

Prayer for Spiritual Strength

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[0 : 00] So now let's turn to the passage we've read together this morning. Ephesians in chapter 3, as I said, Derek intended to look at verses 14 to 21.

His title was Won Through Prayer. Well, perhaps Derek will want to pick up on that if he's given opportunity in the near future. But I've put a few thoughts together here, hopefully that will be of use this morning.

We begin at verse 14, which is, of course, you'll have noticed virtually a repeat of verse 1. Verse 1 is, for this reason, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of eugenitals, and then he takes a step sideways, and he says, surely you have heard.

He digresses for the moment. But then he comes back at verse 14, and he repeats, for this reason, I knew before the Father.

And I want to begin by just noticing the fact that here we are entering, as it were, the mind of the apostle Paul. Here is the apostle Paul applying a bit of logic.

[1 : 21] Here is the thought processing of the apostle Paul. Notice in this little passage, 14 to 21, verse 16, for example, I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being.

So that, at the beginning of verse 17. And in verse 19, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled.

You see, he's thinking. He's looking at certain ideas, and he's putting them together, and he says, well, there's consequences to my actions.

And there are consequences. Somebody gave me this glass of water just a wee while ago. They turned on the tap. There's a certain consequence to that.

Ordinarily water will come out. Somebody came here this morning and turned on lights. They pressed the switch. Lights came on. We know we work on this basis every day.

[2 : 31] We take certain actions and certain consequences follow. Now that's where we kick off with the apostle Paul here.

For this reason, I kneel. There's the doing where, there's the action. For this reason, I kneel. But he's going to say more.

Of course he is. But we need to notice. We really need to feel this, to understand this. This is not just the actions of a mere pragmatist.

You know, if you go around the streets, I saw a group of cyclists this morning. They were, I don't know if there's an event on in Edinburgh. Maybe you'd know about it. But they were all dressed in these day glow tops.

They were mature folk in old-fashioned bicycles. Not penny farthings, but older bikes. You know the ones. More like bone shakers than the modern ones. And I saw them coming around the corner.

[3 : 32] I had to wait in order to turn right. And as they turned around, one lady came off her bike. And just the other day, I'd been saying to my wife, you know, these roads are so poor, I don't know how these cyclists manage.

She came off. They could have been much worse than it was, you know. But as you turn these corners, as you come to these traffic lights, councils tend nowadays, don't they, to put double yellow lines there?

Well, you put double yellow lines there so people don't park their vehicles there. If people park their vehicles there, it's more likely moving vehicles won't see pedestrians and accidents result.

So they apply this logic. They think the thing through. They say, if we do this, well, this will be the consequence. And that's what Paul's doing here.

But he's not just like the surveyor or the engineer for the local authority who says, well, we need some yellow paint here. And then we'll not have accidents.

[4 : 39] He's talking of something so much more significant. His logic, his flow of thought is founded upon a personal experience and relationship with the living God.

And that's what you and I, I hope this day, are interested in. He has this living relationship. Let me take you back to the beginning of chapter two.

He says, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

The spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us, he says. He includes himself. All of us who lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature. You see, we're all in this together, Paul is saying.

You go on in that chapter and he will speak here. Ah, but now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

[5 : 46] For he himself is our peace. He made the two one and destroyed the barrier and so on. And then he came and he preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near for through him.

We both have access to the father by one spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

This is what is in Paul's insides. This is what is moving him. This is what is making him say, now you folks, I'm writing too.

I'm using my head here and I'm just thinking things through. But this is no small matter I have to speak to you about. For I am speaking to you as one who has come to know the amazing grace of the living God personally.

And it is upon that basis that I have something to say, probably otherwise he would have said, I've got nothing to say. And he would have put his pen away.

[6 : 55] But he has this to say. There is this relationship of which he longs to speak. At one point in chapter three, verse eight, he says, well in verse seven, he's been given this great ministry.

He's been given this understanding, this clarity on the mystery of Christ. But then he says, although I am less than the least of all God's people. You see, there's no trumpet blowing with Paul.

He's just got Christ. As he says elsewhere, he says, I came to preach only Christ crucified. That was his concern.

And that's what's firing up inside him as he now speaks to these people in this relatively simple, in this relatively simple manner.

We have to remind ourselves, I think, when we read Pistles by Paul, this man was once the one who produced widows and orphans.

[7 : 53] He used to go around chasing after people of the way, Christian people. And he would go with all of his authority as a prominent religious character.

