verse 18. That the eyes of your heart. May be enlightened. In order that you may know. The hope. To which. He has called you. The hope.

To which he has called you. Hope. Is a great word. Isn't it? It's a. It's a lovely. And a precious word. It's a looking forward word. It's a future expectation. I find it.

Very difficult. To. Put weight. Onto the things. That concern the future life. I find that very hard. To. Actually create.

Much substance. From the things. Which are promised to us. But there are some verses. Which we can identify with. And this came to mind. As I was preparing.

Isaiah 35. Verse 10. Which is. Is repeated in. 51. Verse 11. Where Isaiah. Prophetically says. Gladness and joy. Will overtake them.

[39:04] And sorrow and sighing. Will flee away. We're just the people. Who are full of sorrow and sighing.

We have so much of that. All about us. If it's not touching us personally. Or members of our family. It's out there in the world.

And it's. Just there. Isn't it. But to think. There is coming a time. And a future expectation. That belongs to the people of God.

Where this. Will be history. Sorrow and sighing. Will fly away. It's a beautiful picture isn't it. It's like this enormous burden. It's going to fly away. It's going to fly away. It's going to fly away. Doesn't that remind us of Revelation 21.4.

[40:03] Not just. Sorrow and sighing will flee away. But here's another astonishing thing. That Isaiah would not have realised at the time. God.

God. Will. Wipe. Every tear. From. Your eyes. He'll wipe every tear from your eyes.

Here's some language which is. Much better than mine. As Pilgrim. Came near to the celestial city. He met with shining ones. And the talk they had with him. Was about the glory of the place. And they told Christian. And his companion. That the beauty and glory of it.

Was inexpressible. There said they. Is the Mount Zion. The heavenly Jerusalem. The innumerable. The full company of angels. And the spirits of just men.

[41:15] Made perfect. You are going now. Said they. To the paradise of God. Wherein you shall see the tree of life. And eat of the never fading fruits thereof.

And when you have come there. You shall have white robes given you. And your walk and talk. Shall be every day with the king. Even all the days of eternity. There you shall not see again.

Such things as you saw. When you were in the lower regions. Upon the earth. To which sorrow. Sickness. Affliction and death. For the former things are passed away.

You're going now to Abraham. To Isaac and Jacob. And to the prophets. Men that God has taken away. From the evil to come. That are now resting upon their beds. Each one walking in his righteousness.

The men then asked. What must we do in this holy place? To whom it was answered. You must there receive the comfort. Of all your toil. And have joy for all your sorrow.

[42:14] You must reap what you have sown. Even the fruit of all your prayers. And tears. And sufferings for the king. By the way. In that place you must wear crowns of gold.

And enjoy the perpetual sight. And visions of the holy one. For there you shall see him as he is. There also you shall serve him continually. With praise. With shouting and thanksgiving.

Whom you desire to serve in the world. Though with much difficulty. Because of the infirmity of your flesh. There your eyes shall be delighted with seeing. And your ears with hearing.

The pleasant voice of the mighty one. There you shall enjoy your friends again. That are gone thither before you. There you shall with joy receive. Even everyone that follows into the holy place after you.

There also you shall be clothed with glory and majesty. And put into an equipage. Fit to ride out with the king of glory. When he shall come.

[43:11] With sound of trumpet in the clouds. As upon the wings of the wind. You shall come with him. And when he shall sit upon the throne of judgment. You shall sit by him. Yea.

When he shall pass sentence upon all the workers of iniquity. Let them be angels or men. You also shall have a voice in that judgment. Because they were his and your enemies.

Also when he shall again return to the city. You shall go to with sound of trumpet. And be ever with him. So dear brothers and sisters.

We are a people with. A mysterious and wonderful past. We live in the present glory of the reign of Jesus Christ upon us.

And one day we shall be with him. And we shall see him as he is. Comfort one another with these words. Encourage one another. We are going to encourage each other as we sing our closing song.

[44:15] Which we really, really do know. That was a thought before we sing.

We need to pray for one another in this way. So that we may be hurried on in the mainstream of God's purposes. To the praise of his glorious grace. Come we that love the Lord.

With the chorus we're marching to Zion.