

Paul's Prayers: Know God's Help

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 January 2014

Preacher: The Venerable Daniel Gifford

[0 : 00] I'd like to warmly welcome you to St. John's on this very wet, sort of cool, dark Sunday morning.

And maybe I shouldn't let you know that where David Short is right now, he's in a very warm and sunny place south of the equator, where it's always summer apparently.

And he's going to be gone for the next couple weeks. And so we are going to be doing a very short sermon series, a trilogy, on the prayers of Paul for his church.

And what we want to do is to think about how God wants his church to respond to what he has made them. You know, we heard in the fall in our last sermon series about what God has made the church to be and created the church to be, what his purposes are for the church.

And here we have prayers for that church, three different prayers and three different books of the Bible. And in a way, what we're doing is we're looking into the prayer life of Paul.

[1 : 12] And that can be a bit of a daunting thing. I don't know if you would want your prayers to be made public. Our prayer life, I think, is sometimes we feel self-conscious about, something that we wish that we could grow in.

And certainly in this new year when we're making resolutions, it's a good thing to resolve to pray more, to pray more deeply as well. And I think that if you took a look at many of our prayers, if you looked into our prayer life, we would be praying for lots of things that are important to us.

Things that have to do with our well-being, our safety, with the safety of the people who are around us, for the needs of people who are in trouble that we care deeply about.

We're all going through things that we want to bring before the Lord in prayer. But what Paul does, and these are very important for us to be doing, but what Paul does in a wonderful way is he lifts our eyes up to God, lifts us up beyond the things that are our concerns close by.

And he wants us to see, he prays that we will see who God is, what he is doing, not simply the difficulties, the things that are around us that need our prayers.

[2 : 33] He gives us a bigger vision of prayer. And what he does in these prayers that we're going to look at is he is praying that God will grow Christian people, will grow his people because of what they hear and they read about God in his word.

And that that word will change their lives, that they'll actually be gripped by the gospel of grace. And so in his prayers, he asks that God will be powerfully active in each of our lives through his teaching, that we will grow, that we will mature because of what we hear.

And so that we will have cross-shaped lives because that vision of who God is for us is something that changes us and transforms us. And that prayer begins on in Ephesians in verse 15.

I wonder if you would turn with me to that on page 976. And in that prayer, he says, he starts out by saying, for this reason, for this reason.

And why he says that, the reason he says that is because for the previous 14 verses, he has talked about an incredible vision of who God is for us.

[3 : 57] The amazing spiritual blessings that we have in Jesus Christ. And he has said things like, God has chosen us in his love to be holy and blameless before him from the beginning of time.

He has said that he has adopted us. God has adopted us as sons and daughters. He has said that God has redeemed us by the blood of Jesus. He's freed us by the forgiveness of our sins.

He has made known to us his will for the world, that he will one day unite all things in Jesus Christ. And that he has sealed us by the Holy Spirit.

He's given us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance that we have in God. Amazing things that you have all heard before. But it is quite possible to hear this glorious truth about God and not be gripped by it.

Not be changed in our hearts and minds and souls by it. And to grow as a result of it. And so Paul and all the apostles are clear that it's really important that they not only teach and preach God's word, but they also pray as well.

[5 : 14] You see that from right in the beginning in the book of Acts in chapter 6. That the apostles devoted themselves to God's word and to prayer. And that pattern of their ministry is teaching backed by prayer that God will act through that teaching.

And that's what Paul is doing here in verses 15 through 23. It's immensely important that he prays for the church. That that truth will come into their lives and change them.

So he begins in 15 and 16 by saying to the churches that he's very thankful to God for them. And particularly because of their love for all the saints and for their faith in Jesus Christ.

The reason he's thankful is because the reality of faith in Jesus is being translated into a genuine love for the fellow believers.

So there's genuine caring between Jews and Gentiles. Between people who are recently pagans. And people who have been followers of God for all their lives.

[6 : 26] So this is a sign of growth and maturity in the church. People are trusting in Jesus. And that's showing itself in love. I've had some wonderful conversations over the years.

And recently as well. With people from all our services. Who have really experienced a warmth. And a love when they have come to St. John's. It's very encouraging to hear stories of people who have been invited out to lunch.

As they have come here. They've been befriended. Or people have after a few weeks invited them to sit with them in their pews. There are many also stories of love that is given between people in this congregation.

Deep sacrificial acts of love for one another. Praying for each other. Caring for each other in very meaningful deep ways. Costly ways as well.

And this is a sign of the truth of God going deep into your heart and your soul. Being gripped by it. And that's why our vision at St. John's.

[7 : 33] Is to be gripped by the gospel of grace. So that we become a community of contrast in this world. And the question that we should think about.

