

Pray We'll Truly Know HIP

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[0 : 00] Well, it'd be great if you could turn back to that passage in Ephesians as we look at it together this morning. But let me begin with a question. I wonder what it is that you pray for when life is hard.

Because it seems to be hard at the moment, doesn't it? Last Monday when it was announced that our lockdown would be extended until at least the 2nd of September.

However, I know many found that hard to hear. I also know the government has a hard job to do, which is not helped by those who do the wrong thing, as we've seen in the news.

But it's also hard for us who are feeling fatigued from being locked up for so long. In fact, last Thursday there was an article on your screens where we marked 200 days in lockdown.

And the article went on to say that Melbourne is one of the most locked down cities in the world. We've spent almost one third of the pandemic in lockdown.

[1 : 07] And of course, there's other things that make life hard too, aren't there? Like struggles with health or work or money or kids or grandkids.

And there's a growing antagonism towards Christianity. Earlier this month, there was a motion to scrap the Lord's Prayer from our state parliament, which was only delayed.

And I'm told next month there'll be more moves to stop Christians being able to express Christian views in public. Which, of course, is nothing compared to what Christians are facing in Afghanistan at the moment, is it?

And so we can also feel flat or fear for the future of the church. And so what do you pray for when life is hard?

Because it seems to be at the moment. Do you pray that life would be easy? That lockdown would end? That we'd all win lotto without even having to buy a ticket?

[2 : 17] I think I've prayed that prayer before myself. But until that happens, and I'm not sure the lotto prayer will ever happen for good reason, what do you pray for?

To help you through these hard times? To help you keep living as Christians? Even growing as Christians? Well, today we come to Paul's prayer for the Ephesians.

And while we don't know if life was hard for them in particular, we do know Paul wants them to keep living and even growing as Christians.

Or as he puts it, to live lives worthy of their calling, their privileged place. As I said last week, the first half of the letter of Ephesians is about our privileged place in God's plan.

And the second half of Ephesians, beginning at chapter 4, verse 1 on your screens again, is about living a life worthy of it. A life worthy of our privileged place, our calling.

[3 : 25] And so Paul's prayer is meant to help us do just that. It's meant to help us truly know our privileged place that God has given us.

And to truly know three things in particular, as we'll see later. That we might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of our calling.

Even when it's hard, like at the moment. But first, Paul begins by thanking God. So point one, if you've got outlines there. And verse 15 and 16.

Paul writes, For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Here, Paul thanks God for their faith in the Lord Jesus. Their faith, which meant they were included in Christ. With every spiritual blessing, as we heard last week.

[4 : 31] In fact, that's what the words, for this reason, point us back to. They point us back to verse 13 and 14 last week. Where we read, And you, Gentiles, also were included in Christ.

When you heard the gospel and believed. And when we believe, we're given the spirit and every spiritual blessing, remember. Including the guarantee of our inheritance. Or because we believe or have faith in Jesus. Of course, if you don't have faith, then you won't have any of this.

But these Ephesians or the first readers did. And so Paul thanks God ever since he heard of their faith. That included them in Christ.

And what's more, he knows it's a genuine faith because it comes with love for all God's people. That's what else he thanks God for. As Jesus himself said, By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

[5 : 47] A love for one another shows we are his disciples. That we have a genuine faith in him. But loving others is not always easy, is it?

The Gentiles found it hard to love the Jews and vice versa. And there are some Christians who are, well, hard to love, aren't there?

Not at our church, of course. At other churches. But these Christians showed their faith in Christ was genuine by loving all God's people.

Not just the easy to love people. And we're to do the same, aren't we? But did you notice in verse 16, Paul says that he has not stopped giving thanks.

For Paul knows loving those you wouldn't normally love is a work of God in us. And he knows having faith in Jesus when you wouldn't normally have faith is a gift of God to us.

[6 : 52] A gift that gives us every spiritual blessing in Christ. A privileged place in God's plan. That's why Paul cannot stop thanking God.

And I wonder what you thank God for. A sunny day, which it is today. A nice meal. At the end of the lockdown, when it comes. They're all good things to thank God for.

But when was the last time you thanked God for helping you to love others? Or your faith in the Lord Jesus? Without which we wouldn't have any spiritual blessing, would we?

And so it's worth continuing to thank God for it. Isn't it? Well, Paul now moves from thanking God to asking God.

