

A Prayer for the Glory of God

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[0 : 00] I'm sure a personal word is allowed and I've been very warmly welcomed here today by the office bearers and I assure you that I count it a very real privilege to be here occupying the pulpit normally occupied by my nephew.

For 40 years I was in a congregation that didn't have a gallery and I feel it a little strange and up to a point a little intimidating to have more than half my congregation up above me.

Habit means I tend always to be thinking of my congregation as down there but I'll look up every now and again just to make sure that you're still with me and if I see that some of you have fallen asleep I might even shout.

Now without any more ado let us turn to the word of God. Ephesians chapter 1 where we're concerned with this passage from verse 15 to the end a passage that is firmly based upon and grounded in the first 14 verses.

Many years ago, in actual fact a year before I was born, you don't need to calculate that, at the Keswick Convention the Bible readings were given by Dr. Graham Scroggie and these were subsequently printed in a small book and the title of that book was Paul's Prison Prayers.

[1 : 27] Alliteration in these days at Keswick was almost compulsory. Paul's Prison Prayers. And there were four prayers in particular. There are two in Ephesians chapter 1 and chapter 3.

There's one in Philippians and there is one in Colossians. And these are only four of a whole lot of very wonderful prayers that you find in the scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament.

And in considering these prayers, it is always good to think of the context and the circumstances of the prayer and then to think also of how God-centered these prayers usually are.

And very, very often the burden of these Bible prayers is not for the personal needs of the person praying, nor even for the good of God's work, or for the well-being of the people of God.

Running through most of these prayers, the basic theme is a prayer and a desire for the glory of God.

[2 : 44] One marvelous example is the prayer of Elijah on Mount Carmel. You know, the magnificent, very dramatic story and fire coming down from heaven. And Elijah prayed, Oh God, hear my prayer, so that this people will know that you are God.

Never mind Elijah. He is basically incidental. The heart of the prayer was a desire for the glory of God. And here in this prayer, in Ephesians chapter 1, Paul is praying from prison.

And prison in these days were not very pleasant places. I've twice been in Berlin, each time to conduct a Bible class, I assure you.

And I can still remember the feeling I had when the iron gate clanged shut and I could hear the big key turning in the lock. Paul was in prison.

And he prayed from prison. Now, there are many different kinds of prisons. Circumstances can hem us in in such a way that we feel imprisoned.

- [4 : 0 0] And we can get very frustrated at times. Our health at times can be a prison when there are things we long to do and we are not able.
- I remember an elderly Christian lady saying to me once, When I was able to go to church, I didn't go. And now that I want to go, I can't.
- Her health prevented it. Disappointment. You know how sometimes you've looked forward to something and it all, as it were, crumbles. And your disappointment is deep and painful.
- And disappointment can come round about you and hem you in and press you down. It's like being in a prison. Parents with little children can almost feel they're in a bit of a prison.
- There are so many things they want to do. So many times they want to go to church and they can't. Because there's little ones to look after. There are all sorts of different kinds of prisons.
- [5 : 0 9] The spirit of Antichrist, that is the dominant spirit of our own day and generation, has the power to hem us in so that at times we almost feel reluctant to speak about the things of God.
- Yes, there are many, many different kinds of prisons. But none of these in any sense need to hinder our prayers.
- Because in our prayers, we go directly to the throne of God with no one entitled to hold us back, not even the devil.
- But there is one very, very dangerous prison. And it is the prison of self-pity.
- And self-pity can hem us in, turn us in completely upon ourselves so that we not only become miserable in ourselves, our influence is that of a misery to everybody else who has anything to do with us.
- [6 : 2 1] The prison of self-pity. But there is absolutely no trace of self-pity in Paul as he writes here from prison and as he prays in prison.
- His personal freedom has been significantly curtailed. He might possibly have been manacled in his hands and certainly his feet.
- He would never have time to himself. There would always be a jailer present. His personal freedom was curtailed. And his active service in the gospel, which was his chiefest delight, was taken from him.
- The one thing above all else that he really loved to do was to preach Christ and him crucified. And he was totally and utterly prevented from so doing.
- These are the circumstances of the prayer. And out of these circumstances, Paul prays. And he writes to the Ephesians and he tells them what he prays.
- [7 : 4 1] Sometimes when people say to me, Oh, I pray for you, being the kind of man I am, I wonder just what they're saying to God about me. So Paul tells the Ephesian Christians what he prays.
- And the prayer begins for this reason. This is why he prays. And the reasons I indicated is in the first 14 verses of the chapter that we, I wouldn't say we studied this morning, I think in measure we hurriedly skated over it, just picking out the main points.
- But in these first 14 verses, we have to notice the words he uses. Time and time again, Paul speaks of God and us.
- God and us. God has blessed us. Verse 4, God has chosen us.
- Verse 5, God has destined, marked us out for a destiny of glory. Verse 7, God has accepted us with all our flaws and failures and limitations.
- [8 : 5 3] Accepted us in Christ Jesus. God has loved us with a generosity of love that we've been singing about tonight that is altogether beyond our comprehension.

