

Know your Saviour

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Date: 29 May 2019

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[0 : 00] I do hope you're able to stay after the service so that we could all kind of have some lunch together, have some chat, and hopefully encourage each other as we all walk with the Lord together. But before we come to God's word, let's pray together. Let's ask God for his help.

Our Lord and Father, we thank you for uniting us together, for gathering us together to listen to your word. We ask that as we come before you, that you would humble our hearts so that as you speak through your word, we'd be willing to hear.

And please, Lord, would you by the work of your spirit be changing and shaping all of us more and more into the image of your son, in whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Please do turn your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1, which is on page 976 in the Blue Church Bibles that are on your seats.

Ephesians chapter 1. And this week we're returning to this chapter of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church, looking at verses 15 to 23 today, as we seek to know our Savior.

So, Ephesians chapter 1, on page 976, and we'll read the whole chapter together. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 30] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundations of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the blood. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insights, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might, that he worked in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

[3 : 42] And he put all things under his feet, and gave him his head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Amen. Amen. Do you ever feel weak as a Christian? Do you ever think that the gospel doesn't have much power, and won't make that much difference for the people you know?

Or do you hear a really encouraging sermon all about evangelism one day, and you go home excited about it, you're ready to evangelize the whole world, everyone you know, your neighbors, your colleagues, your family, your friends, but then you lie awake at night, worrying.

What are they going to say if I share the gospel with them? How are my family going to react? Or maybe you worry that if you share the gospel with your neighbors, that they are going to reject you. They're going to push you out, and be talking about you behind your back. They'll make sure everyone knows that, well, you're one of those odd, weird, fundamentalist Christian types. And you wouldn't want that.

[4 : 52] You wouldn't want them saying that about you, would you? Or you'll have a big family meal together, and you know there's that one person there who, well, they think that you're just a misinformed idiot.

They'll think you're taken in by these foolish stories, and they seem to be the well-read, intellectual, strong ones who have all the answers in their back pockets. There's a whole variety of different ways we tend to feel fragile and afraid as Christians, because we feel like as Christians that we're in a position of real weakness.

We feel like we're on the losing side, that we're not gaining that much ground really, and that us sharing the gospel with the world is not working, and that the world is winning the fight.

We feel vulnerable. And the Ephesian church felt that too. They lived in a world which looked very powerful, where the hugely impressive temples of Artemis loomed over the religious scene.

And the church looked very poor and vulnerable in comparison to the grandeur of the religious establishment of Artemis. The church was living in Artemis' great shadow.

[6 : 04] We heard last week of how the church was born, how despite all this apparent strength of the goddess Artemis, which provided opposition to the gospel, that God still placed a church, a group of believers united together by Jesus, in Ephesus.

He turned them away from idols and towards himself. One of the boys in our youth group finished his French exams last week, and he has hated every minute of studying French at school.

And to celebrate being done with it, celebrate being finished with his exams, he and his friends got all of their French daughters together, put them in a metal bucket, and then set it on fire. They were having nothing to do with it ever again.

And in a similar way, when the Ephesians were converted, they turned their backs on the idols of Artemis by gathering all their idolatrous books together and then burning them in a very public and visible display of their repentance, away from idols and towards the Lord.

They were having nothing to do with those idols ever again. Artemis was gone. But because they repented from Artemis towards the Lord, the whole town whipped up a storm in trying to get these Christians chucked in prison.

[7 : 14] Tens of thousands of people were involved. And for a full two hours, they all chanted loudly in one voice, great is Artemis of the Ephesians. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Again and again and again. And to chant anything for two hours, well, I mean, I've never done that. I've never chanted anything for two hours. I don't know if you have. But it would mean that at the very, very least, they were quite passionate about it.

And much more likely, they were fanatic. They were diehards of this idol. They must have shouted themselves hoarse. Almost the whole city believed in Artemis and were willing to publicly nail their colors to the mast in mass number.

It was so intimidating and looked very powerful compared with their wee group of people meeting together in someone's house to worship the Lord of all creation.

How would the little Ephesian church stand a chance against the powerful temple and all of its fanatics, all of its followers? They must have been left asking themselves, was God's plan in the world working?

[8 : 27] Was he the one with the power? Does he know what he's doing? Because it certainly didn't look like it to them. Didn't look like God was winning. But we saw last week in the first 14 verses just how wonderfully blessed these people were in Christ.