And he would chase them down. You imagine being like that. Having this guy coming after you, somebody whispers in your ear, I hear Paul's on his way or Saul's on his way.

Take cover. It happens in the world nowadays, my friends. Let us pray for such folk. Let us remember them, the ones who were being hunted down for loving Christ.

Well, he used to do that. But now he doesn't bring forth widows and orphans. He brings forth brothers and sisters in Christ. And to them, he's addressing himself here.

And he's addressing themselves regarding, well, the sovereign God. That's the way I'll put it. But in a such a way as to make the whole thing more intimate.

[9 : 00] For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

He presents to us what Jesus presents to us when he was asked to teach us to pray. He said, pray like this, our Father who is in heaven.

And this is what Paul is only doing himself. The fatherhood of the sovereign God. Don't think of God out there distant, the great clock worker, clock maker, the one who's brilliant, who has created everything.

But he's out there. Think of God as he is in his son, Emmanuel, God with us.

And God has this great family, ever increasing. The father of an enlarging household. None can number the size.

[10 : 10] No census can appreciate, approximate the size of his great family. This living edifice that is constantly being built.

It's been going on like this for centuries, Jerusalem, Greece, Rome, up into Northern Europe, heading eastwards, over into Britain, over into America, over into Africa, India, China, Korea, Australia.

Keep going. This family is throughout the whole world. The Lord is building his church.

Now you and I, we need to hold on to this because we are constantly being told by those who would oppose the will and work of God that Christianity is in decline.

It's rubbish. God is building his church and he cannot be prevented from doing so.

[11 : 33] But nonetheless, we have lessons to learn. One of which is, he wants us to know him as Father in Heaven.

I believe this is so very important to Paul for this reason I kneel before the Father. Don't, don't, don't tolerate the notion of your God as God.

A sort of hard-minded, hard-hearted notion of God. He is the Father, whose soul loves us to send his one and only Son for you and for me.

Not for them, or thousands of years ago, them too, but for you and for me today.

And again I would ask, is anybody here not yet come to Jesus as Savior, whom the Father has sent in his love?

[12 : 46] Have you not yet come? Shall I stop now and let you think about it? Have you come to Jesus, sinner that you are?

How many will receive you as you are? Don't put it off.

The Father, so loved the world, he sent his only Son. Do not turn your back on his gift of love.

The Father of whom Paul is speaking here makes full provision for his children.

Verse 16 we read, I pray that out of his glorious riches, well who can measure his glorious riches?

[13 : 55] He prays that out of these glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being.

Any of us who are fathers of mums, we tend to make provision, don't we, for our children? We tend to seek to care for our children.

We seek to provide food for them, that they might grow, provide health services for them, that they might remain healthy.

We tend to provide schooling for them, that they might fully develop, shelter over them. We would all of us, I'm sure, if the shelter was limited, we would say children you take the shelter, I'll remain outside.

We understand the whole idea of providing according to parenthood. Well here is the Father making entire total provision for his children.

[15 : 05] And it speaks here of the spirit in verse 16, working that power of God in your inner being, strengthening in the inner being.

You see we need, we who profess Christ, we need to be exercising ourselves at our fullest capacity. We are not to say oh well I'm a Christian now and therefore well let's just mosey along and see how things go.

No we are to exercise ourselves, we are to look for these incredibly powerful workings that God is prepared to minister as Father to his children.

I was once told by a physiotherapist that we have what are called core muscles inside. I don't have them anymore.

Mine went away a long time ago, they went on holiday I think and lost the passport and they never got home again. My core muscles have gone but we have them apparently, maybe some of you are really into exercising them.

[16 : 16] Maybe are you into exercising your inner man, your inner being. That's the point that Paul wants. I'm sure Paul like any of us would appreciate it a healthy figure.

But he was much more concerned with the inner man, the inner woman, that is the Father's child. That is the purchase of Christ.

It's not easy you know for Christ to dwell within is it? You know elsewhere Paul he talks about may the word dwell richly within you. That's not easy is it?

There's so many points of opposition in life. There are so many distractions. There are so many others who want to take up our time.

We hear of the flesh, the world, the devil all opposed to this development of the inner being, the inner man.

[17 : 21] That which enables Christ to dwell within. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

You see is this our prayer my friends? Ross was talking about prayer meetings to be forthcoming. We are always involved in prayer meetings.

Are we praying for this mighty power of the Lord to be granted to us that we be strengthened inwardly?

We all of us acknowledge the feebleness of just having some truth up here and we get into disputes.

We talk about fine points of theology maybe. That's been a blight on the church for such a long time. Dry dusty stuff.