Why on earth God should love us, I simply do not know. I was glad to hear in songs of praise on the television before I came out tonight, Wesley's hymn, And Can It Be.

Amazing love. How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die? Can you understand why God should give His Son to die for you?

Can you possibly understand why on earth God would freely, not without cost, but freely give up His Son to that awful death on the cross in order to get you and me?

It's astonishing. It's almost beyond belief. And sad to say, we've tended to become almost accustomed to it. And that's sinful.

[10 : 08] And God, in His wonderful love, verse 10, has drawn us into His perfect plan for the fullness of the time, making us actual working parts, vital parts, in the outworking of His plan of redemption for the whole course of history.

And in verse 14, God has assured us of the final end. And in the course of that passage, we are told more than once, if I remember rightly, that all this is given to us, done for us, and given to us in order that we might be appointed to live to the praise of God's glory.

How is the world to see God's glory? How are the folk that you work with and live around, how are they to see God's glory?

Only if they can see it in the display window of your life and my life. And only you and God know whether that window is clean enough for anyone to look through or not.

And having spoken of these things, Paul finds himself gripped. Preachers sometimes find themselves gripped. I don't mean, I don't mean to get excited when I'm preaching, but sometimes when I'm speaking God's truth, I must confess, it stirs, it stirs my soul to the very depths.

[11 : 52] And Paul is gripped by the thought of what God has done for him and for them, and his whole heart is open to God and to God's people, and he says, for this reason, he prays.

And I can't help commenting at this point that I think that very often the reason why our prayer lives tend to be so shallow and so reluctant and so neglected that we have not really grasped the wonder of what God has done for us.

the wonder of what God is actually doing in us day after day, and what God is eventually to do for us when he brings us to his eternal glory.

Paul is really marveling that in a place like the city of Ephesus, dominated by carnal, yes, carnal, sexual worship in the temple of Diana, the poisonous virus of sex was through and through the whole of society in Ephesus, just as it is in our own day and generation.

And Paul marvels that in a place like that, there are these Christian believers and their faith is known and their love is known and Paul gives thanks.

[13 : 35] people because you see, at this stage, these Christians were standing firm. These were Christians, that was a group of Christians, a congregation if you like, that had Paul as their minister for the best part of two and a half years.

And preaching in these days wasn't only on a Sunday, it was often day after day. they sat under that kind of spirit-inspired biblical ministry.

And even when their minister was no longer with them, he was writing them letters like these that would be read as the congregation gathered for worship and studied all the ministry that this congregation had.

But not all that long later as we read in the second chapter of the book of Revelation, Christ, the king and head of the church, says to this congregation, you have left the love that you once had and if there's not a change, I will remove your candlestick out of its place.

because you see, to sit under an authentic biblical ministry week after week does not in itself guarantee your spiritual health and your spiritual growth and your spiritual condition.

[15 : 11] You have to make it your business and I have to make it my business that as we hear the word of God, we receive it. Isn't there a verse in one of Paul's letters where he pleads that you receive not the grace of God in vain?

We have to allow the word that we sit under not only to teach us but to search us and chastise us and change us and inspire us. And this is why Paul prays.

It's a marvelous prayer. It almost seems wrong to be dissecting somebody's prayer. But we want to learn. I believe at the very heart of the prayer is verse 18 where Paul prays that the eyes of your hearts might be enlightened.

It's an interesting bringing together a phrase. The eyes of your heart. Well, my eyes are in my head. But he prays that the eyes of our hearts.

What does he mean? I think he is praying, this is how I understand it, he is praying that we might see more clearly and grasp more firmly and feel more deeply and sense more greatly the privilege of being a Christian.

[16 : 45] Do you ever think of that? Countless thousands in Glasgow and more in Scotland haven't a clue about Christ and the Gospel.

How would you like to be like that? Aren't you glad that God has chosen you and opened your eyes to see and opened your mind to receive and open your heart to believe?

