

Our Prayer For You

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 00] I will turn back to Ephesians 3 and Paul's prayer for that young church in the New Testament and the little bit that follows on from it.

Very ordinaryness of our lives, and we do most of us, are very ordinary lives. None of us are absolutely famously amazing and different.

We are fairly ordinary people, but in the ordinaryness of our lives there's two brilliant things, among many other things I'm sure. There's two great things to get in the ordinaryness of our lives.

The first is a word of encouragement. In our day-to-day lives it's really nice in your workplace, your study, you come out of an exam, you get home after a heavy day's work, whatever it might be.

Someone gives you a word of encouragement. That's good, isn't it? We enjoy a word of encouragement. There's plenty of people that are ready to knock us down, but it's great to get a word of encouragement. Someone says something nice about us, we like that. I think that's a very ordinary and a very everyday thing.

[1 : 09] And sometimes as Christians it's particularly nice, for us as fellow Christians to see who I'm praying for you. And I've remembered you in prayer this morning. And that may be something that you weren't expecting, you weren't looking for, but it was a great thing to have.

So that's a nice thing, a word of encouragement. But also another thing, another thing that's really nice to get in our ordinary lives is an unexpected gift. That's nice as well, isn't it? We like getting unexpected gifts.

Maybe it's something that you really need and you didn't realise that the person who's bought you it or brought you that knew that you needed it. But they've clocked on to something and they're aware of the fact that you needed that gift.

And they've, boy, that's really good, a really unexpected gift, something that you're really needing. But it could also be, of course, a luxury, something you can live without, but it's just a really brilliant and really nice luxury that just makes you feel great.

And so these are two very ordinary things in life that we like receiving from other people. A word of encouragement or an unexpected gift makes you feel loved.

[2 : 19] It makes you feel appreciated and in the kind of day to day mundanity of our lives, it's nice to feel that, isn't it? When we're going from one place to another and sometimes we're knocked back, sometimes we're kicked in the guts, sometimes we're struggling to carry on.

And someone does something or says something that just helps us and encourages, makes us feel loved and appreciated. Well, today I would like to do that in a kind of spiritual way and I'd like to do that in a spiritual Christian way, especially for Amy and for Rowan today.

I would like to do that for them. I would like to encourage them with nice, kind spiritual words before their baptism and remind them and remind us of the greatness of the gift that we have in Jesus Christ and in salvation and in our relationship with Him.

I hope that it'll not just be an encouragement for them, but it will be an encouragement for us all. And if you're here today and you're not a Christian, it would be a challenge for you also to think about the gospel message and what it is that we believe and that we hold on to.

So it's very important at the start of their Christian lives as they are baptized here today that they have that encouragement and that they know our love for them and our support for them as Christian family members here in the congregation.

[3 : 44] So I want to say two things to us all today, but especially, I guess, to them. And then for a moment, consider the responses that we should make by faith as Christians. Very simple, nothing particularly new or flash, but significant and important from God's word.

And from the same kind of attitude that Paul had for the church that he was speaking to, he was speaking to this young church in Ephesus, and he wanted to bring them encouragement as well and remind them of the gift of salvation that they had.

And so he too, you know, he says, look, for this reason, I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives his name. I pray for you. So that's what he's bringing this encouragement to them, that he's praying for them, he's reminding them of the gift of salvation. And that is a great thing for them and it's a great thing for us to do. So there's a couple of things, I just want to say a couple of things to Amy and Rowan and to us all today at this service as believers.

First thing is you belong, in Christ you belong. And that's a great thing, that great word of encouragement. Paul speaks here about kneeling before the whole family in heaven and on earth and before our Father.

[5 : 00] And later on in chapter four where we read as well, he speaks about there being one spirit and one body and one Lord and so on.

And there's this one family that you belong to as a Christian, that we belong to as Christians. And you come by faith through Jesus Christ to be reconciled with your Father and to know company and friendship and fellowship with your divine Creator.

Once more, we know that sin has come in and broken and divorced and estranged us from our Father and created all kinds of problems and tensions. That we can't put right but that He has come in the person of His Son to reconnect us to Himself and we belong to His family.

And we belong to the One who is the source of life, the source of love, who is infinite, who is eternal, who is glorious, who is God.

And we become in a very special way, in a very unique way, we become part of His family. The Bible speaks of us being adopted into His family. We become His children.

[6 : 13] And it's a worldwide family to which we belong, a unique family. And we seek in our Christian lives to bear family traits, to look like our Father and to act like Him in love and in grace, which we'll go on to speak about a little bit more.

But you belong and you belong to the family of God, the Christian family, that breaks race and country and gender and colour and background and denomination and everything.

Because it's this great family of God, one family you belong. And within that family you share that one gift of hope. He says that in verse 4 of chapter 4, there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you're called.

