

Faith & Love

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[0 : 00] I'm going to turn together through that chapter that we read now and just help us focus on the first part of this passage that I read previously, beginning in verse 15, Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 15.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

And the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him. Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened so that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, and what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us, he who believed, according to the working of his great might, as he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

He seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, and so on. And just to focus particularly on that first part of the passage this evening, Paul says, I do not cease, verse 16, to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, to give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

We've been working our way through the first chapter of this great epistle, this big letter that Paul wrote to the church, to the new fledgling church in Ephesus at that time, way back in the first century AD.

[1 : 40] And we've seen three things that are true about our salvation. This is the great theme. It's always the great theme that the apostle Paul dwells on, is our salvation.

Ever since he met with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, and his life was turned completely around, and he became Paul the apostle.

Instead of being Saul of Tarshish, the persecutor of the church, the person who he thought could work his way or earn his way into the favor of God by doing all the right things, by dressing in the right way, by attending all the right things, by doing everything from the outside.

When the moment he met with Jesus Christ, his whole life was changed. And all of these things by which he tried to win God's favor, they all just fell to bits.

And he counted them as rubbish, he said. They were just a complete waste of time. And it must be a terrible experience living so many years of your life and being so fervent in what you're doing and then discovering all of a sudden it's all been a complete waste of time.

[2 : 48] And God made him discover, he showed him that, but he turned his life around in such a way that he used him. And he became the greatest, most effective preacher of the gospel ever in the world.

And so, I suppose in the hands of God, what we think is a waste of time, God can turn all that around. And he can, as the Old Testament says, he can repay what the locusts have eaten.

And so, tonight, if you are someone who you feel has spent years and years and years of your life living the wrong way, and you feel, how can I come to God just now?

How can I, after spending all these years in the wrong place, doing the wrong thing, living away from God, what's God going to do with my life now? I'm finished and God surely has nothing to do with me.

You're wrong. God can do anything with a person who's truly prepared to admit his own sin and to come to him in faith. You don't know what the Lord can do with you and how God can turn your life around and how God can use that life once again to his glory and to his praise.

[3 : 59] And that's what counts. God, God's glory. That's what counts in our lives. And so, salvation became the theme. The Apostle Paul was the most fervent preacher of all time.

He was consumed with the gospel. He loved people. He loved to be amongst people so that he could share the gospel with them. And he saw every circumstance, whether he was preaching at the marketplace, whether he was in someone's house, whether he was in the synagogue, or whether he was in the street corner, or whether he was tied, chained to a prison guard.

Every circumstance, wherever he went, was an opportunity to share the Lord Jesus Christ. I guess most people rejected him, just the same way as they would today. Most people had no time to listen to him.

We always think that because so many people were affected through Paul's preaching, that everywhere he went, that everyone listened to him and everyone was converted. That's not the case at all. There were many discouragements in Paul's day, and I'm sure there were many times, many places he went to where nobody would listen to him.

It was the same with the rest of the apostles. But yet it was still, he knew within his own heart that that's the work that God had called him to do, and he was going, even for the sake of one more person. If you'd asked the apostle, you know this, there's only one more person that's going to be converted through your preaching.

[5 : 19] Is it worth carrying on? He would say yes. He would say, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. That's how fired up he always was, and that's what the gospel meant to him because of what Jesus had done for him.

Why was that? Because he had that knowledge of what Jesus, he had that perception of what Jesus did for him.

That's what lay at the very heart of his being. He had a grasp of the cross. That's what he said. He said that he boasted in the cross.

The cross was everything to him. It drove him. He breathed and lived and ate and drank the cross because he somehow was able to see that here is where the son of God himself loved him, Saul of Tarshish, and gave himself for him.

And therefore, that was such a power and such an effect in his life that it meant all the difference between a lazy life and an active life. A life that did nothing for the Lord and a life that was prepared to spend.

[6 : 26] For me, he says, to live is Christ and to die is gain. What lay at the heart of such power and such enthusiasm? I'll tell you. We're going to see it in a few moments.

That he knew his Savior. He knew his Savior. I didn't say that he knew some things about his Savior, but he knew his Savior. And he made a point. That was his great ambition and goal in life was to know his Savior.