[18 : 27] You can't call it rubbish because it's truth but we can make the truth to be so less glorious than it is when we don't make application of it.

Paul is saying I pray for your inner beings that you might know the Holy Spirit from the Father empowering you in your inner being.

That you become the children of God so obvious so that people look at you and say oh that's different and I have to ask myself how much do I know of that?

How many times have I been approached by somebody saying you're different? We're challenged by God's word aren't we? Be thankful.

If you're challenged by God's word don't shy away, don't hide and say oh dear that's embarrassing. Say thank you God. Thank you Father for challenging me, for showing me that there is life in me.

[19 : 32] You have done it. Now do it again. Do it some more. Holy Spirit of God come and empower me in my inner being that I might love the brethren, that I might honor my Lord and my God and my Savior, that I might love my enemy, that I might not fear what lies ahead.

The death is welcome for then things get better. You see it changes your mindset when we understand the Father's love and the Father's ability and His glorious riches to grant to us that we be established more and more and more and more and then we take on the likeness of our blessed Savior Jesus.

We have in this little passage a presentation of the work of the Trinity. We have the Father, we have the Christ, we have the Spirit, our God in His concern for us.

Little you, little me, with all your failings, with all your sins, the sins that you will never ever, ever wish to disclose even to your closest friend, your dearest love, your soul ashamed, but you can take them to your Father for Jesus has prayed for you.

Don't know if you know the Eden Project. It was a place in Cornwall near where Caroline and I lived.

[21 : 17] It was built about 15 years ago. It's these great glass plastic domes in which very exotic plants and trees and so on have been planted and now grow.

River and fauna, you know, built upon a rather ugly old China clay pit. I was there, we were there when it was being built and it looked a horrible, horrible place, treacherous looking ponds of ugly colored water and so on and so forth, sludge and slush and filth.

And now it's this glorious thing. A beautiful place. But we were there when it was being built and we saw all of the work going on to establish what now is.

You saw great rolls of coconut matting, I assume it was, being rolled out onto the sides to hold fast this slippery clay, you know. And you saw these machines getting rid of all the filthy sludge, the poisonous elements and so on.

You saw the foundations going in that the trees would go up. And in this passage, the Lord has given us these two ideas that we might be rooted and established or founded in the love of Christ.

[22 : 47] It's what the Father wants us to know. That's what He wants us to experience. We're not to say this was for then, this is for the exceptional, this is for ordinary people to whom Paul wrote.

And that includes you and me. He wants us to know this firm establishment in our inner beings so that the mighty awareness of Jesus might be present and might grow, might blossom, might flourish.

The awesomeness of knowing Jesus. We need that work of the Holy Spirit to reveal that and to enable us to bear that knowledge of Jesus.

There are times in history when people have been visited in special ways and they have said things like, oh Lord, no more, I cannot take any more of your self revelation.

It is simply too glorious. And these were very often people who knew great measures of the Spirit of God in their inner beings.

[24 : 04] It is awesome, the glad tidings, good news, blessings that the Father has for His children.

And the cost of granting this to His people, to His children, the value of it, how do we estimate it?

Well, only by looking at Paul's words, we remember that it has cost His Son.

But he wants to speak rather of the love of the Son, the love that comes through the Son. And we are given a few words which we need ourselves to en flesh.

We read here that you may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

How wide is the love of Christ? How do you measure it, you see? How wide is it? Well, you see, it takes in all types. Of ourselves, we might be disinclined to accept certain people.

[25 : 15] We say, what's surely not. That person, that person's a terrible person. Well, I wasn't so, Paul, a terrible person in what he did.

But he became one of the special people of God. You know, the breadth of the love of God in Christ is so high.

It takes in male, female, a color. It takes in nationality. It takes in socially unacceptable.

It takes in the prisoner. It takes in the self-righteous. It takes in all manner of people. Let us not put any limits on it, but let's just appreciate it for its width, its breadth.

And what about the length? The length of the love of God. We have to put something to these words, you see. We're just given these few words.

[26 : 13] What about the length? Think about it. It's very important that we think on these things. We meditate upon the word of God, the length of the love. Newton, what does he say?

If I've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun. He then goes on to speak. I can't remember the words, but it's, you know, even when the same period of time has come and gone, well, we've only just begun.

That's how long it is. I have this lovely verse. I've always loved this verse, and it's in Revelation. It's relevant to, for me, anyway.

I want to share it with you. We have this image in Revelation 7, for the lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd.