And that's a great thing and it's one of the great things about the Gospel that we share and that we seek to live is that we ought to be people with a message and who live a life of hope.

Surely isn't that one of the greatest things in life? To have hope? Hope's a great thing. It's a terrible thing to ever get to the stage where you feel hopeless, where you feel in despair, to be without hope.

[7 : 33] To see someone in that place where they are without hope, isn't that a terrible place to be? And it's a place where nobody wants to be, where they can't wake up in the morning and have any hope for anything that day.

And yet the Gospel is a Gospel which shares one great hope. And it's not like a kind of vague meaningless hope where you kind of say, well, I kind of hope that maybe someday in the future something good will come out of all this and we'll just wait and see.

It's not a kind of vague, almost empty or stupid or mindless or brainless or naive hope.

It's not that kind of hope that the Bible speaks of. It speaks of something that's sure and certain and firm and secure that is based on the person and the work of Jesus Christ who is a living serial. I mentioned that in the prayer that we worship on the resurrection the first day of the week.

The day of Jesus rose from the dead, defeated the power of death. And it's that living hope that's based on his person and on his promises as the Creator, God, the sovereign Lord of the universe.

[8 : 38] That that is the kind of hope that we have. And it's a hope that sustains us and sustains and has sustained the people of God through centuries of trial and tribulation and difficulties and struggles and doubts and fears and brokenness and suffering.

It's a hope that God can redeem, that God will redeem, that God is a purpose and a plan, that God is patient and wanting no one to perish. But at the same time that we live in a battlefield for the for the time being until he returns and brings us into his new heavens and new earth.

And it's a glorious, rich, powerful hope. Look at a little bit more this evening when we're talking about the personal work of Christ. We're looking at his resurrection a little bit. We'll look at it in a slightly different way.

But it's really important for us to keep on holding on to that truth. If we lose sight of that truth then you can't have, as 1 Corinthians says, you may as well just ditch the lot. Give it all up. We'll give it all up if he's dead anyway.

There's nothing there and if it's all just made up then we give it up. But there's this great hope and it's hope against all hope sometimes, isn't it? It's hope against what sometimes we feel and we see and what's around us.

[9 : 51] There's this great hope of the gospel and the glorious riches of the person and the character and the knowledge of Jesus and the hope that he brings into our lives and the cleansing and the forgiveness.

It's very easy for us to live as Christians with a spiritual poverty. The Bible speaks about spiritual riches and spiritual poverty. And it's easy for us to live as if these things aren't true.

So we're actually scrambling around in spiritual poverty, not dwelling on, not thinking about, not luxuriating in these truths, but just ignoring them and the difficulty that that brings into our lives. It's a bit like maybe you go to a relative's funeral that maybe didn't know terribly well and a family relative. And at the end of it, someone from the closer family gives you an envelope, which they say is just a little bit of the inheritance that's left from your relative who's died.

And you're kind of preoccupied with everything else and you stick it in your back pocket and you actually forget to open it. She's like, well, I didn't know this relative very well and I don't think they had much money anyway. And it'll only be a few Bob, a few pounds, a few, a few, a bit of milk money to spend.

[11 : 03] And you don't think about it and you carry on with your life and your life is a struggle and you don't have much money and you're living from week to week. And one of these days, you don't wear a suit very often. So one of these days you think, wait a minute, I left a, I left an envelope in the back pocket of that suit.

I wonder if there's anything in it. I've got a lot of bills to pay this week. Maybe it'll help a little bit towards these bills. And you go and open that and you find out there's five million dollars in a check. It's poor relative that you didn't do anything about. You've been living in poverty, but all the time you've been rich. If only you recognized it, if only you'd taken the time to realize the inheritance that was being gifted to you.

I know it's rather unbelievable, but it's an illustration. It's just a picture of what might, what can be a spiritual reality for us that as Christians, we stick Jesus in the back pockets.

I'm sure they'll be convenient one of these days when I'm nearly dead or when I'm struggling with things. I'll maybe call on him then, but in the meantime, I'll just struggle away with my own life without really applying the riches, the glorious riches of his character and his person to my life and the power of the spirit in my heart.

[12 : 17] And we can often be as Christians living in the gutter spiritually when he invites us into the throne room to be with him and to live as Christians, recognizing the glory of being in his presence.

So it's one great hope that we all share and belong and have in belonging in Christ. And there's also one baptism, and that's obviously mentioned here, and will be performed shortly in the church here. There is almost that baptism is that badge of belonging to the Christian faith that God has given us, the sacrament that he's given us, which is a kind of visible sign of an invisible spiritual reality.