Point to verse 17. He says, Paul keeps asking God to give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

[8 : 08] And now we heard back in verse 13 that they already have the spirit. And so this prayer is not asking God to give them his spirit again. Rather, it's asking God to use his spirit to give them wisdom and revelation.

So that they might know God better. Or deeper in their hearts. You see, the spirit works through our conscience.

Convicting us when we do wrong. Prompting us to do right. But also convincing us of the truth about God. Helping us to see things about God.

And to really know them. Not just in our heads, but in our hearts. That's what verse 18 goes on to say. Verse 18 is not another prayer.

It unpacks the same prayer. And so Paul writes, You see, Paul prays that the spirit would help the eyes of their hearts to clearly see.

[9 : 21] So that they might truly know in their hearts. After all, clearly seeing things helps us to truly know them. Doesn't it?

My eyesight is not the greatest. And unfortunately, glasses won't fix it. Now, I realize I cannot see you in the room because you're not here in the room. But even if you were here, I couldn't see you all very clearly at all.

In fact, one day I was meeting my wife, Michelle, up at Shopping Town. I waved at her from a distance. But as I got closer, I realized it was another woman.

And the worst part was Michelle was coming from the other direction and saw me waving at this other woman. Clearly seeing helps us to truly know.

In my case, knowing that I've got the right girl. In Paul's case, knowing what we've got from God. You see, Paul prays God's spirit would help us to see clearly so that we might know truly in our hearts.

[10 : 31] He prays that we might just have a, won't have a head knowledge only, but we'll have a heart knowledge too. Be fully convinced in here about what we've got from God.

And about three things in particular. See if you can spot the three things as I read verse 18 to 19. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which

he has called you.

The riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people. And his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Did you spot them? I hope so, given I underline them in bold. Paul prays that we might truly know with our hearts the hope given by God, the inheritance of God, and the power of God.

And so on your screens there is an acronym. And so one way to remember them is hip. And so hope, inheritance, power, hip.

[11:44] So, you know, think cool and hip. Think like, actually, I grabbed the wrong glasses. These are actually my wife's glasses, sunglasses.

But anyway, that's what the way to remember it, isn't it? Hip, hope, inheritance, power. I said to my Bible study group during the week I was going to make a bad joke and it turned out much worse than I'd planned.

But at least you're going to remember it now. Point is, Paul wants them and asked to be fully convinced to know in our hearts these three things. Why? Well, because knowing them will encourage us to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard.

How does this work? Well, we'll take the first one, hope. Our hope is our certain future because it's built on Jesus and his blood and righteousness.

That's why it's certain. And we'll sing about that later. And it includes our inheritance of the new creation. So in the Old Testament, the inheritance referred to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

[12:54] For us, it's the new creation, a perfect world. And this, too, is secure. As Peter says, we have been given new birth into a living hope, a secure hope, because it's based on Christ and into an inheritance.

You see, this inheritance is part of our hope. And this inheritance is kept for us in heaven. In other words, our names are already on the title deeds, if you like.

The new creation is ready and waiting for us. And it won't perish, spoil or fade. There's no use by date.

You see, our hope includes an inheritance of a perfect world that is ready and waiting for us. As Jesus said, the meek will inherit the earth.

But our hope also includes perfect bodies. As we read in Romans, our hope includes the redemption of our bodies, a perfect body to live in a perfect creation with a perfect character.

[14:05] Early on in Romans, we read that we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That is, fall short of his perfect character.

But part of our hope is having that glory and character restored. Romans 5, 2. Where we'll have his character will be like him.

And so the Christian hope is life eternal with God in a perfect creation, with a perfect body and a perfect character. And Paul prays we might know this truly in our hearts.

For if we do, it will encourage us to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard. For example, if you missed out on travelling because of the closed borders, which I know many people have, then truly knowing this hope means you'll be disappointed, yes, but not depressed.

Because you know in your heart you'll have an eternity to enjoy the perfect creation with free travel. And so you can continue to confidently live for God, even though it's hard.

[15:23] Or if you've missed out on seeing Christian friends and family because of lockdowns, which I know many people have, yes, you'll be disappointed, but not depressed.

Because we'll have an eternity to spend with them. And if the thought of spending an eternity with Christian family worries you, well, don't worry, because they'll come with a perfect character too. And so will you. You see, if you're finding life hard, then pray you'll truly know the hope God has given you in Christ.

That you might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard. Or take inheritance.

Here we move from our hope to his inheritance. Verse 18 speaks about his glorious inheritance among his people. And so what is God's inheritance?