In him they had every spiritual blessing they could have. They were made sons and daughters of the high king of heaven, redeemed and given an inheritance in the new creation to look forward to. They weren't to be pitied, but they were the most privileged and blessed people on the entire planet because of all that Christ has bought for them by his death on the cross.

And today we're going to see more of the same by looking at what God has done in his son. So let's dig into these verses as we seek to know our saviour. Look with me at verses 15 and 16 where we see Paul's prayer of gratitude.

This passage splits into two sections. It's one prayer, but he prays in thanks first in verses 15 and 16. So the Ephesian church, for all their thoughts of being lesser or inferior to everything around them, were a cause of unceasing thanks for the apostle Paul.

Did you see that at the start of verse 16? He does not cease to give thanks for them. He couldn't stop them if he tried. The great apostle to the Gentiles, Paul himself, was always thanking the Lord for the Christians meeting in their little house church in Ephesus.

[9 : 58] He gives two reasons, but really those reasons point to something far bigger. So what are these reasons? Well, firstly, they have faith in the Lord Jesus, which you see in the middle of verse 15.

These Ephesians were taken from idolatry to the goddess Artemis and brought into relationship with the Lord. They're brought in as sons and daughters and are adopted in as members of the royal family of heaven.

They were brought into all that because of their faith in Christ. They were extraordinarily blessed in him and were looking to him alone for their salvation. In the city of Ephesus, where the might and establishment of the Artemis cult would have seen very tempting, they were firmly remaining committed to their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Secondly, Paul is thankful for their love towards all the saints at the end of verse 16. They're not a group of individuals who have kind of independently come to faith in Jesus as their Lord and stayed that way, separate and independent as individuals.

But they're all joined together in him. They have a collective identity in him. It's a spiritual reality and the Ephesians are acting it out in real day-to-day life.

[11 : 19] They're made sons and daughters of God himself. They're part of the same family. They bear the same family name. So they're acting like it. By loving all of their church family, they are acting out the spiritual truth that they are united together in Christ and part of the same spiritual family.

All of them. Those easy to love and those less easy to love. There are always people you find easy to love in a church, aren't there?

They're usually, to be honest, they're fairly like you. If I'm describing the people I find easy to love, you'd be surprised at just how similar they are to me. They're usually like you and you agree with them on a lot of issues.

But God doesn't only tend to save people you find agreeable. He doesn't tend to save people you find easy to love exclusively, does He? The church is full of people who are different to us, who we find harder to love.

Because love is easy when it's towards people you naturally like, isn't it? Love is beautiful, however, when it's hard. When it's toward people who have hurt or offended you, but you love them anyway.

[12 : 33] That's the kind of love Paul is commending here. Not just straightforward, easy, simple love, but difficult love which bears with one another despite our differences, our quirks, and our sin.

So why did Paul mention these two things? Why did he mention their faith and love? Why is he so thankful for them that he never seems to stop? What is it about these things that meant he would not cease to give thanks to the Lord for them?

Was he just trying to cheer them up and give them a kind of great, big, apostolic thumbs up on how they're doing? Well, no. Something far bigger is going on here.

Because all of this points towards what Christ has achieved and what he's doing in the world, which we saw in verse 10 last week. He is uniting everything under his headship.

Look at verse 10. God's plan for the fullness of time is to unite all things in him, in Christ. Christ. That's what God was doing in the world.

[13 : 37] That's what he was doing as he sent his son to unite and fix everything by putting it all under his rule. As the Christians in Ephesus were having faith in Christ, they were submitting to his lordship.

And as they had love for all the saints, they were being united together under Christ as Lord. Do you see that? These aren't just brief notes he's making of how they're doing, like he's filling out some sort of spiritual report card for them.

They're not just nice things that Paul's decided to mention because he wants them to feel good. But these are clearly there to point them to the greater work that Christ is doing in the world as he is uniting everything under himself.

They themselves are evidence of something far bigger at play that Christ is going to unite everything in himself. They're a foreshadow, a foretaste of what's coming in him when he returns and brings about the new creation.

And it's a really encouraging thought that as every time you love one of your brothers and sisters in your church family or one of the saints you've been united to in Christ, then you're displaying to the whole world that you are what Christ is working for in the world.

[14:54] You, as you love other people who you've got nothing in common with except for Christ, are displaying that you've been united in him as all things will be in the time to come.