There's this pouring out of water symbolizing the pouring out of life that he gives us, but also the cleansing that water brings symbolically speaks of the cleansing that Jesus brings into our heart. And the baptism, putting our faith in the Christ who is the Lord of this baptism, because as the judge of all mankind, that he's the judge who becomes judged himself on the cross and takes the price and the cost for our sins that we can't deal with and takes the death and the separation that we deserve and takes on himself and brings us his peace as a result when we put our trust in him and we believe in him as our substitute and our Lord.

[13 : 37] No sin, no separation, no brokenness, no failure, no mistakes, no nothing is too deep or too difficult for him to deal with and to cleanse and to work with and to forgive and to bring us from darkness into light and to cleanse us, taking the sting of death and removing it and giving us that belonging.

And every believer shares in that baptism and goes through that baptism symbolically associating and binding them to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. So that's the first thing, is you belong. The second thing briefly, and this is great as well, is the Gospel says you are loved, you are loved. And God says that from his own words. That's the good news of the Gospel message that Paul is really intent on reminding the Christian church in Ephesus that that's his prayer for them to remind them, I pray for you, being rooted and established in love that you may have power together, all the saints to grasp how wide, how long, how high, how deep is the love of Christ and this love that passes in all this that you may be filled with the measure of the fullness of God.

I wonder what you think we would be filled with the measure of the fullness of God. To be God like in your life, to be like God. You know people speak of being holy and being like God. What does it mean to be like God? Well here Paul says here to be filled with the fullness of God is to be filled with the love of God, with God's love in our lives.

And the reminder is that as Christians, and the encouragement today is that you are loved as Christians. You're reconciled to the author of love and you've responded to his call, the call of the Gospel to come to him and to receive his love and to know his forgiveness and to know his grace in our lives.

[15:22] And that love is absolutely foundational for all of us as Christians here. In the 21st century, in modern sophisticated secular Edinburgh and Scotland, that is the ongoing foundational reality of our faith.

It is that we are rooted and established in love. That is absolutely core to us. You know whatever else we think might be core, it is to be rooted in the love of Christ.

That rescuing love, that redeeming love. It's not a soft, sappy, sentimental, Hollywood type love. It's a really gutsy, powerful, divine love that has enabled us to be taken from the clutches of death and brought into the reality of eternal life and what God brings for us.

And the more we understand how much we've been forgiven, the more we will love. You know that's true isn't it in life? It's a truism that if we don't think we've been forgiven much, we don't love much.

When we recognize and know how much we've been forgiven and as we recognize maybe our own hearts more and more, it fires up that sense of love within us. You know when Jesus says, he who's been forgiven much loves much.

[16:37] And it's not saying that there's really some people who need to be forgiven lots and there's others who really only need to be forgiven forgive me a tiny bit because they're really great. It means that those who recognize how much they've been forgiven will love much.

And those who don't recognize their need for forgiveness, won't love much. And it's a kind of clear parallel and working through of this truth. But it's foundational and if we don't grasp that love as foundational to our faith, then our faith will be insecure and it'll be unstable.

And we'll rely on other things like intellectual knowledge or biblical knowledge or going to church and routines and rituals, all of which are significant but none of which are as foundational as knowing how much we've been forgiven.

Because that is the core of who we are and what we are. So it's foundational, it's powerful. He speaks about that power in verse 17 and verse 20. May have power together with all the saints to grasp.

And then he goes on verse 20 to say, according to the power that's at work within us. So this love of God is not an impotent, weak thing. It's a powerful experience that comes from God that he gives us in our lives.

[17:45] As he shares his love with us, it speaks about him amazingly in verse 16, through his spirit who will change you in your inner being.

That's a great phrase. The Christian understanding the relationship we have with Christ is primarily deep within our inner being.

It's not the clothes we wear, it's not the outward behaviour necessarily that we reflect, although outward behaviour is significant because it should reflect what's within us. But it's about letting God deal with our very inner being, not just surface, something strong.

You know, when you go and you've been bitter or angry or jealous again and again, and you know you can't change your own heart. You know you can't do the kind of thing you want to do with your life, but his power is able to transform our hearts. Nobody else can do that.

There's no self-help and there's no kind of psychological behaviouristic technique that can change our hearts.

[18 : 53] Many things can help, but the fundamental direction of our heart, which is self-centred and selfish, cannot be changed to worship God unless the power of the Holy Spirit comes and transforms our heart and perspective.

So your loved, this powerful love that can change you, your loved also in an unlimited way, there's that great verse there, verse 18, you know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

It's boundless, it's inexhaustible. I can only love so much, you know. There's a point where I can't do anymore. We've all got limited ability to love and there's something that just comes to the top and we say, I can't love anymore. I can't do it anymore.