And that's what we're going to focus on this evening as he prays. The same thing to be true for the Ephesians. Now, the Apostle Paulie tells us three things that are true about our salvation.

First of all, it's a calling which dates back to before the foundation of the world. We saw that that was a difficult teaching in the Bible. But it's one in which we have to accept whether we can understand it or not.

And I suggested to you that there's nobody who can truly understand this great doctrine that he sets forth at the beginning of this chapter. This doctrine of what we call election. where God has chosen his people before the foundation of the world.

[7 : 29] And then we saw that he described it as redemption in which the slave was set free. He was a slave to sin. Jesus Christ set him free and restored him to himself.

The third thing we saw was that the gospel was an inheritance. An inheritance in which God had given us the riches of the life that he had won for us on the cross.

And then he sealed those gifts to us by the power and by the presence of the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee, he says, of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

That's what he sets out in the first half of this chapter. Now he gets personal with the Ephesians. And he, first of all, he tells them that he is rejoicing in them because of the good gossip that he's heard about them.

Look at the way he starts in verse 15. He says, for this reason, because I have heard of your faith. Now any sentence that begins with the words I have heard, we can describe as gossip.

[8 : 33] The problem is that for the most part when a sentence begins I have heard, it's usually something bad. And there's something within us that loves to hear gossip, isn't there? We're really honest with ourselves.

There's some sinful part of our nature, especially in a community where people know each other that actually takes delight in passing on information that is not helpful and in hearing information that is not helpful and information that can destroy the character of someone even if what we hear is true.

I just thought I would fit that one in in order just to remind me and you of the harmfulness of gossip. the harmfulness of negative, destructive information about people.

That's not how God wants us to live. But what Paul is talking about here is what we might call good gossip. He had heard, he was keeping his ears open, but there was a filter in his ears so he only heard the good things.

I'm sure he heard the bad things as well, but he certainly was not a person to pass on harmful and destructive information. He delighted in what he had heard. And isn't it wonderful that in the first Christians, that's one of the first things that we learn about the first Christian church.

[9 : 58] You know, we're always asking ourselves, how did the first Christian, the Christian church live and worship and act and behave in those days?

And it's a fascinating thing to try and grasp. I don't suppose we'll ever get to grips with it fully, but here's one thing that we do know, that they delighted in one another.

They treasured one another and they kept in touch with one another and they wanted to hear more and more about what was going on in other congregations and in cities and towns where the gospel was reaching for the first time.

And here is Paul in that circumstance and he is absolutely thrilled to know when he thinks of men and women who not so long ago were worshipping idols, they were Roman citizens, they were Greeks, they were worshipping a whole multitude of gods that were going the wrong direction and they were suffering the effects of a life that was completely dark and pagan and idolatrous and now they've come to meet the same Jesus as he has met and their lives have been turned around in the same way and they're now, their lives come down to two things.

First of all, faith in the Lord Jesus and love towards all the saints. Now these are the two marks of a Christian. Faith in the Lord Jesus and love towards all the saints.

[11 : 25] I want to ask you this evening, do you have, do you trust in Jesus Christ alone as your saviour, as the payment of your sin?

That's what faith in Jesus Christ means. It means that you have taken your life and you have entrusted your whole life to Jesus, your future to him and you have asked him to forgive and cleanse you from all your sins and you've done so because you've come, you've seen what he has done on the cross.

That's what the cross was all about, the payment for our sins and faith in Jesus Christ is when we personally come to Calvary and when we see what he has done for us and we entrust ourselves, my all, to Jesus.

When I leave behind my life of darkness and sin, the old person that was once me and now I'm trusting myself completely to Jesus Christ, I'm asking him to cleanse me and wash me and to lead me from this day forward and to open up my heart and to renew my heart and to give me that promise of everlasting life and that's what he promises to everyone who believes.

That's what faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is. But faith is coupled with love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Always. There are no exceptions to this. The person who trusts and loves Jesus is a person who loves and trusts his brothers and sisters in Christ.

[12 : 57] And I want us to focus very, very closely and pay very close attention to what Paul is saying here because what's coming out here is the immensity of the affection that these first Christians had for one another.