We, as we meet together in this room, the 60 so of us who are here meeting in the middle of this huge city with its big buildings and its apparent wisdom and knowledge and power, as we meet together, as we love each other because of our faith in the Lord Jesus, we're showing the world what God's doing and we're displaying his wisdom to the world by doing it.

And the world might not agree with that. It might pop its head in the door, have a wee look around and think that, well, this isn't much to write home about, is it? But that's because they don't see the spiritual reality.

They just see a bunch of folk who are hearing a weird message from some outdated book rather than people united together under the lordship of Christ and at peace with him as he unites all things together.

I hope you feel encouraged by that, by the knowledge that as you care for and love the people God has placed you in a church with and as you keep on trusting in Christ despite how powerful the world looks, you're visibly displaying the spiritual reality that you're united together under him, under Christ.

[16:19] Well, let's now look at Paul's prayer for growth, which we see in the rest of the chapter, verses 17 to 23. So Paul is glad that they're evidencing their salvation in Christ and in their faith and love and he prays that they would continue to grow as Christians.

But what does he pray for? Well, he prays in verse 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know.

Paul wants the Ephesians to simply grow in knowledge, nothing fancy, but knowing more of what they already have in Christ. He wants them to have wisdom, revelation, knowledge, and enlightenment to know more of what they have.

For them to grow as Christians, they need to know more of their salvation and know more of their savior. Paul shares three things that they are to know.

So let's briefly work through each one of them. He wants them to know firstly, verse 18, the hope to which God has called you. What are the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints?

[17:33] Paul wanted them to know the hope that started at the beginning of their Christian faith, which they were called to, and from beginning to end, the hope is always in what Christ has bought for us with his blood, our inheritance in the new creation with the Lord.

Because if there's nothing coming after this life, if there's no inheritance, if there's no new creation, if this life is all there is, then us living as weak Christians, powerless in this world, ought to be pitied and felt sorry for.

What are we doing all this for? Why are we investing time and money and people into trying to advance God's kingdom if it's all for nothing? But thankfully, we have an inheritance in the new creation where everything is going to be united in Christ.

We've got something rock solid and guaranteed which we're all waiting for, which is going to be rich and glorious in every way. The Ephesians would have looked poor by the world's standards, meeting in their small house church with the shadow of this great temple Artemis looming over them.

But each and every one of those Ephesian Christians had a rich inheritance to look forward to in the new creation, the new heavens and the earth. Their heavenly father is bringing them into his lavish kingdom.

[18:55] Secondly, Paul wants the Ephesians to know, verse 19, the immeasurable greatness of God's power towards us who believe. Paul wanted the church to know that the power of the God who brings life to the dead is at work among us.

And he's not giving us some secondary reserve power that is weak or inferior in any way. It's the same power that verse 20 raised Christ from the dead.

Which means that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in you. If you were to look over to chapter 2, you'd see that power quite wonderfully at work in the Ephesians themselves. In that well-known chapter, they are brought from spiritual death to life, to being seated with Christ in the heavenly places. The same power is at work there. We need that same power that raised Christ from the dead because, well, we, without his help, are dead in our sins and trespasses. We're unable to save ourselves no matter what we do, so without him, we're looking forward to a state of eternal death without his help. Thirdly, Paul wants the church to know what God has given to Christ.

[20 : 09] God has, verse 20, raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

God has raised Christ from the dead, seated him at his right hand and put him far above all the rulers and authorities. With every phrase added in, Christ gets that bit more majestic, doesn't he? Verse 22, and he put all things under his feet. All these things, all the rulers and authorities, powers, dominions and names are under Christ's feet.

God has taken the most powerful and intimidating groups and establishments in the whole world and he's turned them into a footstool. Let's think about that image for a minute.

Do any of you have a footstool at home? If you do, how would you describe your relationship with your footstool? Does it tell you what to do?

[21 : 16] Does it have power over you? Does it strike fear into you? Does it force you into the corner of your living room intimidating you with its influence and might and power?

Of course not. It's a footstool. It's got no power over you and all you do with it is put your feet on it when you're tired. No danger. Well, God has taken the rulers, the authorities, the powers, the dominions and the names.

He's taken all the things you are most afraid of as a Christian and he's turned them into furniture. Something Christ puts his feet on. And the reason he can do that is because he has defeated them. He has defeated the rulers, authorities, powers, dominions and names, all of them. He's been raised far above them and put them under his feet. He's won. The result is not in question so we can have great confidence in him as we go on in the Christian life in a world which is so against the church and thinks so little of it.

