

PM Colossians 1:9-14 A great prayer

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Preacher: Rev John Sharp

[0 : 00] In Paul's letter to the Colossians, in chapter 1, I know that the order of service says reading from verse 9 to 14, but I want to read the verses before and the verses after.

You'll notice that verse 9 begins, for this reason, since the day we heard about you. So it's appropriate to read the verses before so we know what the reason is.

Yes, so reading from verse 1 of Colossians, chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers in Christ.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that you have for all God's people.

The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven, and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

[1 : 25] You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

[2 : 59] He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things in earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Amen. And may God add his blessing to the reading of his word. Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank you that in your great wisdom you have given to us the scriptures, and as we turn to reflect upon them. May your spirit be our teacher, and your glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. One of my favourite passages in scripture is this first chapter of Colossians. And when I preached, the one and only time as a sole nominee for a charge, I preached on the verses 15 to 20, which set forth the supremacy of Christ, as supreme in creation, as supreme in providence, and supreme in the church.

I want to focus, however, on the verses that precede that section, verses 9 to 14. Because that section lies very much with what goes before the reasons for Paul's thankfulness, and it leads into that paragraph about the supremacy or the kingship of Christ.

[4 : 49] And I want to spend just a little time on the context. Verse 9 begins for this reason. What reason? Well, go back to verse 6.

All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it, and understood God's grace, and all its truth.

And so Paul there begins a prayer that he sort of began in verse 3, but is picking up now in verse 9. Now, we might ask what the relevance to us of a prayer from long ago might be, and I would suggest to you simply this, that what Paul expresses here should be the prayer of each of us, for ourselves, for our church leaders, for indeed all within the fellowship, the prayer of ordinary members, for their leadership, the prayer of the leadership, for ordinary members.

And so I want to unpack this prayer a little this evening. And the first thing I think that we see in this prayer is that prayer should always be bounded by praise.

And Paul sets out in this prayer at least three great reasons for praising God. And we find this in verses 12, 13 and 14.

[6 : 19] In verse 12, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. The God who has qualified you, that is, makes you fit to share his eternal kingdom.

And of course, we don't make ourselves fit to be members of God's family. He does. And here we are reminded to praise God for his great and wonderful provision to us of the righteousness of Christ.

How is it that we are able to come? How is it that we are qualified to come into God's presence? Not just that our sins are forgiven. Sometimes people seem to stop at the Gospels just about sins being forgiven.

That's the negative. That only, if you like, wipes the slate clean. There's nothing positive in the sense about it. But Jesus on the cross takes our sin to himself and gives us in exchange his righteousness.

Bonner's lovely communion, him, mine is a sin. But thine the righteousness. Here is my robe, my refuge, and so on.

[7 : 42] And so we thank God, we praise God for his provision. Not just of forgiveness, but of the righteousness of Christ. Because it is that particularly which qualifies us to come into God's presence with our heads held up.

And so we praise God for his provision of grace and mercy in the Gospel. In verse 13 we read, For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

God has rescued us by his power and love he has saved us. He has redeemed us. By his power he has effected transferred from one kingdom to another.

From the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of God. He has transferred us from being part of a rebellious humanity.

He has transferred us into his family. The family of God. From spiritual darkness to spiritual light. And so we might wonder at the power of God that can accomplish all this.

[8 : 59] And I like here how Paul includes himself back in verse 12 he says who has qualified you. But here in verse 13 he says he has rescued us.

He too needs the grace and the power of God in his life. Paul also has been rescued from darkness. Why do we need rescued?

Well obviously because we are lost because we are sinners. And in verse 14 we read in whom we have redemption. The forgiveness of sins.

Yes we are given the righteousness of God but the forgiveness of course is also very important. Our great need no matter who we are as we stand before the Lord is for forgiveness.

That's the dilemma of each one of us. We are morally guilty before a holy God. But God has worked salvation for us in Christ. There is forgiveness as we take Christ to be our saviour.

[10 : 06] And so we praise God for his great pardon. Three reasons for praise. In verse 12 God's provision of grace in qualifying us to be members of his family.

His power displayed and taking us out of the kingdom of the world and transferring us through Christ's work into the kingdom of God. And in verse 14 God's pardon of our sin.

Three reasons to praise God. God has qualified us. God has rescued us. God has forgiven us. And that all turns on the son he loves.

Verse 13 for he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins.