I'm drained to the degree that God's love is boundless and inexhaustible, it's wide. So no boundaries, nobody is exempt in other words, what he says with the wideness of his love, nobody is exempt from it.

It's long, it's never started and it will never end, it's from everlasting to everlasting. It's high, it's the characteristic, it's the mark of heaven and of eternity and probably most significant is deep.

[20 : 04] It's incarnational, it comes down to our level, it's nailed to a cross. It goes straight to the pit of hell and separation and death and defeating power of Satan and the grave in our place.

Powerful, unlimited love and it's also a spiritual love. Verse 19 says it's a love that surpasses knowledge. In other words, it's not just a mental ascent.

It's not just reading about it, it's not just knowing theological truth. It's not just opening your Bible, it's more than just knowledge. It is knowledge, knowledge is hugely important.

The Bible is hugely important as God's revelation of himself to us, but it's more than just head knowledge, it's spiritual. It surpasses knowledge and it's a love that surpasses knowing about it. It needs to be experienced, it needs to be something we put our faith and trust and it's a spiritual relationship with our Father in heaven that needs to be developed like any other relationship through prayer and the word.

[21 : 11] A love that's meditated on, thought about, acted on. And as we do so and as we spend time recognising that dimension, that area of life, that spiritual reality for us, we find that he can and is able to do for us with respect to his love and it's measuredably more than we can ask or even imagine.

I don't know what it's like to be filled with the fullness of God, but I know that that is what I can attain to as I depend on Christ and keep looking to him to work through the needs that I have in my heart and life.

So you're loved, you belong and you're loved. And that's true for Amy and Rowan today, it's true for us all. And just very, very briefly for a minute, a response to that.

It might be that we pray for Amy and Rowan and pray for each other. May we experience the belonging of the Father in our lives as Christians and the depth of his love.

And the interesting thing, the depth of his love, which is a vertical thing, so we're in love with God, it's a kind of vertical relationship with our Creator, our Sustainer, our Judge and the response to that has a...

[22 : 33] It triggers a horizontal... horizontal, horizontal, it's a new word, it's another one for the Free Church, Diet, Lament, New World Syndrome. It triggers a horizontal response.

So this vertical reality of knowing God triggers a horizontal response of love and triggers a horizontal way we live with each other. So the way we understand the love of God in our lives affects the way we live with each other.

So it means one, that we live like you belong. Okay, live like you belong. Verse one, as a prisoner of the Lord then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you've received.

Okay, so live as Christians like you belong. Worthy of the calling you've received. Live as ambassadors for Jesus Christ as yourself.

You're going to be yourself, uniquely yourself. He doesn't take away our identity, he doesn't take away our uniqueness. But he wants us to have family traits and he wants us to live as ambassadors for Jesus Christ.

[23 : 38] It changes us. Your identity's in him, but you are still yourself and live like you belong. The healing and the hope and the fulfillment that he offers in your life.

So live like you belong in that graceful way. And then can I say secondly and lastly, love as you're loved. Love as a Christian, as you have been loved yourself by Jesus Christ.

Verses two, three and four, really two and three particularly, speak about that kind of loving others because of the way you've been loved and reflecting the love you've been given with the love you have for other people.

So he says, be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. You know how hard that is to bear with one another in love in the Christian family?

What do we rather do? We rather separate ourselves, gossip, talk about them, separate ourselves out, do different things. Very difficult to forgive and bear out, bear with one another in love. Yet that's what we're asked to do.

[24 : 42] Keep the unity of the spirit and bond of peace. Remember the grace that you've been given. So love as you've loved. Love with humility because pride in our lives and self-righteousness is an oxymoron.

Be gentle. That's not a weakness. That's a real courageous, strong thing to be. To be gentle. I think if I'm right, if this is the right word that's used here, I didn't check this word in the Greek in my usual encyclopedic knowledge of the Greek, but I think that this word is the same word that is used for a horse that has been tamed, that's been broken and is the idea of strength, but controlled strength. There's that gentleness within it. It's not a weak sense, a strong word. Patience with one another, long suffering, united, and living through the bond of peace.

Peace has been made with us, with our Father, and we are to relate that peace in the way we live with one another. See, if we don't have these qualities together, who's going to be interested in coming?

Who's going to be interested to belong to the family that we are? If in our outworking of our Christian faith, we show all the characteristics of brokenness and division and self-centeredness and pride and bitterness and greed that has very often kept people from investigating the claims of Jesus further.

[26 : 16] So may we serve one another with that understanding of what we have received.

So Amy and Rowan, by God's grace, may we all share your joy and share your testimony today and your baptism.

And may you remember and know that you're loved by Christ and belong to Christ and also you're loved by us and belong to the family of God that is not just St. Clumbes but is worldwide.

And may God bless you. And may these truths be a great reminder to us all today. Amen.