

Knowing the Fullness of God in Christ

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[0 : 00] To keep your Bibles open there to page 1173. Before I start, happy Mother's Day to those few mothers.

! It's called, Wow God! Thank You! Sorry! Please!

In fact, I think on kickoff Sunday this year at 10.30, Simon Camilleri came and he read from the book, I think. It teaches children the structure for prayer.

And as the title suggests, it's Praise! Wow God! Thanksgiving! Thank You! Confession, Sorry and Petition Please!

And that's something that we, grown-ups, can learn to do as well. In fact, Paul in his letter to the Ephesians starts with a very similar structure.

[1 : 12] Last week we began with a long section on praise, didn't we? And today we get to thank you and please. Now, sorry I've sort of struck up in the outline because the confession bit is not explicitly or directly in there.

But I think Paul includes it as part of his praise to God when he praises God for all that he's done in Christ Jesus so that we can be forgiven for our sins. So, implicitly I think it's in there.

So, with that sort of structure in mind, let's tackle today's passage where we move to Thanksgiving in verses 15 and 16. So, on the slide we read, Paul here is thanking God for the Ephesian church collectively, but also believers individually within them.

And in particular, he's praying or thanking God for their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for God's people. And here God's people, I think, is not just a reference to their fellow Christians in Ephesus, but also beyond as well.

And it begins with, for this reason. Because faith and love are evidence of God's work in their lives. It's a demonstration, as we saw last week, that they were chosen by God and blessed in Christ.

[2 : 42] And so, that which we praise God for, his character and his works, is also turned to thanksgiving, where we see it as evidence at work in our lives and the lives of our fellow Christians.

And you see that that boy is not just giving thanks as a one-off, but ongoing. He says, I've not stopped giving thanks for you. Because he's continually amazed by what God has done.

And he sees again and again the ongoing impact of God's work in their lives. But then, Paul turns these very things of praise and thanksgiving into matters for petition.

Please God, take what you've done, he asks, and bring it to ultimate fulfillment. So, verse 17 and onwards is what we see Paul asking for next.

And he says, I keep asking, and again, notice the present continuous sense. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation.

[3 : 47] And here, just for information, have a look at the three persons of the triune God there. Jesus, Father and Spirit, all together in the prayer.

And he says, I keep asking so that you may know him better. That is God. 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.

I want you to know this, that Paul is not actually asking for them to be given hope or power.

Because they already have that. Instead, the prayer is for knowledge.

Hence, it is the spirit of wisdom and revelation. The prayer that their eyes, the eyes of their heart might be enlightened, so that they might know God better, by knowing what he has done and is doing in their lives.

And so in the outline, you see the three points or the three things that he asks. One, that they may know the hope to which God has called them. Two, know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in

his people.

[5 : 01] And three, know the incredible power for those who believe. And these are not three separate things. They are interrelated. And they actually are things that Paul has already praised God for in verses 3 to 14.

He has already praised God for these things because they have been done to the Ephesians and to the Christians in general to fulfill God's master plan. But now the prayer is for the recipients of these blessings to fully appreciate just what God has already done.

And we know the difference, don't we, between simply experiencing something and understanding why it's happened or how it's happened.

So for example, unless you're a doctor maybe, we can take some medicine and be cured. And still it's not the same as knowing how the medicine has worked. Or we can get from here to Sydney in a plane, but not fully appreciate the wonders of flight.

I mean, I still don't fully appreciate the wonders of flight. How the physics and the aerodynamics work. How the plane is engineered. I have no clue. So likewise, we can be saved.

[6 : 20] We can enjoy all of God's blessing. And like the Ephesians, we can even show faith in Jesus and love for God's people, which Paul gives thanks to God for. And yet we gain so much more when we understand and appreciate why God has done what he's done and how he's done it.

Right? So what is this hope, the first thing that Paul wants them to know more of? Well, back in verse 4 last week, remember, it was to be holy and blameless in God's sight.

Or verse 10 is the hope of being part of, of being united under Christ, bringing unity to all things. He says also in verse 12 to the Jews that they were the first to put their hope in Christ, then to be followed by the Gentiles.

But notice that while hope is always future oriented, that's what hope is, right? You're looking forward. The calling has already occurred. It's in the past tense. God has already called them. God has chosen them before creation. Therefore, what God has done already makes the hope in the future certain. This is not a wishful hope, but hope that is guaranteed by God.

[7 : 41] Now, the second thing that Paul prays for them is that they might know the riches of God's glorious inheritance, which is really part of the hope, I think, which we're called to.

Now, it's easy to just quickly glance over those words and to think that what Paul means here is God's glorious inheritance for his people.

But actually, if you look at those words, it says God's inheritance in his people. In other words, God's holy people are the inheritance.