[16:26] Well, it is his people. It's us. In the Old Testament, God saved Israel out of Egypt. And notice, they are the people of his inheritance.

Well, so too are we. We have been redeemed to be God's treasured possession. Those whom he longs to be glorified with.

Whom he longs to enjoy life to the full with. Walking with us in the cool of the day as he did in the garden with Adam and Eve.

You see, we may long to have our inheritance. But God is longing even more to have his inheritance.

Us. With him. Not just spiritually. But physically and perfectly. Now what does that tell you about our worth to him?

[17:26] So if you're feeling flat or forgotten. Pray you'll know the inheritance of God, which is you. That you might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of his calling.

Even when it's hard. For what other God or leader values you like that? Hope, inheritance and P for power.

Verse 19 again. And know his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead.

And seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms. Did you notice how powerful that power is? It's incomparable.

There is none like it. In fact, verse 20 said, It's the same power God used to raise Christ from the dead. And seating him at his right hand.

[18:37] And so if God's power can do that. Then it can help us persevere, can't it? Help us who believe to keep living a life worthy of our calling.

Even when it's hard, can't it? I think I've told you before about a lady from this congregation originally. Who before COVID existed, was pretty much locked down in her aged care room. Because she could not walk. She ended up with an infection in her legs. And I think I've told you before that she faced having them amputated. Although she passed away before that had to happen.

But before she passed, her suffering was so bad. Even her children, her non-Christian children, told her to give up on God. They weren't always very encouraging. And yet despite some doubts early on, she came to truly know in her heart the hope she had in Christ.

We even joked her body would come with new legs. Because she never actually liked her own legs. And she came to truly know in her heart the inheritance of God.

[19:51] Which was her. That she was highly prized by God. Even if not by her family. And she came to truly know in her heart God's power for her.

Which we prayed would sustain her. And it did. You see, God helped her to truly know in her heart this hope, inheritance and power.

Which encouraged her to keep living a life worthy of her calling. Even though it was incredibly hard. In fact, she even tried to evangelize the aged care workers and staff.

That's how it all works. And just in case that's not enough, Paul finishes his prayer by adding that God's power has appointed Christ king for the church.

So point three and end of verse 19. He says, That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked.

[21:07] Not only in the present age, but also the age to come. You see, God's power raised Christ and seated him above every ruler there is.

In other words, Jesus is king and rules over all. Verse 22 says the same thing in different ways. On your screens, verse 22, And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. You see, God placed everything under his feet. He is the true man of Psalm 8 and the king who rules over all.

Or on the flip side, God appointed Jesus to be the head over everything. Jesus is the king who rules over all, you see. But did you notice that God did this for the church, it says.

Jesus is head over everything for the church. Because we are connected to him as his body. And so he rules for us, the church.

[22:27] To grow us despite what the world throws at us. There was an article that came out earlier this week from Christians in Afghanistan.

I don't know if you've seen it. But it speaks about one Christian who has already spent time in prison for his faith. I don't know if you can read that on your screens there.

But this man reports on a brother, as it says, who's already spent time in prison. But this Afghan Christian also ends by saying, our hope is not in politics, but in Jesus, who is the king.

You see, this Christian Afghan may know he could well end up back in prison or even killed. But he also knows the future of the Afghan church is not found in appeasing the Taliban.

But it's found in Jesus, who is the king. Who rules for his church. Even in Afghanistan and here in Victoria.

[23 : 42] Life may be hard for us at the moment. And part of what makes it hard is not knowing. You know, not knowing how long this lockdown will last. Not knowing how effective these vaccines will be.

And not knowing what life will look like for us in the future next year. But knowing our privileged place in God's plan.

Knowing what God has given us in Christ. Can encourage us to persevere. And so pray that God's spirit would help you to truly know the hope God has given you.

The inheritance of God, which is you. And the power of God to help you. The power that in fact made Jesus king.

Who rules for his church, including you. Pray that you'll truly know these things. Not just with your head.

[24 : 46] But with all your heart. So that you'll be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of your calling. Even when it's hard.

Let's pray that now. Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father. We pray that by your spirit. You would enlighten the eyes of our hearts.

So that we may truly. Deeply know. The hope you have given us. Your inheritance, which is us.

And your power to help us. Power that may Jesus king. Who rules for us. Your church. Help us to truly know these things.

That we might be encouraged. To keep living a life worthy of our calling. Even when it's hard. We pray this in Jesus name.

[25 : 45] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.