This is how long? And the shepherd is there, and he will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[27 : 24] He will be there, leading time without end. How wide? It's all inclusive. All sinners.

How long? Unending. How deep?

Can anybody tell me, maybe somebody will be kind enough to tell me before I leave, how deep it was, the descent of Jesus, so that he could raise me from eternal ruin?

How deep did he descend? We don't know the experience of Jesus. We don't know what he went through, but surely it's becoming for us to pray the Father, to give us the help of the Spirit, so that in the inner man we can contemplate these things, we can delve these things, we can say, oh, show me more of your love, my Lord Jesus, that I might show you more in response, and that I might live for you.

How deep did he descend? And how high has he risen, each and every one of us who are his today? Can you yet speak of the heights of glory to which you are granted?

[28 : 48] It's yours. It's never to be taken away. It's yours. Because it says here that you may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

And to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

It's just immense. But that's our Father. That's our Savior. That's the Holy Spirit who is our comforter.

The three persons of the glorious Godhead who are interested in you and me. We'll never fully grasp it.

But we are to say thank you and receive it. It's not selfish to take. It's what he wants us to do. And they were given in verse 20 these words, now to him, who is able to do immeasurably more than all

we ask for, imagine according to his power.

[30 : 02] That is, it worked within us. It's not just what we can ask. It's what we can imagine. To immeasurably more than that, that's what he has in store.

You see his glorious riches, we just cannot measure them. But they are limitless. They are inexhaustible.

That is his purpose, his intent, his desire that we, his children, come to his table, that he feed us and provide for us and nourish us and grow us.

That we come on with him day by day, week by week, year by year, coming to a fuller expression of who we are, his redeemed people.

We need, we must know more of coming to terms with our potential in him.

[31 : 05] Very quickly, a few points to notice about Paul as he reflects on this truth he knows for himself and he wants others to know of, hence his prayer.

Three quick points. Notice his humility. Please notice his humility there. For this reason I kneel before the Father.

Notice the reverence in the Apostle Paul here. Now you and I, we all know there are different ways in Scripture, different postures people adopt.

Some, their eyes are raised to heaven, their hands are raised, some lie flat on their stomachs in prayer, some sit with their heads bowed.

Paul kneels. I once went to visit a lady in the first congregation I was ever in. She was a lovely older lady but she was very quaint and I never quite knew what was coming when I visited her and one day she just came out and said, Mr. Mure, I always got my title, Mr. Mure, let us kneel in prayer.

[32 : 16] So we had to kneel in prayer and Mr. Mure suffered for days after his, he's got football knees you see and my knees were, or one of my knees was in a terrible state but she believed oh you have to kneel in prayer.

Well let's not be caught up with adopting postures. It's the humility of the man here that stands out. I kneel before the Father. You see he's got this wonderful sense of the intimacy of his relationship but he's also got the reverence that goes with it.

He is the Father in heaven as Jesus presents us with that fact. When you pray, pray, our Father in heaven.

And that is what we see I think in Paul. But again, yes this is a prayer but notice he is praying. He is a praying man and he prays lovingly for others.

He is so taken up with others. People here, people there. He prays even though he's imprisoned he's praying across the lands and across the seas.

[33 : 26] He remembers people here and there. He seems to be praying for them more than himself. And even though he is in prison you cannot prison, imprison prayer.

That's a wonderful thing you know. You cannot imprison thought. You cannot imprison prayer. Sometimes we can be imprisoned by failing health. We can be laid up in our beds of sickness. Maybe not with any great prospect of ever leaving our beds of sickness but we're not imprisoned for the throne of grace is always open to her.

And finally God's glory. There's 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

As Paul thought on his great God and Savior through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit and recognized the immense glorious riches that are in store for him and for all to whom he is to take this great message now revealed.

[34 : 46] He says oh let us be those who pray reverently to the glory of God mindful of one another, bearing one another's burdens, going forward coming to a fulfilled sense of the potential for which our Heavenly Father intends for us.

Well I'll leave it there. Pray that God would add blessing to his word.

Let us pray. Lord our gracious God we thank you for your word. We pray that you would apply it to us each one. That we would know more and more of what it is to hunger and thirst after those things you would have us know.

You would have us experience. You would have us share one with the other. Look what the Lord has done for my soul. That you would have us be more and more the visible people who are visible because of their loveliness and because of the fact that they have something precious to impart to a society that is groaning in its lustness, in its darkness.

Oh Lord our gracious God help us to be more than we are, to be what you would have us be. And this we pray that we might develop as people who live to your glory.