And I've been asked as well. Which is really good. Is what does it mean to be a community of contrast? What's that contrast look like? Well it's really defined for us in that verse.

By faith and love. Because first we are called by God to show a deep love and faith in Jesus. By receiving the incredible blessings that we see in verses 1 through 14.

Entrusting ourselves to those blessings. Holding on to them. And submitting to Jesus' lordship joyfully. It is a wonderful thing to give ourselves to God in that way.

And secondly that this translates into our lives by showing a self-giving love to all the saints. For all those who come to St. John's. Whatever age they are.

[8 : 36] All the different age groups. And this is the strength of St. John's. We are multi-generational. That we show love to people of all different backgrounds. People that we do not naturally relate to.

That's a contrast to the world. It's a community where people strive not to get but to give. Because Jesus gave.

Because Jesus gave of himself every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to us. By his gift. And that combination of faith and love exists only in the church.

It's a contrast to every other community in the world. And it can happen in these big gatherings that we have on Sunday mornings and on Sunday night. And also in smaller groups in the church as well.

Where faith translated into love is lived out. And the remarkable thing about a growing faith in Jesus that shows in love for one another.

[9 : 38] Is it can be a real light to the world outside the church. In Ephesus the church was a minority gathering. There weren't many gatherings like that in this huge city of Ephesus.

And in that gathering people behaved differently and they believed differently. And an example of that is. Maybe we'll turn over there real quick.

432 on page 978. So you just look at the bottom of the first column on 978. And you see this call by Paul. To be kind to one another.

Tender hearted. Forgiving one another. As God in Christ forgave you. You see that combination of faith and love that takes place there.

The faith that Jesus has forgiven you. And the love of kindness. Tender hearted. Forgiving one another. That is the life of faith and love. And the Ephesians were very integrated into the life of Ephesus.

[10:42] There wasn't this strong demarcation between life in the church and life in the world. They lived amongst the community. And they brought that contrasting life of faith in Jesus and love for each other into their work life.

Into their social life. Into their family life. And that repelled some people. We see a persecution that takes place at times. But many were attracted into those communities because they were a shining light of Jesus.

That comes into the world. Into relationships. And there was an attraction about that. And so the question for us at St. John's is how can we grow more and more into a community that's gripped by grace like that?

Well this is exactly what Paul is praying for. And what he prays for is that and the way that this happens is that we know God better.

And we know him by knowing who he is for us. We know him by obeying who he is and what he wants as well. And so verse 17 shows us that it is by knowing God better.

[11:56] It's the greatest, it's the great gift from God that Paul prays for. He says in verse 17, You see, it is a prayer that God wants us to know him better.

That he alone can give us that gift of growth. That gift of knowledge. Knowledge. This was a precious thing for the Ephesians to hear because the occult dark magic, things that had to do with the spiritual world was really very prevalent in that city.

And there was lots of secret wisdom. And you got it by paying for it. You paid for charms. You paid for wisdom and revelation. You paid for documents that had spells and incantations.

So you could know the gods. You could influence them. You could be secure. And secure wealth as well. But Paul says that God gives that spirit of wisdom and revelation.

Of him. Of the living God. And he opens the eyes of each of our hearts is the way he puts it. Our inner nature is our hearts. What makes us tick.

[13:21] And Paul is saying we are naturally blind to God unless he opens the eyes of our hearts. This is what the Holy Spirit does in our lives.

That free gift of God. He reveals who he is to us. Simply that we can know him better. And that's why Paul prays.

And I think that Paul is modeling something very important for us at St. John's. It is good for you and I to pray for one another that we will know God better.

And I wonder if that's a prayer that you ever pray for others in the church. People that you know. Pray that God, that one another knows God better.

All of us need to grow. All of us have to grow in the relationship that we have with God. It doesn't matter how long we've been a Christian.

[14:20] Or how short we've been a Christian. God wants us to grow. To know him better. You know, the Ephesian Christians knew God. They knew these things that Paul had said.

But Paul is praying that they will know him better and better each day. And so there are two great things God opens your hearts to see.

And I want to just close the sermon with this. Two great things that Paul prays for. The Ephesians. So that they will know God better. And there are two parts.

That you will know God's hope. And secondly, that you will know his power. He prays for hope. And he prays for power. And I want to look at this for a moment.

That hope is really in two parts. It's in verse 18. He prays first. That you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

[15:18] And that is a future hope. It is the unseen hope. It is this certainty based on God's promise. That this gathering today. Will be gathered with all God's people.

In the very presence of Jesus Christ. In the new heaven. And in the new earth one day. That we will live with God. And he will live with us. We have each been called by name.

