

Pray We'll Truly Know HIP

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[0 : 00] Well, can I add my welcome to Vijay's and Michelle's. Welcome if you're joining us from either St. John's or Holy Trinity Church family. And welcome if you're joining us from elsewhere. Hopefully you've got that passage from Ephesians 1 as we continue our series.

Although I'll be showing the verses on the screen as well. But I wonder what you said for that question, which was, I wonder what you pray for when life is hard.

Because it does seem to be hard at the moment, doesn't it? Last Monday when it was announced that our lockdown in Melbourne would be extended and tightened.

I know for many they found it hard when they heard. I also know that it's hard for the government to do its job and it's not made easy by those who do the wrong things as we've seen on the news.

But I also know it's hard for us who are feeling fatigued from being locked up for so long. In fact, I don't know if you realise, but last Thursday, as one article said, last Thursday marked 200 days in lockdown for us here in Melbourne.

[1 : 14] Melbourne. That's about one third of the whole pandemic that was spent in lockdown. As the article says, Melbourne is one of the most lockdown cities in the world.

And of course, there's other things that can make life hard too, aren't there? Like struggles with health or work or money or kids.

And there's the growing antagonism towards Christianity. For example, earlier this month, there was a motion put forward in our state parliament to scrap the Lord's Prayer, which has only been delayed.

And I hear that next month there'll be more moves to stop Christians being able to express Christian views publicly in our state. Which, of course, is nothing compared to what the Christians are facing right now in Afghanistan, is it?

And so this antagonism can make us feel flat or fear for the future of the church. So what do you pray for when life is hard?

[2 : 24] Do you pray that life would be easy? You know, that lockdown would end? Perhaps that you'd win the lotto without even buying a ticket? I think I've prayed that prayer before, actually.

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? 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, whether they were facing a particular issue, we do know Paul wants them to live and even grow as Christians.

Or as he puts it, to live lives worthy of their calling. So do you remember, as I showed you last week, the first half of the letter of Ephesians is about unpacking our privileged place in God's plan. And the second half of the letter, beginning in chapter 4, verse 1, is about living a life worthy of it. Of our privileged place.

[3 : 31] Of our calling. And so Paul's prayer this morning is meant to help us to do just that. It's meant to help us truly know our privileged place that God has given us.

So that we might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of our calling. And this morning we'll see it's about particularly knowing three things, which we'll come to later, that will help us to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard.

But Paul begins his prayer by thanking God. So point 1, verse 15. 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 and their love for all God's people. And their faith has meant that they were included in Christ with every spiritual blessing, as we heard last

week.

In fact, that's what the words for this reason point us to. They point us back to last week, to verse 13 and 14 in particular, where Paul writes, And you Gentiles, you here in Melbourne, were also included in Christ when you heard the gospel and believed.

[5 : 01] Which means we have the spirit and every spiritual blessing, including the guarantee of inheritance, all because we believe, have faith in Jesus.

Of course, if you don't have faith, then you won't have any of these. But Paul's first readers did. And so Paul thanks God ever since he has heard about that faith that included them in Christ.

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

Love for one another shows we are his disciples. It shows 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 just hard to love, aren't there? Not in our church, of course, other churches.

[6 : 14] But these Christians here in Ephesians showed their faith in Christ was genuine by loving all God's people.

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

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

We're just saying that in our memory verse, Ephesians 2. And this gift of faith gives us every spiritual blessing in Christ. And a privileged place in God's plan.

That's why Paul has not stopped thanking God for it. I wonder what it is that you thank God for. A sunny day, which it is today.

[7 : 19] A nice meal. At the end of lockdown when it comes. All good things to thank God for. But when was the last time you thanked God for the gift of faith?

Which has included you in Christ with every spiritual blessing? Or his work in your life that has helped you to love those who are hard to love?

When was the last time we thanked God for those things? Are they worth thanking God for, aren't they? Because our faith has made an eternity of difference, hasn't it?

Well, Paul now moves from thanking God to asking God. I point to verse 17. He writes, 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.

Here, Paul keeps asking God to give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation. Now, we've already seen back in verse 13 that they already have the spirit.