Not the ones to whom the inheritance is being given to, even though that is true and that's what we find elsewhere in the Bible. It follows on from verse 14, doesn't it? Where last week we saw that those who are redeemed through faith in Jesus are God's possession, right?

On the next slide, I think. And this is not a new concept. Because all the way back in the Old Testament, which is something that Sharon read for us in Exodus 19, verse 5 and 6, that's how God has already referred to Israel.

[8 : 52] Notice on the slide there, Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations, you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

And if we think about this a bit more carefully, I think to be God's treasured possession is actually much better than getting treasures from God. Even though, I mean, that's good too.

And we do get those. Because you see, we are like the trophies of a world-renowned athlete. All these athletes, you can think of them.

They win many competitions, don't they? But you know, maybe from young they've been winning the state competition or the competition at school. Those trophies or those medals, they just go in the drawer, don't they?

But hanging on the wall or displayed in the trophy cabinet are the medals or the trophies that are most treasured by them, isn't it? That Olympic gold medal, that world title.

[10 : 02] That's what they put in their cupboards, don't they? On display. It's the one that he or she is most proud of. And this is what we are to God, isn't it?

For example, me as a parent, you know, I often think, you know, it doesn't matter how much money I might have in my bank account, which is not much.

Or whatever achievements I might have. No, I still say of my daughters that they are my most treasured possessions, isn't it?

Many of your parents would say the same. We're God's crowning glory, testifying to his accomplishments. Which makes sense, because if God's master plan was to redeem a holy people through his Son, bring unity to all things under him, making us holy and blameless, then God's people are the shining example, the clear demonstration or evidence that God's plan is being fulfilled.

Now, of course, there's nothing for us to boast about, because this is God's plan. This is Jesus' work solely. We're each chosen by grace without deserving it. We're like, you know, lumps of coal that's discarded in the ground, which God then picks out, and then by the blood of Jesus transforms into diamonds.

[11 : 30] But like turning carbon into diamonds, such a transformation requires an act of great and incomparable power, which God alone can do.

And so the third thing Paul wants them to know is the incomparably great power for us who believe. What is this power? How is it demonstrated? Paul elaborates in verse 19.

That power, he says, 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, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

The resurrection of Jesus is the mighty act that required the great and incomparable power for God to achieve. Yes, the God who easily spoke, and the heavens and the earth came into existence, and he put the stars in the sky and the sun in the moon.

The God who breathed and gave life to every single living creature. The God who was born. The God who was born. The God.

[12 : 45] The God. I think in some ways, the resurrection of Jesus was an act of even greater power by God in comparison. Why? Because by raising Jesus from the dead, God was not just bringing a dead person to life.

You know, even Lazarus was raised, wasn't he, from death by Jesus. Instead, Jesus died to take on the weight of the whole world.

All the sin and evil in the world was the cause of Jesus' death. And so in raising Jesus to life, what God was achieving was the reversal of the entire human destiny.

One that was headed towards death and destruction, now turned 180 degrees around, so that there might be hope of life in the new creation.

In Christ's resurrection, a new humanity was created. It's like, you know, really the big bang occurring all over again.

[13 : 55] Except, not the physical big bang, but a spiritual big bang. In the singularity that is Jesus' resurrection, we have a new creation emerging from his risen life that now sustains the new creation.

The power of that resurrection forever and ever. Now, when we belong to Jesus, we are powered by that life.

When we talk about you having eternal life, it is the life of the resurrected Jesus that sustains each and every one of us for eternity when we put our faith in Jesus.

And that's why Paul doesn't stop here at the physical resurrection. But he continues to speak of Jesus' reign, being seated in the heavenly realm, given power to rule over all things in heaven and on earth, both in this age and in an age to come.

This is the unity that we read in verse 10, under which God is bringing all things, both in heaven and on earth, Jew or Gentile, all in and under Christ.

[15 : 02] And so, what Paul prays for is simply that we may know God better when we, in the depth and wonder of his plan, understand what God is doing in creation.

But now then, Paul, in verse 22, adds one more dimension. And I think it's worth elaborating and spending some time on. For he says, 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.

And the key phrase here is for the church. Because although last week we said that God is achieving his master plan to the praise of his glory for his son, and yet who are the ones that are

blessed in Christ?

We are the church. And so, God is in one sense doing all this for his son, but for the benefit of the church. And Paul now reiterates this by talking about those who are in Christ corporately as the church.

Those who belong to Christ's body collectively. God's holy people. And so, while we are all individually blessed in Christ, we must never lose sight of the fact that the church, the corporate body of Christ, is important.

[16 : 38] This letter by Paul to Ephesians is actually encouraging us not to be individualistic, but rather when we read the Bible, when we apply it, not to just think about what it is for me and myself, but actually to think about what it means for us as the body of Christ.