To come under the rule of Jesus Christ. King Jesus. And into his kingdom forever. And I wonder this morning. If you know. That Jesus has called you.

And that he is calling you. Right now. You know when Paul. Was teaching about choosing. And predestining you. Adopting you. Redeeming you. Earlier in chapter one. He is revealing a very personal call. To each of us. A personal call by God himself. That is a call by name.

[16:16] And that call. Paul is saying. Defines you. It is a call that gathers you. To many other people. Who have also been called.

And Paul dearly wants you to grasp fully. The hope. That comes with that call. That he will heal you. He will make you perfectly righteous.

He will resurrect your body forever. And you. Along with others who know Jesus. Will live with him. In the loving company. Of everyone who has heard that call.

Who have said yes. To the call. Of Jesus. On their life. And I think that hope. Spurs us on. When that future hope. Is clear to us.

It shapes our decisions. What we think of. And so. So we begin to think of. What are the things that get in the way. Of that future. Future. And that is what we get rid of.

[17:12] And then we think of. What prepares me for that future. What can I. What can I take on. That will lead me towards that future. That helps. On that walk. That journey.

To that future hope. How can I help people in my life. In this church. Towards that future. That God calls us to. It's a tremendously encouraging. And motivating.

Hope. That God gives to us. And we need to be clear about it. That's what Paul is praying for. We spend lots of time being clear. About what is happening in the world around us. In the news.

And it can be depressing. Paul says. Be just as clear. About the hope. That God has given to you. And he prays for that. As a gift for us. But besides that future hope.

There's a present hope. At the end of verse 18. It says. What are the riches. Of the glorious inheritance. Of his. Glorious inheritance. In the church. And I emphasize.

[18:08] His. Because if we look carefully. Paul is praying. That we know the riches. Of God's inheritance. He's not talking about. Our inheritance. Which was earlier in the chapter. He is saying.

That the saints. The church of God. Are God's glorious inheritance. It is his glorious return. On the investments. That he has committed.

In Jesus Christ. Dying for our sins. To save us. And reconcile us to him. And Paul says. The church. The church is God's precious treasure. It is what.

It is what belongs to him. And that he values more than anything. We can imagine. And I wonder if you look on the church. In the same way. As Jesus.

Precious possession. And treasure. I read a couple of weeks ago. And you may have seen this in the news as well. About a certain Father McLeod.

[19:06] Who is in England. And he had bought a painting. For about 400 pounds. And he said. He said in the newspaper. That this portrait really caught his eye.

And he bought it 10 years ago. And there was something about it. The portrait he said. Something about him. The character. Who in a sense. Looked rather an angry person.

But the more I looked at him. And as the years went on. The more I wanted to know. Know more about this painting. And so. He brought this painting. To a recording. Of the antique road show. Which is a British TV series.

Which you may have seen. And the host suspected. That this 400 pound painting. May be. An Anthony Van Dyke painting. And he was a Flemish master.

In the 17th century. And so they took the painting away. The road show did. And after a lengthy restoration. It's now been verified. That it is a Van Dyke portrait.

[20:06] It's a masterpiece. From 1636. It's worth over 400,000 pounds. And it is the most valuable painting. Identified in the show's 36 years.

The newspaper said. And Father McLeod was very happy. And blessed. Of course he's going to buy. Bells for a church. Apparently with some of the money. But I think this is a wonderful picture for us.

Because the church. Is like that. We see the flaws. We see the need for restoration. And it might seem rather ordinary. Not a great work.

And something we're familiar with. It's sort of hanging around. Like this painting was. Was around this priest for 10 years. But Jesus delights to consider the church.

His treasured possession. He understands. And actually puts value. On this church. He actually uses his church. To display his wisdom.

[21 : 05] And his grace. To the universe. It is actually his means. To bring salvation. To bring God's deepest blessings. To the world. Through the church.

He will completely restore. This church. This church. This church. One day. But now. It is of great. Great value. And in the church.

We are called to value the church. In the same way. To understand. How God appraises the church. And treasures it. Because if we treasure it.

In the same way. We will care for it. We will see the importance. Of this church. In his work. In the world. And. And we will be.

We will be moved. And shaped. To minister. And serve God. In his church. For the world. For the sake of the world. Because of it. It's a great gift.

[21 : 59] For our eyes to be opened. To the deep value. Of the church. Well Paul closes. In verse 19. By praying that the church. Will know God's power.

Not only the future. And the present hope. That we have. That God values us. Deeply. As a church. And as individuals. But also that we know God's power.

And so he says in verse 19. What is the. That we would know. What is the immeasurable greatness. Of his power. Towards us. Who believe. There were.

