

4. Priorities from Paul: Patient endurance and joy

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Our gracious God and our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, that you are the everlasting God, that you are the creator of the ends of the earth, that you do not faint or grow weary, and that your understanding is unsearchable.

We thank you, Lord, that by your grace we are your servants, chosen, that you are with us, that you are our God, that you strengthen us, you help us, you uphold us with your righteous right hand.

And we thank you that we can meet and gather in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to purify for himself a people zealous for good works. And Lord, as we pray for ourselves, we think of others in this world, our attention today particularly focusing upon the land of Pakistan, troubled as it is by floods, political instability, disease, and unrest.

We ask, Lord, for that nation, that you, the creator of the ends of the earth, might sustain it. But above all, Lord, that you will strengthen your people. We pray for your Christians, your sons and daughters in that land, that you will strengthen them with your glorious might, Lord, that you will give them great patience, great endurance, and great joy in the midst of their difficulties.

We ask, Lord, that you will uphold them, help them to be those who love others and who seek to relieve them in their hour of distress. We do praise well for that land, Lord, that through this, these terrible times, that the gospel might gain a hearing, that it might bear fruit, and that many in that land will be turned from darkness to light.

[1 : 47] So we pray, Lord, as we gather around your word in the presence of your spirit, we ask that you will fill us with a knowledge of your will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that as we listen and as we leave, we might live lives that are worthy of the calling we have received, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in the knowledge of you.

And we ask this through the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, as I mentioned, we're in our final study in the first chapter of Colossians, Paul's Prayer for this Young Church.

So we'll read again in chapter 1, verse 1 to 14. And this can be found on page 983 of the Church Bibles. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother.

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

[3 : 27] Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Well, one of the news stories that caught my eye this week is the story you're probably familiar with of the Chilean miners.

This is a group of 33 men who on the 5th of August got trapped in a mine in Chile, and they were feared dead. And at the start of this week, the firm managed to drill into the part of the mine they

were staying in.

[4 : 52] They discovered that 33 men were alive, and they were just rejoicing when they saw the cameras and there was this little party going on in this mineshaft. But it's quite a story, isn't it?

These chaps have spent two weeks living in really, what is a very small room. The temperature is about 32 degrees. They've been, I think, having a glass of milk each a day and something to eat. It has been a very difficult time. A real test of their perseverance. And one of them, who's become a bit of a celebrity, wrote a note to his wife.

And on the note, he said to her, let me see if I can find it, he said, have patience and trust in God. That was his message. So we have this picture of these men in a very difficult situation, persevering in the midst of it.

And the one man, one man who seems to be at the head of it, has said, let's have patience. And in the middle of that difficult situation, there is great rejoicing at the prospect that they're, hopefully, quite soon, going to get out.

[5 : 58] Patience, perseverance, and joy on our television screens. And that is a little bit like what Paul is writing in verse 11. He asks that this church, the Colossian church, may be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might, for all endurance, for all perseverance, and patience, with joy.

He wants them to be people who keep going in the faith, even when things are difficult, and who keep rejoicing, even when their circumstances are hard. And we remember from our previous studies that things in Colossae were actually going quite well.

This was a new church. Paul had never been there. He had preached in Asia, and Epaphras had come to faith, and he'd travelled back to his hometown and begun to share the gospel with his friends and his family, and a church had been born.

And it was a church, verse 4, which was faithful. The people were known for their faith in Christ, their love for all the saints, and their hope laid up in heaven. So it was a healthy, young church. And Epaphras had come to visit Paul in prison to tell him of this new church. And Paul was very encouraged, and he thanked God for the grace shown to them. Paul wanted to remind them of the truth of the gospel which they had heard.

[7 : 18] The church was young and healthy, but there were elements coming into it, seeking to lead the people away from Christ, seeking to turn them from him who is the supreme Lord and the sufficient saviour, into all sorts of other practices.

Angel worship, asceticism, philosophy, things that would take them away from Christ. So Paul reminds them that the message they heard is the word of truth, verse 5.

And the person they heard it from, verse 7, is a faithful minister of that truth. And they needed to know that. They needed to know that they could trust the gospel and trust Epaphras with these other teachers coming, preaching variations and different gospels.

So Paul gives thanks for the grace they've received through hearing the gospel and coming to faith, and then he goes on to pray for them in verse 9. And we saw last week that Paul prayed that they would live lives that are worthy of their Lord.

And to that end, he asked that they would be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Paul asks that they might know what is pleasing to God, and then be giving the wisdom and discernment to put that into practice day by day, that in all their lives and in all their decisions, they might be pleasing to God, they might be characterized by good works, and they might be seen to grow in their faith, in the knowledge of God.

[8 : 39] And having prayed that, he goes on to pray something else for them in verse 11.

Something very important for new believers, but something very important for every single one of us, however long we've been walking with Christ.

He prays, verse 11, that they may be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience, with joy. Well, what does that mean?

Well, I've never run a marathon. I don't know if anyone here has, possibly. Charles has. Excellent. And I've never run one. The only thing that runs consistently my body is my nose, I'm afraid to say. But a few years ago, I was invited to run the London Marathon. And it was a little bit different. And a friend of mine, who I was at university with, thought it would be great to set a world record by having the highest number of people ever to run the marathon tied together.

And he thought the best way to do this would be to create a gigantic green millipede. So he commissioned a firm to make this big rubber suit. And it would accommodate 20 people.

[9 : 44] And they decided to run the London Marathon. They did it. They did it in five hours and 40 minutes. And they raised a lot of money for charity. You can go online and look at the photographs. But I said to him, I don't want to be in your millipede because I don't think I've got the strength.

I don't think I've got the resources to finish the marathon. And sometimes the Christian life can feel a bit like that, can't that? I don't have the strength to go on. I haven't got the resources to keep walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

What Paul is saying is that left to ourselves we do not have those resources. And it is therefore to God we have to turn in order to strengthen us to live the Christian life.

He is not short of power. Verse 11 tells us that he has all power according to his glorious might.

That God has power enough to create this universe and to sustain it.

That he has power enough to raise Christ from the dead. And for those of us to our believers that power is at work in our lives. To bring us to faith in Christ through the hearing of the gospel and then to sustain us and to grow us as Christians.

[10 : 57] It's important to realize that, isn't it? We cannot make progress without power from God. The disciples needed to learn that. As they were preparing to go on their worldwide mission Jesus said just wait until you receive power.

They could do nothing by themselves. They needed power from God and it's a lesson each of us and I need to learn. You see we get a lot of people who come into the bookshop and they talk to us about their faith and they say I'm trying to live as a Christian and I'm trying really hard to live as a Christian.

And the question I ask them is well in whose strength are you trying? Is it your own? Is it simply trying to live a moral life to live a good life? Or are you living in the power of God given to transform us and to sustain us as believers?

You see if you're living the Christian life in your own strength you will fail sooner or later. Isaiah tells us that even youth shall faint and be weary and young men shall fall exhausted.

How true that is spiritually as well as physically. But if we are looking to God then we're told that those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles.

[12 : 08] They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint. Paul's prayer for the Colossian church is that they will wait on the Lord and he shall renew their strength with his glorious power that they will walk worthily and not faint.

So he prays that they will have power. But what does that power look like? Well Paul lists for us three characteristics of a life lived in the power of God. They are endurance and patience and joy. Firstly endurance you see this word is a very common word in the New Testament. It means endurance perseverance steadfastness and it's a sort of characteristic of somebody who keeps going even when things get difficult.

And the example in the New Testament we're given is one of the examples is Job. James writes to us telling us about the perseverance of Job because here was a man who faced real difficulties in his life.

He lost everything that he had. He lost almost everyone who was dear to him. He lost his health. And people were saying to him Job you should just give up. His own wife was saying Job why don't you just curse God and die?

[13 : 21] Why don't you give up on your faith? And Job refused to do so and he persevered in his faith and the Lord rewarded him.

It is somebody who continues to follow Christ even when their circumstances are very difficult or they face very real obstacles to faith. Well maybe that's you here today.

Maybe you are at a point in your life where you are facing massive discouragement. Maybe there are battles you've been fighting in your own heart for years struggling with sin the same sins day after day week after week.

And maybe you think I've just not made any progress. Paul prays for those Christians in Colossae and we need to pray for each other that we might be given power for perseverance to continue even when things are difficult.

Or maybe in your own personal ministry you're meeting opposition. Maybe everything seems to be going wrong. Maybe you're being worn out by seeing a lack of fruit such as was seen in Colossae

and maybe you think is it really worth continuing?

[14:28] Wouldn't I be better just signing a letter of resignation and moving on and doing something more rewarding with my life? And the prayer there is for power for perseverance to continue following Christ and serving Christ even in the midst of great difficulty opposition and persecution.

And the Colossians needed to hear that because they were facing the very beginnings of false teaching. Soon the church would be struggling with it. There would be all sorts of difficulties. Perhaps fallings out among the believers and they needed to keep going with Christ in the midst of that. In a few decades the church throughout the Roman Empire would face persecution and Christians would be in very real danger of their lives.

And Paul says you need to have perseverance when you face that situation. That you don't simply cut and run when there is a cost to your faith that you press on with Christ. So he says you need endurance.

And the second characteristic is patience. These men in their coal mine in Chile they're going to require a lot of patience. They've waited two weeks but I think the estimate is they might get out in time for Christmas.

[15:40] That's a long time down a coal mine. They need patience. And the word patience again in the New Testament can be used in that sense. It can mean waiting for something. A sort of long-suffering waiting.

A persistent waiting. And Abraham was an example of that wasn't he? God made a promise to Abraham. He said I'm going to give you a son and you will be the father of a nation.

But it took 24 years for that son to appear. And the book of Hebrews tells us God made a promise to Abraham since he had no one greater by whom to swear. He swore by himself and thus Abraham having patiently waited obtained the promise.

There is this idea of patiently waiting for something. Of trusting that God is in control even when we do not understand the circumstances and continuing to commit ourselves to him and to trust in his purposes and his timing.

They are to patiently wait. They are to persevere when things get difficult. And the third characteristic in verse 11 is great joy. One of the great mysteries of the Christian faith is how closely suffering and joy are tied together.

[16:57] In the 1970s I think it was, Pastor Richard Wurmbrand was visited by some Americans. He was a Romanian pastor and he had suffered under the communists spending a total of 14 years in prison.

I think three of which were in solitary confinement. He had been beaten, tortured, ridiculed, his wife had been imprisoned, his children had been left to wander the streets for themselves. Eventually he was released.

Some Americans came to visit him and they said, we have come to see Richard Wurmbrand and he said, that's me. They spoke to him for a while and they said, we don't think you are the man we are looking for because you are far too joyful.

He was a man who suffered more than most of us will ever suffer. And his life was characterized by a deep joy. And that, says Paul, is the outworking of God's power in the believer.

Joy. Not that the Christians were masochists, but there was a reason for that joy. Verse 12, they were to give thanks to the Father who has qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

[18:07] The right approach to suffering is to keep the long-term perspective. these chaps in the cave were not rejoicing because they're trapped, they're rejoicing because they think they're going to get out, because they think there is hope of rescue, of salvation.

They're thinking of the future. And Paul says in verse 12, think of the future. You have this wonderful inheritance in the saints in light. Christ is in you the hope of glory.

He has gone before you to prepare a place for you. And there awaits for you a crown of life, an everlasting joy in the presence of the Father. And what is more, says Paul, it is a sure and a certain hope.

God himself has qualified you to share in that inheritance. It is he who has delivered you, he who has transferred you into the kingdom of his beloved son.

It is he who has forgiven your sins through the blood of Christ. So we have to keep in mind that perspective. And it is the perspective the New Testament seems to present us with.

[19 : 12] Always this balance between what is permanent and what is temporary. So Paul, when he is suffering, says our light and momentary troubles are nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory which we are to receive.

Peter says don't forget your inheritance, this imperishable, undefiled, unfading, wonderful, glorious inheritance in heaven. though now for a little while you have had to suffer trials of various kinds. Christians are joyful in suffering, not because they enjoy it, none of us enjoy suffering, but because we know that it will end and when it ends we will have something wonderful and something everlasting.

Paul prays that they might be patient, that they might have endurance and they might be joyful and that is only possible through the power of God. So what is our prayer for ourselves?

What is our prayer for our brothers and sisters in Christ? What is our prayer for each other? What is our prayer for our brothers and sisters in faraway lands, lands such as Pakistan, who daily face physical need, health problems, sickness, persecution, marginalization because of their faith?

[20 : 25] Well, says Paul, pray that they will be strengthened with God's power for all endurance and patience with joy. You see, Paul is very realistic about Christian experience.

He was brought to faith himself. Remember that day on the Damascus road, he had been a persecutor of the church, one who sought to extinguish the name of Jesus from Israel.

And one day the Lord met him on the road to Damascus and he beheld the glory of Christ. And Jesus said to him, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and away from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from dark darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place and inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Paul's commission was, as he reminds us in verse 14, to preach the gospel, to see people turn from darkness into light, from the domain of darkness, the domain of Satan, into the kingdom of his beloved son, to see sinners find redemption, to find the forgiveness of their sins, a new beginning in life and a new power for life.

But his experience of that Christian ministry was far from easy and he himself had come to know the need for God's power and the need for perseverance and patience and joy.

[22 : 12] As he wrote to the Corinthian church, he says this, servants of God we commend ourselves in every way, by great endurance in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless night hunger, by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, by truthful speech and the power of God.

we are treated as imposters and yet are true, as unknown and yet well known, as dying and behold we live as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing everything.

the life of a Christian minister and indeed of a Christian believer in the first century was not easy.

Paul learned that, he was called by Christ personally and he faced a lifetime of difficulty and he writes to the Colossians, young in their faith, young in their church, saying you too need these things, you need the same power at work among you because in time you will face them yourselves.

How I pray that you will be strengthened with God's power for endurance. and patience and joy.

Well I don't know what you're facing, I don't know what we'll face in the days ahead, perhaps in this country, in this very land where we currently enjoy so much liberty.

I don't know what circumstances of our lives will come to pass, what sicknesses we might endure, what opposition we might have from within our families, whatever. But God's power does not run dry and he still has his wonderful glorious might.

[23 : 56] so let us look to that each morning, let us trust in the Lord whose mercies are new every morning. Let us pray for one another, those we do know and those whose faces we have not seen that we will each be strengthened to live those lives worthy of the Lord.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your wonderful power. We thank you that it is you who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints of light.

It is you who has transferred us from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of your well-beloved Son. Lord, we thank you for that power in operation. when we were converted and everyday sins. We pray, Lord, for each of ourselves that you will strengthen us by that same power. As we have to wait, Lord, for the fulfillment of your promises, we ask that you will give us patience, that we might remain faithful to you.

As we face difficulties in our lives and opposition in our Christian walk, that you will give us perseverance to continue pressing on to the goal. And, Lord, in all of these things we ask for your supernatural joy to fill our hearts, that we might rejoice in all circumstances, always giving thanks to you for the wonderful hope we have in Christ.

[25 : 20] So, Lord, we thank you for our time together. We thank you for your word. We thank you for your spirit. And ask that we go from this place walking worthily, fully pleasing to you in all that we would say and do.

And we ask this, Lord, in the precious name of Jesus.