For we are God's treasured possession, singular. Right? Not treasured possessions individually. Together, we express the unity that God is achieving.

Together, we bring God's glory to God's work in Christ. And so, later on when we get to chapter 5, the church is the bride of Christ, isn't it?

Singular, again. Whom Jesus washes and cleanses in order to present to God as holy and blameless, without blemish. And so, Paul ends here by saying, the church is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.

If you like the full splendor of God's master plan, what He's doing in this world is seen in the fullness of Christ's body, the church, in number and in maturity.

[17 : 55] So that if ever someone was to ask God, God, how is your master plan progressing? What He will do is point to the church and say, all is going to plan.

Thank you very much. All that Jesus has done on the cross, and more, is being poured out into His body, the church, filling it by the power of His Spirit.

every spiritual blessing that we enjoy in the heavenly realm is done within the church, and as the church. Now, of course, although this is such a glorious vision of the church, it is true, isn't it?

That the church hasn't always, and still doesn't live up, to what God has in store for us. But don't let that make you think that God has failed, or that God has given up on the church.

God will never give up on the church. Why? Because it's too precious to Him. He has given His only Son to die for it.

[19 : 04] How can God ever give up on those that He has called to be His church? And while the reference here to the church is, you know, the full company of believers across time and age, gathered around God's throne where Jesus reigns, the local church, that's us.

We are the physical expression of this wonderful reality. Now, I have to say that not every church, of course, is part of this, because we know elsewhere, like in Revelation, that there is judgment for churches, individual churches, that fall away from the gospel.

But where churches continue to faithfully trust in the Lord Jesus, and love God's people, then we can be encouraged that actually, God cares deeply for us.

No matter how big or small we are, we as the church, is someone or something that God deeply cares for. And more than that, we can take comfort that actually God will see that His master plan is being fulfilled in us and through us.

That we are part of His crowning glory, showing forth the power of His amazing grace as He works in us through Christ. So, you know, some of you are probably too young to have been hurt by the church, but in future, the message is, don't give up on the church, even when things go wrong and we're saddened by it, or hurt by them.

[20 : 46] Christ's body, of which the local congregation is an expression, is the place where God will continue doing His work, and unfold His master plan.

In fact, part of that work is to actually display forgiveness and grace, isn't it? So, if you're hurt, and you need healing, the place you need to go to for that is actually within the church to find grace and forgiveness.

So, if you belong to Christ, never separate yourself from the fellowship of God's people. Yes, sadly, there are times when perhaps things are too difficult to remain in a particular congregation and you have to move to another one, but always come back to the church to find healing and grace and forgiveness.

not because the church itself provides all that. Jesus Himself does all that. But as I said, the church is the fullness of Christ who fills everything in every way.

And as Christians, we need to know that we belong to the church. We're saved to be part of Christ's body. There is no belonging to Christ without belonging to the church.

[22 : 08] But more positively as well, if your desire is to know God better and to know the hope and power of God in Christ, then the church is the place to discover that.

So, don't underestimate the importance of belonging to a local congregation because it's the context by which you understand God's will, where you learn God's word and how to apply it. That's why we gather together and pray together because we build our lives in Christ together as part of the church. Also, as we've already done today, let's continue to remember that God's master plan is being fulfilled in the world across churches around the world.

So, it's good that we keep praying for our gospel partners in Australia and in the world to pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ because they too are part of God's treasured possession.

When we support them, we support God's master plan being fulfilled in this world. That church that we just prayed for that is in Niger or Burkina Faso, even though they are being oppressed, is something that God, some church that God cares deeply for.

[23 : 26] And in fact, we've just prayed and because we've been prompted to, we praise God that despite their suffering, many are turning to Christ because God's master plan is being fulfilled even in the midst of their persecution, isn't it?

Praise God for that. And when you personally want to discover how to serve God more, then think about how what you're doing or what you plan to do will serve as a blessing for the church because it's in Christ that God is filling the church with every blessing in every way.

And so your work, your ministry, your service is intended to bring blessing within the church to others. As I said last week, God's plan for our lives is not centered on us but in Christ, on Christ. It flows from all that He's done for us on the cross. but the blessings that flow from this amazing act of grace, the result of God's incomparable power at work is seen in the church, in its growth, in its fullness.

We belong to this. We are part of God's treasured possession. We praise God for it, we thank God for it, and then we ask day by day that we may know God better through it.

[24 : 53] Let's pray. Father, thank you for raising your son Jesus to life and through him for us to receive new life and hope.

Thank you that you've called us to belong to him, to be part of your treasured possession, the church. Help us all to serve together and to bring you glory together.

Fulfill in us the fullness of what you have planned in Christ Jesus so that the whole world may live to your praise and glory. In the powerful name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.