Of course, at many times they were under pressure. They were being persecuted for their faith. And you know, there's something strangely binding about persecution, isn't there?

Can you imagine what it would be like if our lives were in danger because we were Christians, because we're meeting here tonight? I think our love for one another would be tenfold to what it is this evening. Because we live in such an easy world and because we don't have to face the danger that other people have to face, then we can afford to be complacent.

Well, maybe that's a bad thing. And maybe the only way for us to turn that around is for the Lord to allow things to happen to us. I don't know what the future of this country is.

I don't know. I think we can all see how things are going and things are not becoming any more friendly towards and accepting towards the gospel. Who knows? Maybe our young people are facing a time of persecution and maybe they're not so young are facing a time of persecution and who knows?

[14 : 11] Maybe there may be some benefits from that. Benefits from that. I always remember what my friend, Pastor Simon said to me in the Karen, he said that we don't want to go back to our own land yet because we can see what the Lord is doing in our persecution.

He's converting people. He's bringing people to himself. There are people who were Buddhists and being converted, being changed to the Lord and coming to worship Jesus.

that's very often what persecution does. God is able to bring out of persecution what nothing else can bring.

So that's one benefit. But I can't help thinking of this great mark of what it is to be a Christian, this great, this immeasurable mark of love towards all the saints.

And I can't help thinking also of what the Lord himself said, that by this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one towards another. And this was an obvious love.

[15 : 28] This was a genuine love. It wasn't just a polite love. It wasn't just an expression of kindness and expression of goodwill the way we always are at this time of year particularly.

But this was a genuine caring love that was interested in one another. and that love was made obvious. In other words, these people were known, the faith of these people were known by their affection, their actions towards all the saints.

And I can't help thinking at this time of year that, you know, we don't know what the future will bring for any one of us. We don't know how many of us here in our congregation here will be with us next year.

Maybe I won't be here. Maybe you won't be here. Are we making the most of one another while we have them? While you have me and I have you, are we making the most? Are we treasuring the moments?

I can't help thinking of those who were with us this time last year who aren't with us this year. And we never expected them to be taken away. That's the way that life is in a world that's full of uncertainty.

[16 : 36] And I can't help being reminded of that when I read about the love in the first century church towards all the saints, treasuring one another and making the most of every opportunity that we have and trying to avoid all these times when we so easily fall out, when we so easily fall out, trying to see the best in one another and esteeming, as the Bible says, esteeming one another better than ourselves.

So this is a passage that begins with good gossip rather than bad gossip. And it's also a passage in which we find prayer instead of wishes.

Prayer instead of worship. Good gossip rather than bad gossip and prayer instead of wishes. The Apostle Paul says that when he heard of the genuineness of the faith of the people of Ephesus, he started praying.

Now you might feel that that is rather strange. It's kind of maybe the opposite to what you expect when we think of prayer for the church. We think naturally of the gospel going to people who don't know Christ that they will be converted.

And of course, of course, our prayer is tonight that men and women, boys and girls who hear the gospel and those who don't hear the gospel will come to hear the gospel in some way and that through hearing the gospel that they will come to a living relationship with Jesus Christ and come to him.

[18 : 06] That's our prayer. Of course, it's our fervent prayer. Is it not? But what Paul tells us here is that there's a sense in which it was when they were converted that he started praying for them.

I'm sure he prayed for them long ago but there's another sense in which he prays for them and he prays different things for them now but his prayer is no less intense. He prays with a fervency and an intensity and urgency.

He hasn't become complacent. That's what we do, isn't it? We pray for somebody to become converted and then we stop praying for them once they are converted. That's a disaster. A complete disaster.

Because there's one prayer for a person who isn't converted that they will come to the Lord. But there is another equally fervent, equally urgent prayer once a person is converted.

Paul tells us that. First of all, he gives thanks for them. He gives thanks that the Lord and his grace has worked in their hearts and so that they too are able to rejoice in the Lord as he has done and able to go back into the years and to the eternity itself and to know that they are saved because God has called them out of darkness and into his light.

[19 : 17] But he also prays for them, specifically for them and we'll see that next time, what he specifically prays for them. But first of all, he gives thanks to them for them, remembering them in his prayers.

