

Thanksgiving and Prayer

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[0:00] Good evening. It's been great to just listen to the testimonies of how God has been working in people's lives.

And I'm sure if we'd had all night, we could have just gone round and gone round and testified to God's goodness. And I hope that that's a really encouragement for all of you here, because I've certainly felt encouraged listening to people's stories.

All right. Josh, have you got the words on this? Yeah, so I'm going to read it from the screen. So I'm going to be reading from Ephesians chapter one, starting at verse 15.

If I'd had more time, I'd probably have started from verse one and read the whole chapter. I would encourage you to go back and read the earlier part of the chapter this week when you have a moment, because it's just such a powerful passage.

But this is the particular bit that God led me to for this evening. For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

[1:13] 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.

I pray also 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 the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him 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 title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.

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.

Amen. Amen. Okay, so as I said, if I'd have more time, I'd have read the previous section, but basically it starts off talking about how we received every spiritual blessing in Christ, and how he called us before the creation of the world, and he gave us salvation.

[2:46] And it's just a reminder of who we are in Christ, but a really exciting and precious passage. And so what I want to talk about this evening is thanksgiving and prayer, which ties in very nicely with the times of prayer, and expressing thanks that we're having this evening.

But I want to check this passage slightly backwards, in that at the end of that passage, it talked about Jesus being seated at the right hand of the Father.

And a good place when we come to prayer is to start by recognizing who Jesus is. So I just want to take the passage backwards a little bit, because I want to say this is the key thing that we need to understand and remind ourselves of.

Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. He is in a place of authority and a place of significance. And Romans 8 talks about Jesus being at the right hand of God.

And do you know what he's doing when he's there for us? He's not having a rest, putting his feet up. He is interceding for each one of us. So when we come to God with our intercessions, we can remember that Jesus is already at the right hand of the Father, and is interceding for us.

[4:07] And not only that, that bit of the passage also talks about the fact that Jesus is exalted far above all powers and dominions.

He is superior to every power that we might come across. If you look across the world at the moment, there are lots of political leaders who are flexing their various political muscles and all trying to prove how big and important they are and how their particular nation or their particular way

of thinking is better than everybody else's and that they have the answers.

But Scripture reminds us that Jesus is the one who is above all. He is above all powers. So when we come in intercession, we shouldn't be looking at the world.

It's okay to pray for the world, but we need to fix our eyes on Jesus and remember that he has the ultimate power, the ultimate authority. And when we pray, we are praying to Almighty God.

So then I just wanted to go back and look through this passage at Paul's prayers for the Ephesians. First of all, in this passage, he gives thanks for them.

[5:18] He says, Every time I hear about you, every time I think about you and your faith in Jesus and your love for one another, I give thanks. In fact, I think, I can't remember if this version or another version, it says, I can't stop giving thanks.

Paul is just overwhelmed with thankfulness and he wants to give thanks for his brothers and sisters in Christ. In particular, in this passage, he's talking about his brothers and sisters in Ephesus, but we see him in doing it elsewhere as well.

One of the first things he wants to do is to give thanks. And we know that when we read Paul's letters, often he had other things to say to the churches as well, but this is his first response. I want to give thanks for your faith.

And then he says, I pray that you will receive the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that God will give you a fresh revelation of who Jesus is.

Christianity isn't something that just happens at a single point in time. Our faith grows over time. We continue, if we are willing, to receive fresh revelation of who Jesus is.

[6:22] And we receive fresh infilling of his spirit, of his wisdom. And what's the reason for that? Paul says, so that you may know him better.

You may know Jesus better. Our faith is about relationship with God. Next month, we're coming back to our church vision statement about seeking to be with Jesus, become like Jesus and do what he did.

To do that, we need fresh wisdom, fresh revelation. And Paul goes on to say, I want to pray that you may know the hope to which you have been called.

It's not just a sort of vague hope that's somewhere in the future, but we talk, scripture talks elsewhere about hope being an anchor for the soul.

We can trust in God. We can know that our hope is secure. And Paul says, I pray that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened, which I think is a lovely phrase, you know.

[7:23] So, in your inner being, you will understand anew who Jesus is. If you look in the New Living Translation, it says, I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light.

Just think about when we have the carol service and it's all dark and then we start lighting the candles and the building is flooded with light. And I know it's not an exact illustration because we can't turn all the lights off completely when we're here, but just think of that image of a room suddenly being flooded with light.

Paul prays that for the Ephesians, that their hearts will be flooded with light. He prays that they know the riches of their inheritance. He reminds them that they have an inheritance in Christ.

Peter says that's an inheritance that will never spoil or fade. What God has promised us is eternal. And then Paul says, I pray that you'll understand God's power for those who believe.

When we pray, we're calling on the name of the one who is all powerful and we can trust in that. So just taking a little bit from that about how we can pray for ourselves and for others.

[8:38] Let's be thankful for one another. Some days that might feel like hard work. Some days we might feel grumpy or we might think, I wish that person didn't do that because it's really annoying.

To be fair, they probably think the same about you. But let's be thankful for one another. God has placed us here in a family together to love and to care for one another and to serve him together.

So let's be thankful and be specific. So rather than just, well, I thank you that I'm part of Whitby Christian Fellowship, which is great, but thank you for that person, for what they do in the church.

Thank you for this person who really encouraged me. And by the way, you're allowed to go and thank them too as well as talking to God about it. Let's pray for one another that we will grow in our knowledge and love of God, that we will spend more time with Jesus, we will become more like Jesus, we will become more equipped and willing and able to do what Jesus did.

Let's pray for one another that we remember who we are in Christ, that we have been called into his kingdom, that we have been called to serve him.

[9:48] Following on from what John said this morning, we have been called to be fruitful for him. And let's bring our intercessions in the light of God's incomparably great power, the power that raised Jesus from the dead, our God is almighty, all-powerful, and we can come to him with confidence and know that he will listen to us and answer us.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for the reminder in this passage of who you are and of your great and almighty power.

Father, thank you that you give us fresh revelation of who Jesus is and of who we are in him. And Father, as we spend time later on this evening and as we go home praying for ourselves and for others, I pray that you'd help us to focus on Jesus who is seated at your right hand, interceding for us and alongside us.

In his precious name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.