And this Christ who has defeated all things has put them under his feet. What is he to us? Verse 22. And he put all things under his feet and gave him his head over all things to the church which is his body.

[22 : 41] He is our head and we are his body. We're joined to him. Since he's our head he controls what's happening. He calls the shots so we are to follow him.

And we are brought together because the body is not fragmented. It's not a disjointed thing. It's not like Frankenstein's monster. Christ's body is one. It's being united under him as its head just like he's going to do with all things.

The church being pictured as Christ's body is a perfect image in Ephesians as you see very clearly how it's being united under him as head. But the church is thought of as being weak and irrelevant isn't it?

It's looked down on. It has to fit around and be shaped by the world rather than the other way around. It has to change its morals get with the times and stop being so old fashioned.

The world thinks that the church is weak that it's powerless that it's useless. It's just an ornament on the shelf that you keep around because you feel like you have to.

[23 : 50] It's not going to change anything or impact anyone or make the world a better place. And the really tragic thing is that often we think these things too.

We who are a part of Christ's body and have him as our head we think that the church is weak. We think it has no power. That it can never influence the intimidating forces of the world.

That's what we think if we're honest anyway. That's partly why we're so afraid of sharing the gospel with our neighbours isn't it? We feel weak and powerless.

We don't really believe that God could change their mind never mind their hearts. We don't think that he could bring them from death to life. That's partly why we're so scared of sharing the gospel

with people.

We think we're the weak ones. That we're the irrelevant ones and all we have to offer is a life of being on the outside. of people thinking that you're a bit dim and talking about you behind your back.

[24 : 54] One of those types. But the church is where the real power of the world rests because we have Christ as our head. We have the most powerful and glorious leader there is who has already defeated his enemies.

We're on the winning side because they're sitting under his feet like a footstool not bothering a thing. When we look at the world with all its wisdom its intellect its power and authority we think that the world is this big it's huge we think it's way up there and the church feels like it's this big that we're small and insignificant.

But the spiritual reality which is far more important than what we see is that Christ is far above every ruler every authority every dominion and every name now and forever and since he is our head and we are joined to him and belong to him well the power of this world is not worth comparing.

They're under his feet. They've got no power of you. And Jesus didn't defeat these powers so that we could keep on going being afraid of them.

The Ephesians certainly weren't meant to read this and then go outside onto the streets of Ephesus and be afraid of Artemis. That wasn't what they were meant to do. They were meant to look at it head on straight on and know that it's been defeated by Christ that as powerful as it looks here on earth that it rests underneath his feet Christ using them as a footstool because he's defeated them.

[26 : 34] He's won and he's made a footstool of his enemies. So why on earth would we be afraid of them? We as Christians are not in a position of weakness but we're actually in a position of unrivaled strength.

Not because of anything we've done nothing special about us and ourselves but all because of Christ and what he's done in defeating all the enemies of God putting them under his feet now and forever.

So we can have real confidence in him as we go out into the world not afraid of what we perceive to be the strength of the world but confident in what we know with certainty to be the power of Christ at work in us and bringing everything we're so afraid of under his feet.

So as you leave today as you go back out into the real world and as you're faced with your hostile friends your colleagues who think so little of the gospel your neighbors who think you're a bit of an odd one for being a Christian or your family who just think you're a bit silly who look like they hold all the cards and make the gospel look small remember what Christ has done he has brought you to life he has brought someone spiritually dead like you into his kingdom and he has put every obstacle you think stands in the way of that person trusting in him under his feet so why be afraid why not ask that friend if they want to read the bible with you why not invite your family member to your church why not invite your colleague to the lunchtime bible talk why not share your faith in the lord jesus with them because anything they could throw at you anything they could threaten you with or say behind your back or make you think they'll never come it's not theirs to control but it's under christ's feet he's made a footstool out of it so we've got no reason to be afraid of it so let's go out into the world which seems so strong and so wise and see it for what it really is see the spiritual reality that they are defeated that they sit under christ's feet like a footstool and let's have confidence that we are joined to him who is uniting all things under himself let's pray together our lord and father we are sorry for how we think that your church is weak that we think it's so small and insignificant when really you have worked your great power in it to bring us to salvation to bring us to life in you and we thank you that we are united that we're joined to the one who has defeated everything and put everything under his feet please give us confidence in you that as we go out into our world which seems so powerful and intimidating that we would go out knowing that all of it has been put under your feet please father remind us of all christ has done and all we have in your son amen w so bye