Now here is what he prays for and this is what I want to concentrate on for the five or ten minutes that remain because I'm not going to stay long tonight. It's a cold night and it's perhaps I don't know what the weather is going to be like later on and I'm going to stop early.

Here is what he prays for. He prays specifically. He prays specifically that God will work in the hearts and minds of those who have already been converted and here's one solution for those of you who complain quite rightly so.

It's not a complaint as such. It's a real problem for some people, for most of us from time to time that we don't know what to pray for when we go to prayer. We want to pray.

We know it's right to pray and we wish we could pray properly. We wish we knew how to pray and what to pray for. What does God want me to pray for? We know how important prayer is in the life of a Christian.

[20 : 24] It is. And yet, we hear it all the time. I've experienced it myself. You go to prayer and you're lost for words. You don't know what to pray for.

But the Bible, if you listen to the prayers in the Bible, they can be immensely helpful. And here's one helpful thing. Where Paul prays for his fellow Christians.

In other words, if you don't know what to pray for tonight, look around you. Look at the people you know. You say, I'm sure I don't need to pray for them. That person's an old Christian. That person's been on the road for 20, 30, 40 years.

That person is far more advanced than I am in the faith. What do they need to be prayed for? You don't know what struggles that person is going through. Even if they're 20, 30, 40 years on the road.

Don't ever think you don't need to pray for old Christians, young Christians, struggling Christians, Christians who seemingly are on top of the world. I know how the impression can be given that there's no problem whatsoever.

[21 : 25] I know how perhaps us ministers can give that impression because of our fervency and because we can because we're in preach. Well, I don't need to be prayed for. Don't kid yourself. Don't ever make that mistake.

You see these men there in leadership, positions of leadership in the church, God has put them into positions of leadership. You think, they don't need to be prayed for. Of course they need to be prayed for. Do you think they don't struggle with many aspects in the Christian life?

Old Christians struggle. Middle-aged Christians struggle. Young Christians struggle. We need to be on our knees. And if the Apostle Paul found it necessary to pray and if he believed in prayer to the effect, to the point where he knew that it was through prayer that God was going to bring about what the Ephesian people needed.

He wasn't of the mind, well, God is in control. He's sovereign over all things. Whatever will be, will be. God knows. He's able to do anything he wants.

Nothing is impossible with God. He's able to work all things together for good to those who love God. I'm just going to sit back and let him do it. That wasn't the Apostle at all. In fact, the more the Apostle grasped the sovereignty and the power of God, the more he prayed.

[22 : 44] because somehow or other he was able to grasp the effectiveness of prayer and the necessity of prayer to the point where he almost couldn't stop.

And you know, the more we grasp that same effectiveness and that same necessity of prayer, that what we're actually doing is coming to meet with God and to come to ask him for what we need and what we want.

Did you hear what we sung in that psalm? Psalm 37. You know, we're so familiar with the psalms we sometimes become so complacent and we lose sight of what they say. Do you know what it says in Psalm 37?

Listen to this. Let this go away with you into the night. Think about this. Ruminant on it. Reflect on it. Believe it. Live it. Listen to what he says.

He says this. Delight yourself in God and he will give your heart's desire to you.

[23 : 52] Let me say that again. Because to me that is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. And if that doesn't drive us to our knees, I don't know what will.

Delight yourself in God and he will give you the desires of your heart.

That is God's promise to you. God will give you the desires of your heart as you delight yourself in God.

So our first prayer is Lord show me above everything else. Show me how to delight myself in you. And you know God will show you that.

He will answer that prayer. And what you're saying is what you're asking him to do is to make your will and your desires conform to his will and his desires.

[24 : 54] And as we do so, our life changes and our minds change and our hearts change. And as we pray that prayer and as we live that prayer, God brings us to be shaped and molded and fashioned according to his will and his purpose.

Is that what we want this evening? I hope it is. I hope it is more than anything else. To do thy will I take delight. Is our desire conformed?

Is it tied in? Does it conform to what God's desire? Is it synchronized? Are our desires, our wishes, our longings synchronized to God's desire and his will for us?