As I mentioned. Incredible. Occult. Powers. And forces. In Ephesus. The Ephesians. Knew the power of evil. In their city. They also knew.

The power of the government. As well. Very powerful government. That could say no. To Christian. Gatherings. And work. But Paul says. There is an immeasurably.

[22 : 56] Greater power. That is active in us. Who believe. And Paul is emphatic. About this power. He goes on. And talks about it. For the next few verses. And it's good to look at.

It is the working. He says. Of his great might. And verse 20. That he worked in Christ. When he raised him from the dead. And seated him at his right hand. In the heavenly places. Far above all rule.

And authority. And power. And dominion. And above every name. That is named. Not only in this age. But in the age to come. And he put all things. Under his feet. And gave him as head.

Over all things. To the church. And by the way. When he talks about the church. At the very end. He says. It is his body.

The fullness of him. Who fills. All in all. Well God's power. Is not an abstract idea. Paul is saying here.

[23 : 51] That the empty tomb. Jesus resurrection. The event of that resurrection. Is solid evidence. Of the power of God. That is for us. Who believe.

It is towards us. He says. It is a power. It is the power. That raised Jesus. From death to life. And to lordship. Over everything. In the universe. And Paul prays.

That we will know. And experience this power. In our own lives. God's mighty work. In us now. And this power.

Is not a power. To. For us to be successful. Or continually healthy. Or for our kids to be safe. And to accomplish our goals.

It is a power. To believe in the gospel. And to live it out. It is power. Given to us. Poured out on us. So that we can bless the world.

[24 : 45] In Jesus name. He works powerfully. And mightily. So that we can persevere. In faithfulness. In following Jesus. In being his disciples.

And this is so important. For us to know. Isn't it? Because. There are many things. In this world. That make it very hard. To be disciples. Of Jesus. There is an endless barrage.

Of media. In the world around us. Against Christian truth. And values. And behaviors. There is a. There is a social pressures. In our lives as well. There is our own personal fight.

Against the sin. Sin. The world. And the devil. As we hear about. In our baptism. And Satan works through all this. He is a prowling lion. We hear in the Bible. Looking for someone to devour.

And that's why it can be very hard. For us to forgive. There are certain sins. That beset us. That we seem stuck in. There are real. Formidable powers. But Paul.

[25 : 43] In this prayer. Emphasized that. Jesus resurrection. And exalting him. Means that same power. Is for us.

And that every power. Is subject to him. They are all inferior to him. As well. And that power of his victory. Is available to us now.

That's why. Being at the very end. Of our own resources. Is actually a very good place to be. If you are a Christian. Because it's then. That we can look to Jesus resurrection.

As Paul is praying for right now. And. And. And look to his rule. In power. And that we. Receive that power from Jesus.

That's what he is praying for us now. So I want to close. By. By saying that we as brothers and sisters. Of Christ.

[26 : 38] In Christ. That we are called. In this prayer of Paul. To pray for one another. As well. To receive the prayer.

That Paul has given to us here. To know God better. By knowing his hope. By knowing his power. As well. And to pray that prayer. For each other. That's something that we as leaders.

In the church. We're talking about in staff. Meaning that we want to pray for that. For people that we serve. In our church. That we would. Know God's power in our life.

That that power will allow us. That will cause us to be gripped. By the gospel of grace. To believe the gospel. And live it out. To know the power of God. To withstand every power.

That seeks to keep us. From being faithful. And knowing God better. We also resolved in this new year. To pray for one another. To know the hope. That God has given us.

[27 : 36] To know the hope. Of Jesus kingdom. That will come. To know the completion. Of his saving work. Will take place. The certain hope. Of the future.

But also that we will know. The certain hope. That Jesus treasures us. Now. And that he accomplishes. His work of grace. In us. Now. Through the church. That he is blessing the world. Through St. John's. That is our certain hope. That is what God is opening the eyes. Of our hearts to see. And may he bless. Our ministry in this new year.

Lead us. Into serving him faithfully. As lights in the world. Because of this prayer. Well let's. Let's just pray briefly together. As we close.

Father in heaven. We pray that you will. Open the eyes of our hearts.

[28 : 33] To your hope. And to your power. We pray that you. Will give us that spirit of wisdom. And revelation. That we are gripped by the truth.

That we hear of in Bible study. In our own reading of your word. In our times of hearing sermons. In our times of ministry. To one another. As well.

Father we pray. That you will show us. This glorious vision. Every day. Of who you are. What you are doing. And that we would be. Filled with your hope.

Filled with your power. That we might live. The life of the gospel. Live out. Cross-shaped lives.

Individually. And in our relationships. With one another.

We ask this. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen.