

Praise, Power And Piety

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, we ask that as we have these few minutes this morning to look at your word, that you will open that word to the deepest things in our hearts, and that you will open our hearts to the healing, saving power of that word.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. You will know that during Lent, we're looking each Sunday morning at one of the epistles, which is addressed to one of the churches, in most cases, in the New Testament.

So we are a church, and a letter addressed to a church is the subject of our study. And we come to the letter to the Ephesians this morning, which I'll tell you where it is.

So it's right there, beginning on page 180 of your Pew Bible. And so it might be a help for you to turn to it.

I want just to begin what I have to say this morning by a kind of testimony, if you will excuse the expression.

[1 : 58] We had a meeting on Monday, which filled me with deep despondency. And now that I'm getting to be an old man, despondency is much more difficult than it used to be.

And so in a place of deep despondency, you need a lot of help. I went to morning prayer the following morning, Monday, and the scriptures spoke in such an eloquent way to my own sense of despair that I found myself quite renewed.

During the course of the week, I experienced considerable failure in relating to people I work closely with. And yet there was also in the week a place of confession and a place of opening my heart to another.

And in that, I found much of the grace of God and a process of healing. I received a letter during the week in response to a letter I'd written some weeks ago in which I had acknowledged my own failure in a relationship that has been long over in my life.

And I got a wonderful letter back full of grace and the faithfulness of God. And it very much rejoiced my heart to hear it. But I also was given a passage to read from C.S. Lewis this week, which talks about pride and envy.

[3 : 46] And Lee left me with the feeling that if you took from me all the pride and envy, there wouldn't be enough left to blow it away on a thistle.

And it's, you know, the thoughts of the imaginations of our hearts are very hard to deal with.

So I tell you that because it was in that that I came as I have to come each week to the Scriptures. And I can tell you that it is one of the miracles of the grace of God in my life that at the focus of my work is the necessity of trying to come to the heart of a passage of Scripture in order that I might lead you to the heart of that passage of Scripture.

Though I often find you got there before me or went further than I could go. But that's my job and that's my responsibility. And it's one of the wonders of the grace of God that I have to do that each week.

And I'm very grateful for it. And it was the epistle to the Ephesians that had to be my concern this week. And my desire is that I might lead you to the heart of this epistle.

[5 : 27] But then I can't do it apart from God's grace and the work of God's Holy Spirit. And so you have to work with me in order that you could perhaps follow me.

So that the three things that I want to tell you about the epistle, which I hope may open it up for you, it is a most amazing document.

If you were to take an old Bible, this is, I think, a publisher's sample that was left with me. So I don't feel any great tenderness towards it.

And I can scribble in it and I can mark it and I can underline it and I can draw pictures on the pages and I can do anything I like with it. And I am delighted that I can do that.

And I commend you to have a Bible that you don't mind abusing badly because it can be very helpful to you. And I've spent the week here looking at the epistle to the Ephesians in its entirety.

[6 : 27] I really feel sorry that one of the results of the kind of preaching and teaching we do around here is that people tend to know a snippet from Matthew and a snippet from Luke and a snippet from the Revelation and a snippet from the Galatians.

And the whole impact of the epistle to the Ephesians or one particular section of Scripture, we fail to grasp. We don't have a chance to get at it.

That's part of the reason that I would like, even over the period of one week, to look at one epistle and see what it says. And this has a magnificent sweep to it.

And I think it could change the whole of your life if you could understand it. And if all of us could understand it, it could change the whole life of our parish.

Because it essentially speaks to not individual Christians telling them how to live their life. It essentially speaks to a whole congregation of Christians telling them how to relate one to another.

[7 : 37] And we desperately need that, don't we? We spend so much time in being independent one of another, that something like Ephesians can be a help.

Three things about Ephesians that I want to tell you then. The first is that it's written by a prisoner who is free to a lot of free people who are in prison.

And you can pick this up in chapter 3, verse 1, when Paul says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for the sake of you Gentiles, chapter 4, verse 1, as a prisoner for the Lord I urge you, so that he is in prison as he writes the letter.

And he's writing it to us, And I think helps us to recognize the kind of prisons that we are in, you know.

And I'm suggesting to you that these are the kinds of prisons that I find people in, and the interior of them I know myself from first-hand experience sometimes.

[8 : 59] There is our body, to which we are sometimes manacled, when our body is diseased and we can't escape from that process of disease.

We are in that kind of a prison. It's not unusual in our society to talk about our marriage as a close association with a ball and chain, you know, which is another picture of a prisoner.

I run across people who are handcuffed to business partners that they cannot work with. I meet people who are under house arrest by their bank managers.

You experience people who are caught in the frustrations of life as though they were in the public square with their hands and ankles locked into the stocks, and there they are prisoners and the victims of public ridicule.

We hear a great deal about people who have no freedom from the bondage of lust and addiction.

[10 : 17] And you very often meet people who are walking down a long corridor like a condemned man, fearfully approaching the exit door without knowing what lies behind it.

And so it's those kinds of prisons that Paul speaks to us about, prisons in which we might find ourselves.

And Paul commends to us the business of praise. He said, you see, what happens is that praise is the thing that transforms our prison.

And that we are called in this holy week to give a good deal of time to offer to God the sacrifice of praise. In the hymns we sing and in the whole of our lives, that our lives may be like a well-tuned instrument, which is able to give exquisite praise to the wonder of our God as he reveals himself in Christ by his death and resurrection.

So that Paul explodes, as it were, and says, praise, this is from prison, remember, and it should be some from our prison as well.

[11 : 57] Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. It's Paul in prison, writing to you and I, who are not visibly in prison, telling us this.

He says, praise to his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, in accordance with the richness of his grace, and therefore we should praise him.

Do you want to see something which, you know, which really is a pan of praise? If you look in chapter 1 of Ephesians, and you look at verse 3, do you see it begins, may begin, blessed be the God, but in this translation it's, praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you want to read to the end of the sentence? Now wait a minute, I wouldn't want you to take me up on that one. The end of the sentence doesn't come to the end of verse 14. That's how enthusiastic Paul is, as he begins on the subject of praise, and why we should praise. And then if you go through it, you'll see that Paul is adding and adding and adding. [13:27] He chose us in him. And on he goes. In him we have redemption. He lavished on us all wisdom. He made known to us the mystery of his will.

In him we were chosen. In him we were predestined. In order that we might, who were the first to hope in Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. And on and on he goes, pouring it out. Why we should praise God. Why our life should be a great hymn of praise.

Well, that's the first thing I want to tell you, is that in prison, he talks about praise. And in his powerlessness, as he is under the authority of the Roman soldiers, he talks about power. Now the power that he's talking about relates particularly to Easter. If anybody wants to see in history a demonstration of the power of God, the New Testament is very clear that that power is demonstrated in the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[14:43] This is the demonstration of the ultimate power of God in the resurrection of Jesus from the rock-cut tomb behind a great round stone with a body bound with the bandages of death, a broken body, almost in a cast of concrete.

And all that is burst as the power of God has been demonstrated before the whole of history by the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And it's that demonstration of the power of God on which the whole of the Christian church is built. If you take that away, Paul says, we are of all men most miserable.

We have nothing left as Christians. That demonstration of power. And as that first sentence that I got you to read talks about praise God and why we should praise him, the second sentence, which is almost as long and runs from verse 15 to 23, this is in Greek.

You may not find it in the English translation, but in Greek there is, it is one sentence from 15 to 23, praising God for the power, that mighty power which is at work in us, the same power by which Christ was raised from the dead.

[16:19] That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead. that power is that he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in the inner man, that he will give you the power with your mind and with your heart to grasp how wide, how long, how high, how deep is the love of Christ.

So, Paul concludes that the only response to the demonstration of his power is praise.

And that's why he says in 3.20, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to the power that is at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

So, from our imprisonment we praise God because of the demonstration of his power we praise God.

And the third the third word that Paul calls for is from prison to praise to power and if you will excuse the word to piety.

[17:46] That is to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. We have trouble with our politicians because they have high callings in the life of the nation and their lives don't seem to measure up.

We have a much higher calling as Christians and our lives are meant to measure up. Do you want to know what piety means? I made a list here from Ephesians.

What piety means and if you don't like the word then consider the opposite to each of these and then you will know that you're not one of those pious people. But what piety means here is that you speak the truth that you submit to membership in the church that you have anger which is without sin that you don't give the devil a foothold in your life that you give up stealing you deal with bitterness rage anger and brawling in your life you recognize that sexual immorality is inappropriate you make sure there is content to what your words say when you pour them out every day you abandon your secret life turn the light on on the dark side of your life let your ecstasy come from the

spirit not from the bottle you are to be an instant finely tuned to praise

God with psalms hymns spiritual songs music in your heart giving thanks wives are to find a new basis of relationship to their husbands husbands to find a new basis of relationship to their wives we are to be in our relationships a model of Christ sacrificial love of the church children are to look at their relationship to their parents slaves at their relationship to their masters masters to look at their relationships to slaves being themselves slaves of Christ and the whole letter ends with with an appeal to recognize and this is one of the memorable parts of Ephesians the appeal to recognize that in the course of this present world you are going to get battered badly battered and therefore you are told to have a belt a breastplate good boots a shield a helmet a sword because you are going to get battered and you will need that protection once upon a time many years ago before most of you were born I reckon

I went to the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in London I was living there and you had to get up very early in the morning and go downtown and the whole of the inner city of London was cordoned off and you couldn't get in unless you had a pass and you had to be in there before seven o'clock in the morning very early that was the day that Edmund Hillary conquered Mount Everest I think and the newspapers were full of the news of that great achievement and we went there and for hours we listened as little snippets came over the radio to say the Queen is leaving Buckingham Palace the Queen is going down the mall the Queen is going down White Hall the Queen is arriving at Westminster Abbey and then in hushed tones the story of the coronation was coming to us over the thing and that we listened to all this as we sat hour by hour in the stands along by Hyde Park Corner and finally the thing happened that instead of listening on the radio in the distance way down the street you could see hear the cheers of people rising and it came like a great wave all the way up the street as heads of government and heads of the

[22 : 06] Commonwealth and senior military people and all sorts of amazing high profile people in the world came in procession up the road and finally the Queen in her great golden coach driven by six horses or pulled by six horses was there and this great tide of cheers came all the way up as this great moment well you see in between Palm Sunday and Holy Week there is another far more glorious and far more amazing procession that we are to observe again in the days of this week it's a far greater throne to which Christ ascends the throne is his cross and we trace the progression from his triumphal procession into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the procession which in the course of the week we will see the great men of the city the men who are the rulers in the

Sanhedrin the high priests the Roman soldiers the Tetrarch of Galilee the separated and exclusive Pharisees the men of great wealth the aristocratic Sadducees we'll see Nicodemus the senior leader of of the Sanhedrin and that wealthy man Joseph of Arimathea we'll see them all pass in procession through the events of this week and at the heart of the procession will be the person of Jesus his face set like a flint as he makes his way towards his awful enthronement and glorious resurrection and when he does that he sets loose upon the world a huge hymn of praise and thanksgiving which is echoed down through all the ages a hymn which has been heard in the famine stricken people of

Ethiopia a hymn that has burst open prison doors a hymn that has defied death a hymn that has echoed through the deep valley of the shadow of death a hymn which is echoed in our service here this morning and which I trust will creep into your hearts and minds and into all the circumstances of your life so that when next Sunday we gather for church we will join the tide of praise and thanksgiving which will sweep around the whole of the world that's what praise is our piety is that we are in training to offer that sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving the power is that which we praise which God has demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the praise is because no matter what the particular circumstances of your imprisonment are Christ has burst the bonds and you are no longer subject to the tyranny of death all this is the great procession of praise which we mark through the days of this week and which I hope will grab all our hearts and that we may be enabled by God's grace to offer to God that sacrifice of praise and if you have any trouble sit down first thing in the morning on each day of this week and understand what it all means as you read again Paul's letter to the Ephesians Amen Our praise now turns to singing as we turn to the offertory hymn it's 127 to the name of our salvation A and you you you you you you you

CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

[37 : 49] And the building committee will be there to receive your comments and to answer any questions you might have. So please take the time to look at them and give your comments. We're anxious to get your input with respect to these important changes.

And last but not least, please join us for coffee and tea in the Trendle Lounge afterwards. If you're a newcomer, please take the orange card that's in the pew and fill it out and drop it off at the information table so that we can follow up with you.

Thank you. A recessional hymn, 264. A recessional hymn, 264. It's aUTELIS WITH Adventuren Amen.

O Savior, be blessed to your own, with promises gathered, glad, and strong.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty, be holy, come, ride on to life.

[39 : 31] O Christ, your triumphs now begin, your Catholic and Grand-Compersy.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty, the wingest conference of the sky.

O now, with spell and boundary lines, to see the approaching sacrifice.

Ride on, ride on, in majesty, for us and Jesus by this hour.

O now, Father, love this earth I both only serve, my life has gone.

[40 : 39] I am my only majesty in the kingdom of my heart divine.

I am my only majesty in the kingdom of my heart divine.

Would you kneel? For this reason I kneel before the Father from whom the whole family of believers in heaven and on earth will rise to its name.

To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, for him being glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Bye.

[42 : 02] Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye. Bye.

Amen. Amen.