Brought us into the kingdom of the son that he loves. And that is the lead to that wonderful paragraph that follows verses 15 to 20 where we read of the supremacy of Christ.

[11 : 17] We see Christ as supreme in creation and in providence and in the church. There is an interesting verse if I can find it just bear with me a second if you go back yes it's verse 17 which says he is before all things and in him all things hold together and the thrust of that verse is the providence of God.

Verse 16 speaks of the creation of Christ but here we have in verse 17 the providence the providential upholding of Christ in him all things hold together is literally in him all things continue to exist continue to be in other words each breath that we draw we draw courtesy of the providential grace of almighty God Christ Christ supreme in creation and providence and in the church and so the end of the prayer moves us seamlessly into this wonderful reflection of who Jesus is and what he has done for us but coming back to the prayer I want to suggest to you a number of things that Paul prays for in verses 9 to 14 and first of all

Paul prays for perception verse 9 for this reason since the day we heard about you we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will we do not by nature understand the things of God we need spiritual enlightenment we need to open our eyes to see his hand in our lives to see his will for us now we're all called to serve God and all of us in different ways but it's possible to think that we're serving God and we are not we need to learn to do the Lord's work in the Lord's way I think sometimes too often the church people decide that they know without really consulting

God what they should be doing for the church and the church ahead to them and perhaps to others within their fellowship they are working for God but they're not because they are not within the will of God they're doing God's work their way and not God's work God's way and God's way is sometimes quite different from what we might expect serving God is not a matter of shooting off and doing our own thing however well intentioned that might be we need to be before the Lord in prayer seeking his guiding hand upon us we need perception of his will if we have to serve him and two sort of illustrations have popped into my mind as I'm speaking here both missionary ones both

Hudson Taylor the great missionary to China and also China I suppose Gladys Hillward when they applied to their superiors as they were to go to the mission field their superiors denied them as unsuitable the superiors no doubt thought that they were doing God's work that they were serving God when in fact they were putting obstacles in the way of two of perhaps the great missionary figures in church history we need the perception of his will if we are to serve him we want to close with the lovely hymn Lord speak to me and I want you to note carefully the importance of the word that in that hymn Lord speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone and note the sequence our speaking our acting should be consequential on having listened to the voice of God of having perceived his will for us which is one of the reasons why the Bible is so important

[16 : 24] Paul prays for perception of God's will and then secondly he prays for progress in that will verse 10 we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord may please him in every way bearing fruit in every good work growing in the knowledge of God praise that you may live a life worthy of the Lord what are the marks of a worthy life well he gives us three here growth pleasing the Lord and progress bearing fruit as we perceive God's will for us as individuals and as a fellowship then and only then can we move forward in useful service Christian life is not supposed to be static and the key word here is perhaps growing as Christians we are never in this life to come to a time when we can sit back and stop growing clearly the youngest person in the faith needs to grow in their knowledge of

God and so on but so do those mature in the faith elders the Lord calls us all to grow in the faith to be growth in the knowledge of God and the faith so that we can share it with others growth in Christian character and love and witness for the Lord I used to use in my communicants classes John Stott's little book on confirmation which I found very useful and in that book he reflects in the fact that one of the great problems of the church is folk who suffer from what he calls spiritual paralysis he notes that we pray for those who are handicapped in a physical or mental way for those who are sick but rarely do we pray for those who are spiritually disabled for those who are not growing spiritually there is to be growth of knowledge of God that's fundamental and further it is logically clear that the lack of growth and character and witness ties back to a lack of growth in our knowledge of God we must know our faith in order to live it and so there is to be growth progress in the

Christian life which poses I suppose a basic question that we can all ask ourselves am I where I was a year ago in the knowledge of God and the Christian character of my life am I moving on whatever my age or am I standing still well Paul prays that we might be growing and we should be praying for that growth in our soul perception of God it's interesting that in Ephesians similarly in chapter one of Ephesians Paul is a prayer and in that prayer he says my prayer for you is that you might know God better know God better perception and then progress in the light of that perception and then notice thirdly that Paul prays that we might please God verse 10 we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the

Lord and please him in every way when Grenfell was invited to Labrador his mother advised him to pray this prayer in seeking to know the Lord's mind about the matter and the prayer that Grenfell's mother gave him was this teach me to do the thing that pleaseth thee what is it that's going to please the Lord their most basic ambition should be to please him Paul could write Galatians 1 and 10 am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God or am I trying to please men if I were still trying to please men I would not be a servant of Christ and so we should pray that by the grace of God we are not hedged in by a partial discipleship but seeking to please

God in all things and this is perhaps particularly a ministerial trap as many a minister has been trapped into seeking from the pulpit to please his congregation to say the things that he knows they want to hear rather than the things that they need to hear Paul prays that we might please him and then Paul prays that we might be profitable we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way bearing fruit in every good work we're all called to be useful to God Christianity is not meant to be a spectator religion we're meant to be profitable in God's kingdom bearing fruit for him to be fruitful in the character of our lives as

[22 : 21] Christians we have the indwelling spirit and we remember that the fruit of the spirit is love joy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness and self control you remember how Jesus told the disciples that they could do nothing apart from him and then went on to say that when they remained in union with him then they would produce fruit let me read that to you from John 15 I am the true vine and my father is the gardener he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit for every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful you're already clean because of the word I have spoken to you remain in me and I will remain in you no branch can bear fruit by itself it must remain in the vine neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me

I am the vine you are the branches if a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing people might think that they're doing a lot but in eternity they are doing nothing and Jesus goes on if anyone does not remain in me he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned if you remain in me and my words remain in you ask whatever you wish and it will be given you this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourself to be my disciples and some people might be tempted to think that they have no particular talents to bring to God to bring to the service of the church I always remember in a sermon a friend of mine once saying it's not great talents that God blesses but likeness to

Jesus it's not our talents that God wants it's just us and if we live close to Jesus there then should be that fruit of character of attractive life setting the saviour forth and there should be the fruit of witness and reading through the scriptures I think these are the two areas that relate to fruit there's the fruit of character and there's the fruit of witness the sharing of the gospel that brings others into the kingdom and it always seems to cut two ways word and character if we are to be profitable to God then we must be able to tell others about Jesus 1 Peter 3 and 15 but in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have but do this with gentleness and respect that hymn that we are going to finish with talks of our profitable witness

O lead me Lord that I may lead O feed me Lord that I may feed the hungering ones with manna sweet O teach me Lord that I may teach the precious things thou dost impart here is the calling of elders to lead to feed to teach but in a sense it is the calling of every Christian Paul prays with praise in his heart prays for perception and progress and pleasing lives and profitable service and for power verse 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might do we grow in and of ourselves no we grow as we submit ourselves to and experience the power of

God George Matheson the well known Scottish hymn writer and one of his hymns has this verse my power is faint and low till I have learned to serve it wants the needed fire to glow it wants the breeze to nerve it cannot drive the world until itself be driven its flag can only be unfurled when thou shalt breathe from heaven nowhere does God call his people to live out of their own resources you remember the early church the disciples filled with the reality and the wonder of the risen Jesus bursting to go out and tell under the wonderful good news but what does Jesus say Acts chapter 1 verse 8 you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth they're told to wait until God equips them elsewhere

[28 : 02] Paul prays in Ephesians 3 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being God sends his Spirit into the heart of every believer we are to live in the light of the indwelling divine guest for he alone has the power to equip us to live the Christian life and nor is that equipping with resources for our pleasure it is equipping for service again in that hymn oh strengthen me yeah fine that while I stand firm in the rock and strong in thee I may stretch out the loving hand to wrestlers on the troubled sea we need God's help if we have to serve him and then Paul prays for patience verse 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience sometimes we're not very good at patience and endurance and that's particularly so perhaps in our age we live in an age of instant communication where everybody wants everything now if not yesterday

God calls us to be patient the Bible's realistic God knows we have our difficult times when the going gets rough when we seem to be getting nowhere we need patience and endurance and so Paul prays for that that we might hang on in there when the going gets tough this then I suggest to you should be the prayer each of us prays for ourselves that leaders pray for those they lead that ordinary members pray for those charged under God with leadership to have perception of the will of God to know progress in our lives before the Lord to live seeking to please him to be profitable in service to know something of Pentecostal power and to be patient in adversity

Lord speak that I may speak Lord lead that I may lead Lord teach that I may teach Lord feed that I may feed and that hymn concludes oh use me Lord use even me just as thou wilt and when and where until thy blessed face I see thy rest thy joy thy glory share is that indeed your prayer for yourself and for others let's pray Father God we thank you for your scriptures we thank you for this prayer of Paul's and we pray that we may take it to heart seeking to know you better to know your will for our lives seeking to live lives that please you and bear fruit for you always in your power and with patient endurance in Jesus name we pray

Amen ■■