[8 : 29] And so this prayer is not asking God to give them his spirit again. Rather, it's asking God to use his spirit to help them have wisdom and revelation, that they might know God better or deeper in their hearts.

You see, the spirit works through our conscience at convicting us when we do wrong, you know, feeling guilty and so on, prompting us to do right, but also convincing us of truth about God.

Helping us to see things about God and to really know them in our hearts. Because that's what verse 18 goes on to talk about.

Verse 18 is not another prayer. It's unpacking the same prayer. Paul says, verse 18, I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know.

You see, Paul's prayer that the spirit would help the eyes of their hearts to clearly see so that their hearts can truly know.

[9 : 42] After all, clearly seeing things helps us to truly know them, doesn't it? And my eyesight is not the greatest and glasses won't fix it.

In fact, I didn't even recognize Kate Madison when she first came on the screen at the back of the church. I think I called her a different name. I'm sorry about that, Kate. Now, it means even if you were here in the room, I know I can't see you because you're not here.

I get that. But even if you were here in the room, you'd all be blurry. In fact, one day I was meeting my wife, Michelle, up at Shopping Town.

I waved to her from a distance, but as I got closer, I realized I was waving at another woman. And the worst part about it, I realized Michelle was then coming from the other direction and saw me

wave at this other woman.

Clearly seeing helps us to truly know, in my case, that I've got the right person. In Paul's case, knowing what we've got from God.

[10:45] You see, Paul prays God's spirit would help them to see clearly that they might know truly with their hearts, our hearts. In other words, Paul's prayer here is that we won't just have a head knowledge, but we'll have a heart knowledge.

Be fully convinced in here about what we've got from God and about three things in particular. See if you can spot those three things as I read verse 18 and 19 again.

And so on the next slide, 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, because I underlined them and polved them. Paul's prayer is that we might truly know with our hearts the hope given by God, the inheritance of God, and the power of God for us who believe.

And so to help you remember on your slide is an acronym. It's hope, inheritance, power, which spells hip. Just kind of think cool and hip, you know, to try and help you remember.

[12:14] Yeah, that didn't work. And in fact, I actually grabbed my wife's sunglasses by mistake. Anyway, I'll think hip replacement. Whatever it helps you, think hip.

In fact, 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 planned. Anyway, you're going to remember it now, aren't you? Paul's prayer is that they might be fully convinced, truly 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, let's take a look. Take the first one, hope. Our hope is our certain future. Certain because it's secured by no other name but Jesus, as we'll sing later.

And it includes our inheritance of the new creation. In the Old Testament, inheritance referred to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

[13:23] But for us, it's the new creation, a perfect world. And again, this inheritance is secure by Christ. And so Peter writes, we've been given new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And what does this hope consist of? Well, into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept safe in heaven for us.

In other words, our inheritance, part of our hope, already has our names written on the title deeds of this new creation. The new creation is ready and waiting for us in heaven.

And it won't perish, spoil or fade. There is no use by date on this new creation. Our hope, you see, includes the inheritance of a perfect world that is ready and waiting for us to be revealed.

As Jesus himself said, the meek will inherit the earth. But our hope doesn't just include the new creation. It also includes perfect bodies.

[14:39] As we read in Romans, we are looking for the redemption of our bodies. And Paul talks about this being part of our hope. Part of our hope is the perfect body to live in that perfect new creation.

But there's more. It comes with a perfect character. Earlier in Romans, it says that we have fallen short of the glory of God, which means we have fallen short of his perfect character.

But part of our hope is the glory of God, sharing in his character fully again, you know, being like him.

This is the Christian hope. Life eternal with God in a perfect creation, with perfect bodies and a perfect character. And Paul prays that we might truly know this hope in our hearts.

For if we do, it will encourage us to keep living a life worthy of this hope that God has given us, even when it's hard.

[15:48] For example, if you've missed out on traveling because the borders are closed, 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 a perfect creation with free travel. And so you can continue to confidently live for God, even though it's hard.

Or, if we've missed out on seeing Christian friends and family because of lockdowns, which I know many people have, then we'll be disappointed, yes, but not depressed. Because we'll have an eternity to spend with them.