This is what he is praying here, that the eyes of our hearts might be opened to see more clearly and grasp more firmly, feel more deeply, sense more greatly the privilege of being a Christian and so to be encouraged to go on to live and to serve the Lord with gladness of heart.

And this prayer with that kind of motivation simply throbs with truth and power right through it. And in a sense towards the beginning in verse 17 Paul reminds us of the God we pray to.

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's an interesting phrase isn't it? The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

[18 : 08] Do you ever think of God like that? The God of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God that Jesus as a real man tempted in all points like we are, fully, totally, utterly human, going through all the trauma of childhood and beginning to grow up and all the agonies of teenage years and all the rest of it.

Oh, I'm glad I'm not a teenager anymore. I still remember what it was like. This is the God that Jesus at the different age stages of his life as a true man, this is the God that Jesus prayed to.

This is the God that Jesus trusted. This is the God that Jesus the man Christ Jesus delighted him. This is the God that Jesus in all his humanity prayed to with agony in the garden of Gethsemane.

Wonderful story that indicates that faith is not always certain. Oh, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, your will be done. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father of glory.

[19 : 43] I love that phrase. The Father of glory. The God, as the epistle of James says, the God in whom there is no variableness or shadow of God.

Isn't it great that he can be counted on? He's I the same. Often you can't say that about your closest friends.

You can't say that often about the members of your own family. But God, he's I the same. You always know where you are with God.

The Father of glory. No variableness or shadow of turning. God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I can still recall as a student, a teacher in the Sunday school, it was an afternoon Sunday school in these days, quite a big Sunday school. Reverend William Still, who was a very gifted musician, took it upon himself to teach the Sunday school to sing the Te Deum.

[20 : 53] Granted, it was to this Jackson setting which most pucker musicians regard as being substandard, but that doesn't matter. I can still remember these youngsters singing that.

We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord, all the earth doth worship Thee, the Father everlasting, to Thee all angels cry aloud, and on it goes, and then there comes a phrase, Father of an infinite majesty.

If you are here this morning, and you are listening in the opening prayer, I've been a minister long enough to know that people don't always listen to the opening prayer. We spoke about God's majesty, His glorious majesty, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

This is the Father of glory that appeared to Abraham. We've told it in Acts chapter 7, the God of glory appeared to Abraham and spoke and Abraham went.

Moses, that other great leader of God's people said on one occasion, God, show me your glory. What do you read in the Old Testament? God, God made all His goodness pass before Moses.

[22 : 22] God made peace. Can you link glory, the glory of God and the goodness of God? His goodness is part of His glory.

Isaiah, a young minister, when there was a tremendous change in the national situation, King Isaiah had died, and what was going to happen after that long, good rain?

and Isaiah went to church, and sitting there, miserable I think, he suddenly became aware that the place was filled with the glory of God.

And seeing the glory of God kept him going in the ministry for more than 60 years. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

He is glorious, and He's a Father. He's glorious in the sense that we stand in awe of Him. Oh, so often in evangelical circles we've lost nowadays the awe.

[23 : 40] Think something we can be far too chummy with God. Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.

The Father of glory, but He's a Father. A Father to run to, a Father tender and true and caring.

What is it to say in Psalm 103? like as a Father pities his children, so the Lord pities them who fear Him. You know how often parents, you'll understand, when your bearings are upset, you don't stand in your dignity and speak to them and instruct them or catechize them.

What do you do? you go down to them. That's what the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ does. But we mustn't forget the Father of glory.

I've been intrigued. Most of the translations disagree with the revised standard version here. But in Romans chapter 4 we read about Abraham.

[25 : 01] No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God. But he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.

Do you see what that means? As he took time to think, he found himself, this is not biblical language, but he found himself thinking about God.

Oh, God, you're great. I shocked a congregation by one saying, Oh, God, you're just smashing.

Do you feel like that about God? You'll gather that I do at this precise moment. And you know when you think of the God you have, it works wonders in the strengthening of your faith.

If you've got a God like that, is there any reason at all not to have faith? And Paul prays to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, and he prays, verse 17, that God will give to them and to us our spirit, or the spirit of wisdom and of revelation salvation in the knowledge of Christ.

[26 : 26] Now, of course, Paul was very aware of the fact that Jesus had promised, it's recorded in John chapter 14, 15, 16, Jesus promised that he would send his Holy Spirit to lead us into all the truth.

faith. And we tend to have far too limited a concept of the Spirit of God, restricting him to some sometimes rather unusual happenings.

But you read the Bible, start in Genesis chapter 1, it was the Spirit of God that brooded upon the chaos and the darkness, and brought light and order.

It was that same Holy Spirit that inspired, that breathed out the Scriptures. And it is that same Holy Spirit who is the active agent in all God's working.

It is that Holy Spirit who indwells every Christian believer and gives life. It is the Holy Spirit who quickens us so that we hear the Gospel and are able to respond and come to Christ.

[27 : 52] It is that Holy Spirit who teaches us in the Scriptures, who makes the Scriptures live to us. It is that Holy Spirit who is, as I would call him, God's divine librarian who brings as it were out of the catalogue of Scripture, the very verse or the very passage that we need at any given time.

People sometimes said to me, I do appreciate your ministry, but I don't think there was anything in the sermon that was really for me tonight. And I said, well now, what you heard, grasp it, store it up in your hearts, because the time will come that you will need it.

It's awfully important to listen to sermons properly, because as we said this morning, we've no idea what tomorrow will bring or require, demand or take away from us, but the Holy Spirit will bring the remembrance.

remembrance. It's amazing how sometimes, perhaps sometimes in pastoral counseling, you're talking and inwardly you think, Lord, what can I possibly say?

And there comes into your mind a word of scripture. It's as if God said, now you say that to them, because that's what they need.

[29 : 30] And Paul prays that God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

And he goes on to pray, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened. Oh, that lovely phrase. It always makes me think of the story in 2 Kings chapter 6, the story of Elisha, Elisha, and his young servant.

And Elisha was discovering that young Christians have a tendency to rather write off the somewhat older Christians. But you know, we have lived longer and made more mistakes and therefore have learned more, I hope.

Remember the story of how Elisha the prophet was sound asleep? The servant had got up and went out. And then surrounding their whole encampment was the armies, the massive armies of the enemy.

And he panicked. And he dashed into the house full of anxiety. Oh, problems, problems, problems. And I hope I'm not being facetious, but I like to think of Elisha's prayer being such as, Oh, Lord, Lord, for any sake, open his eyes.

[30 : 55] And God opened the young man's eyes. Surrounding the enemy was the hosts of God. There was no need for fear.

The trouble is, you know, that our spiritual eyesight is often rather defective. And Paul is praying here that by the Spirit our eyes will be opened so that more and more and more and again and again and again will find us.

Oh, I see it now. I see it now. Now, what does Paul want us to see? Three things. That you may know, I pointed this out during the reading, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you.

The sure hope of glory. And the scripture says, which hope we have as the anchor of our souls, both sure and servant.

Will your anchor hold? We have an anchor that keeps the soul, steadfast and sure while the billows roll, fastened to the rock that cannot move, grounded, firm and deep in the Savior's love.

[32 : 12] and the Savior's love for us is the underlying guarantee of our sure hope. When the Bible speaks about hope, it's not the way people say, oh, I hope it'll be alright.

It's going to be alright, says God. Oh, says Paul, I want your eyes to be enlightened, your eyes open, that you may know what is the sure hope of glory.

Elsewhere in Scripture he says, Romans chapter 5, we rejoice in the sure hope of the glory of God.

Do you see what that means? It means we know where we're going and we are sure that we will get there. When I used to admit new members by profession of faith, as they stood in the front of the church in the face of the congregation and they answered all the appointed questions, I would always quote to them at the end of the final question from 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, Faithful is he who called you, who also will do it.

As if God said, I'll get you to heaven, if necessary, in spite of yourself, because you're mine. And I have a place of service, prepared for you, and I want you to be prepared to be able for that service.

[33 : 45] Oh, says Paul, I want your eyes to be opened to see the sure hope to which God has called. I want your eyes opened so that you may see what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

Now, I tend to wonder just exactly what this means. his inheritance. What does God get out of this?

He gets you, and he gets me. And as Isaiah 53 says, the day will come when he will see of the travel of his soul and be satisfied.

when we get to heaven, he'll look at us. He might even have a wee walk around us and say, yes, that's how I planned you to be right from the beginning.

And that's what he's working at. And that is his inheritance in the saints. They shall be mine, says God, in Malachi chapter 3, they shall be mine when I make up my jewels.

[35 : 09] But what about our inheritance? Well, the Bible's full of this. 1 Corinthians chapter 2 is at verse 9, Eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man, the things that God has prepared for them that love him.

And God says, yes, and you don't have to wait till you get to heaven before you get some of it. Are you looking forward to the next spell of your life?