And so this is all about prayer, isn't it? Here's a man and he's telling us he's telling us not how much he prays but what he prays for. He prays for them and he longs for them and he prays specifically for three things for three things and we're going to look at that next time but he prays specifically for this for the Lord to give them in verse 17 a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.

Now did you see that as we read that passage there? I didn't read it with very much enthusiasm at all. Let me read it in a different sense altogether. This is what he prays for. And if the Ephesian church needed this then we need it.

[26 : 34] This is what the church needs in every age. It's in the word of God it's in the Bible because God wants us to know it he wants us to understand it he wants us to have it. Here is what it is. Here is Paul's prayer that the Lord may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

Did you see that? The knowledge of him. Now these Christians lived in a world that was full of danger full of uncertainty full of temptation Paul could have despaired and I'm sure that there was I'm sure he was struggling with this thought how are these Christians these new born babies in Christ going to live in a world that is so hostile to them.

they could they faced exactly the same dangers as you and I face in a world today and Paul I'm sure was just as concerned for them and for their future as you and I would be for one another as we ought to be that's why we pray for one another because we know the kind of temptations there are in a world full of mass media full of images on TV and on the internet and full of of of the wrong company these people could have got into the wrong company they could so easily backslide some of them did they could fall into temptation they could be they could begin to believe another message that wasn't the message of the gospel some of them did they could start falling out with one another and start fighting with each other they could turn out to be lazy about their faith and end up failing to live as God wanted them to live and all of these all of these different things exactly the same situation as you and I maybe in a different form but they faced exactly the same situations and he doesn't go into any of those and neither does he produce a list of what to do and what not to do as Christians

I'm not saying that we can live any way as we want but what I am saying is that we understand what Paul is praying for here we won't want to live in a different way to what God wants us to live and what the heart of what Paul is praying here is this that the objective the aim and the goal of every one of us as God's people is this that I may know him that's it that's it we say well I know him anyway I've been converted what is it to be converted but to come to know or come to faith in Jesus Christ and that's true do you think you know God as you ought to do you think you've reached the point at which you don't need to know anymore in many ways we're at the beginning when a person comes to faith in Christ he's at the very beginning of his of his education in Jesus and it's not an academic education it's a personal knowledge of the personal

God and so when a person comes to faith in Christ they begin to take the first steps as they come to know him and the trouble begins when they stop getting to know God that was Paul's great desire he wanted that I may know him he says and the power of his resurrection that was his great desire you would have thought that of all people the apostle Paul knew God more than anybody else did and yet that was his great desire to know more and more and more of the Lord who he had come to know and come to serve and we can only do that by getting to know the Bible and by getting to know who God is and what God is having come to know him do we want to know our saviour do we want to know everything that there is to know about him even at this time of year as people talk about God becoming man the birth at Bethlehem do you know what that means do I know what it means in order for me to know what that means then I have to go back I have to start with God as Trinity the first person the second person the third person of the Godhead do I try my best to understand what that means

[30 : 47] God the Father God the Son God the Holy Spirit do I have any idea what it meant for the second person of the Godhead to come all the way down into this world for the one who created the universe in all its majesty and its unthinkable vastness its indescribable vastness and that's only what we know and for the maker and the creator of that universe to come all the way down into this world and to become a baby do we know what it meant for God to take our nature to become man without changing from what he always was for him to remain as God and yet at the same time become man you know when we ask these questions we discover we don't really know God at all but if he has come for me and if he has died on the cross to save me and if he has told me tonight that what I need more than anything else is to know him then surely my prayer tonight is that I may know him more and more and more and the more

I know the more I grow and the more I grow the more I will serve him and and be faithful to him and obey him and to be guided by him you know the psalmist said give understanding unto me so that I will keep your law that's what we pray for tonight give understanding to me so that I will keep your word let's pray our father in heaven we ask now that you will bless your word to us and we pray that you will send us away from here with something to think about that we may dwell upon these words that we have been studying together we ask that you will show us the enthusiasm the example of the apostle Paul as one who truly loved the Lord and who truly wanted to live for his savior we pray that we might be those who live for our savior as well and who can make an impact as the Holy Spirit works among us in Jesus name

Amen be upon just thank you thank you