And if you're, the thought of spending an eternity with your Christian family is worrying to you, don't worry. They will come with a perfect character. And so will you.

You see, if you're finding life hard, then pray that you will truly know the hope God has given you in Christ, that you might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of it, even when it's hard.

[17:05] Or take inheritance. Here we move from our hope to his inheritance. Verse 18 spoke about his glorious inheritance. inheritance. And so what is God's inheritance?

Well, it's us, his people. In the Old Testament, again, God saved Israel to be the people of his inheritance. And it's the same for us.

Verse 14 already spoke about us being God's very own possession, his treasured people, 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, like he did with Adam and Eve before sin came into the world.

You see, we may long to have our inheritance, but God is longing even more to have his inheritance, which is us. Not just spiritually, but physically and perfectly with him.

Now, the fact that God longs for that, that we are his treasured inheritance, though, what does that tell you about your worth to him? And so if you're feeling flat or forgotten, pray that you'll truly know the inheritance of God, which is you.

[18:32] That you might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard. for what other God or leader values you like that?

Hope, inheritance, P was for power. So verse 19 again, and he's 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 his power is? It's incomparable. There's none like it. In fact, verse 20 says, it's the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him at God's right hand.

And so if God's power can do that, then it can help us persevere, can't it? It can help us who believe to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard.

[19:43] I think I've told you before about a lady from our church who even before COVID existed was pretty much locked down to her age care room because she could not walk.

She ended up with an infection in her legs and she was told that she'd have to have them amputated but she ended up passing away before that had to happen. But before she passed, her suffering was so bad that her non-Christian children, her adult children, told her to give up on God. They weren't always encouraging. And yet, despite some doubts early on, she came to truly know in her heart the hope she had in Christ which included a perfect body, remember.

In fact, 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 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 to help her which we prayed would sustain her and it did.

[21:04] 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 extremely hard.

In fact, she even tried to evangelize the aged care staff. That's how it works, you see. And just in case that's not enough to encourage us, Paul finishes his prayer by adding that God's power has appointed Jesus king for the church.

So point three verse 19 again. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms.

Notice, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every name that is invoked not only in the present age but also the one to come.

You see, God's power raised Christ and seated Christ at his right hand far above every other ruler. Jesus is king who rules over all.

[22:20] verse 22 goes on to say the same thing in different ways. Verse 22 on your screens and God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.

You see, God placed everything under his feet. He is the man of Psalm 8 and the king who rules over all.

Or, put differently, God appointed Jesus to be head over everything. Jesus is king and rules over all. Do you get the point?

But did you also notice that God did this for the church? Jesus is head over everything for the church.

because we are connected to him as his body, his people, he rules for us, the church, to grow us despite what the world throws at us.

[23 : 24] There was an article that came out earlier this week from Christians in Afghanistan. On your screens there, it talks about one Christian who has already spent time in prison for his faith.

But notice what he says at the end there, right at the end of the article, he says, our hope is not in politics but in Jesus who is the king.

He knows he may end up back in prison or even killed. And yet, he also knows the future of the church in Afghanistan does not rest on appeasing the Taliban but on Jesus who is the king who rules for his church whether in Afghanistan or here in Victoria.

Life may be hard for us at the moment and part of what makes it hard is not knowing how long this lockdown will end, not knowing how effective these vaccines will be and not knowing what life will look like for us even next year.

But there are some things we can know that do encourage us. We can know our privileged place in God's plan, knowing what God's given us in Christ which can help us, encourage us to persevere.

[24 : 58] And so pray that God's spirit would help you to truly know in your heart the hope God has given you, God's inheritance which is you, and God's power to help you, the same power that appointed Christ as king and ruler for you, the church.

Pray you'll truly know them, not just with your head, but with all your heart, that you might be encouraged to keep living a life worthy of our calling, even when it's hard.

Let's pray that now, let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for these truths and we thank you for these things that you have given us in Christ.

we pray that by your spirit you would help us to know them with all our heart, the hope you have given us, the inheritance which is us, and the power to help us, the power that appointed Christ as king for us, the church.

Help us to truly know these things, that we might be encouraged to keep living lives worthy of our calling, even when it's hard.

[26 : 27] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.