Well, even at my age, I still am. Oh, says God, you haven't begun to grasp grasp what I've planned and prepared for you.

Oh, there's verses all over the place in scripture. I once got a row from my big brother. He'd been listening to me preaching and he scolded me for misquoting the scriptures.

And of course, I disagree. I said, I didn't. So he turned up the Bible and said, you quoted verse? Yes. And he pointed out that I had misquoted. So here's a verse from Colossians chapter 1 and verse 12.

[36 : 24] Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us. I'm told the word literally means he's given us the title deeds. You know the hazard sometimes when you're buying a house and there's all sorts of uncertainties.

And oh, it's such a relief in the end when your lawyer tells you it's all settled. And you can go to the lawyer's office and you get the key. It's yours.

And he's got the title deeds for you in his safekeeping. Now says Paul, giving thanks to the Father who has given us the title deeds to share in the inheritance of the saints and light.

He has delivered us from the dominion or the jurisdiction of darkness and lifted us up over into the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of all our sins.

This is our inheritance. Peter has it in 1 Peter chapter 1 to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.

[37 : 48] The old version says kept in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith until you're ready to take your place.

Oh, the assurances of being a Christian. this is our inheritance, the riches of our inheritance.

It's all settled and we have to enter into the reality of it. Now, way back in Sandyford, one of my divinity students, Brock White, who was a designer with Morris the Furniture People and was called into the ministry and served in Kirkcaldy for quite a number of years and he's now retired.

All these young men are growing old, I don't know why. In the prayer meeting, on one occasion, in the middle of his prayer, he prayed that we might learn to live in the power of the world to come.

I thought, that's interesting. I think the following week when he prayed, but the phrase came up again, to live in the power of the world and he kept on using it until I got a bit exasperated with him.

[38 : 59] Then I realized he was absolutely right. This is what I should be doing, I'm a Christian believer, and you, living in the power of the world to come by the Holy Spirit, the power of the Holy Spirit, remembering that the world to come is not some distant, distant thing on the horizon.

Remember my brother once preaching and saying, you mustn't think of history moving on and then meeting a solid wall. the end of history and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No, no, he said, time and eternity are parallel like that, with just a hair's breadth between them.

And I understood at that moment some of the verses in the gospel, but the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.

again, I don't mean to be facetious, but will we be able to finish the service?

[40 : 09] In such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man comes, living in the power of the world to come. And that leads us on to the third thing that Paul is speaking about, the hope, the riches, and verse 19, the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, the power that is the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

The power of the resurrection is in us now by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

my minister in Aberdeen used to harp on at times about the line from one of the hymns, think what spirit dwells within you. The power by which the whole kingdom of evil was shattered, the immeasurable power of God, is in us because we believe, not if we believe, but because we believe, which simply means that the possibilities for the likes of you and me if we are Christians, and I hope you are all Christians, think about it.

Make sure you're in Christ. It's your only hope of heaven. The power within us that enables us, as we read earlier, to live to the praise of God's glory.

Time is gone. And for our reassurance, we are pointed to Christ enthroned above all, over all, now and in the ages to come, head over all for the church.

[42 : 14] And when all seems chaotic, and circumstances close in, and seem to frustrate and deny all that we mean by the gospel, look away to Jesus.

Look, ye saints, the sight is glorious. See the man of sorrows now, from the fight return victorious. Every knee to him shall bow.

Everything's under control. He is head over all in the interest of the church. Head over all persons, head over all powers, things visible, things invisible, things human, things devilish.

We need not fear any of them. Christ is head over all in the interest of the church. The church, I know I'm just rattling through this, the church which is his body.

Christ and believers together in one spiritual body of which Christ is the head to rule and direct.

[43 : 23] The church which is his body by means of which he expresses himself and his purposes in this world.

And the prayer ends with us looking at Christ because Christ is everything in all that he does, in all that he is, in all that he gives.

All things are yours, says Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. All things are yours and you are Christ's. and Christ is God's.

And if you need any more assurance than that, I leave you with this verse. Your life is hid with Christ in God.

The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory who has loved us with an everlasting love.

[44 : 38] Amen. And may God bless to us his own good word. And may God bless to us now as we sing our closing hymn. It's number 714, words by Charles Wesley.

And I commend to you especially the words at the beginning of the last verse. love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down, fix in us your humble dwelling, all your faithful mercies crown.

Hymn number 714. 415. 1. 1. 1. 2. 2. 1. 1.