

Paul Shapes the Longings of the Ephesian Christians

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to our Bible reading for this evening, and Edward is continuing our series through the letter of Ephesians. We have visitor Bibles just at the side here at the back.

So if you don't have a Bible with you, please do grab one of those. And turn to Paul's letter to the church in Ephesians.

And Edward will be preaching the second half of chapter one. But I'll be reading the whole of the chapter. So Ephesians chapter one. And beginning there at verse one, page 176, if you have a visitor Bible.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.

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.

[1 : 08] Who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

That we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons 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 beloved. 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 insight. 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.

[2 : 11] 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 towards 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.

[3 : 10] 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. And he put all things. Under his feet.

And gave him. As head over all things to the church. Which is his body. The fullness of him. Who fills. All.

[4 : 06] In all. Amen. And may God bless. His word to us this evening. Amen. Well good evening friends.

Let's turn to Ephesians chapter 1 once again. And it's on page 976 in the red hardback Bibles. If you have one of those.

And as Paul has pointed out. Our passage for tonight is the last section. Of this first chapter. From verse 15 through to verse 23. And my title is.

Paul shapes the longings. Of the Ephesian Christians. And of course by extension. The longings of Christians like us. In the 21st century in Glasgow.

Now you'll see quickly. That in this section. Paul is praying. But the paragraph is not set out. In the simple form of a prayer as such.

[5 : 12] Paul doesn't write. Dear father. We thank you for this and this. And we want to pray for this and this and that. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. It's not that sort of prayer. What Paul is doing here.

Is he's recording. For the Ephesian Christians. The way in which he is praying for them. He's saying to them. This is how I'm praying for you. Brothers and sisters. I'm giving thanks for you.

Verse 16. And I'm also asking God. To give you various things. And what those things are. He tells them in verses 17 to 23.

So he's recording his prayer. He's reporting his prayer for them. This is a description of the terms and categories. That he uses. As he prays for his friends in Ephesus.

Now don't you think there's something odd. Or at least something intriguing. About that method. After all. Why should he divulge to them.

[6 : 09] The things that he's asking God to do for them. You might want to say to Paul. Brother. Why are you spilling these beans. Isn't your prayer life a private matter.

Private between you and the Lord. Well of course you're praying for the Ephesian Christians. Because you love them. And you care for them. But why tell them what you're asking God to do for them.

Now I think Paul's answer would be. I'm writing like this. Because. I am wanting to shape their own longings. I'm wanting them to see and to know.

What is really desirable. They're young in the faith. They're learning to pray. But I want to expand the horizons of what they long for. I want to give them. A bigger and broader.

And more far-reaching grasp. Of what the Christian faith is really about. Now thinking of us. At one level. Paul is teaching us here. How to pray.

[7 : 05] He's showing us the things that we should be asking for. As we pray for our Christian friends. But at another level. Paul is shaping our longings. He's opening up a great vista to us.

It's almost as though we're looking into the Grand Canyon. In Arizona. And we get amazed. As we see how far it stretches. And how deep down it goes.

With a little blue river. Running along the bottom. Paul is giving us a big view. Of what to pray for. And also what to long for. Now just think for a moment.

Of some of the things that we might long for. In this life. In this world. We might long for a better job. We might long for. Colleagues at work.

Who are more focused. And less lazy. We might long for a better boss. A younger car. A delightful person to marry. Or maybe just for a life of.

[8 : 03] Idleness and relaxation. For enough money to buy a big armchair. A big television set. And the services of a butler. You ring the bell as you sit there.

And he comes in. You call sir. And you say. Yes Charles. Kindly bring me a nice slice of that. Coffee and walnut cake. And also a glass of my.

My favorite beverage. Oh would that be. Iron Brew sir. Oh Charles. Come come. You know me now better than that surely. Coca-Cola is what I need.

Now we all long for certain things. In this world. And many of those longings. Are absolutely right and proper. But they're all things. Within this world. And this world is passing away.

Paul here. In Ephesians chapter 1. Is opening up our longings. For things which don't belong. To this transient world. Things which belong to eternity. These things.

[8 : 59] To quote the old hymn. Are solid joys. And lasting treasures. Which none but Zion's children know. So let's put on our reading glasses. And focus on the text.

And allow Paul to teach us. How to pray. And how to recalibrate. Our longings. So that we long for blessings. Which can be never taken away from us. Eternal blessings.

Excuse me. I'm just going to get a little bit of water. To quench the thirst of the frog. That is in my throat.

Good. Now in verse 15. He tells us what motivates him to pray. For this reason he says. Because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus.

And your love towards all the saints. Now it's a slightly odd way to start. Because he'd known this church in Ephesus for years. He had spent almost three years with them.

[9 : 56] But that was several years previously. And he must have been to some extent. Out of touch with them. So when he says. I've heard of your faith. He can't mean.

I've heard of it for the first time. After all. He had been the very person. The missionary evangelist. Who had first brought the gospel to them. Some seven or eight years before. So he must mean. I'm here in prison in Rome. But I've recently heard. On the Christian Bush telegraph. That your faith is holding strong. And your love towards all the saints. Towards all the Christians.

Is being expressed in many kinds of ways. In other words. You're standing firm. You're trusting the Lord Jesus. And you are loving your fellow Christians. And that is why.

Verse 16. I don't cease to give thanks for you. I'm so thankful to the Lord. For what he has done. In sustaining your faith in Christ. And in sustaining your faith. And your love.

[10 : 51] Now doesn't Paul there. Give us a real example to follow. To be continuously thankful to the Lord. Not just feeling. An unexpressed. Warm glow of gratitude.

Inside ourselves. But actually saying. Thank you to him. For the faith and love. Of our fellow Christians. Christians. If your neck. Is not too.

Elderly and creaky. Just turn it to the right. For a moment. And have a look at one or two people. And then. If it can bear it. Turn it to the left. And look at a few more.

Now. You're not looking here. At perfect Christians. You might even be looking. At one or two rogues. But you are certainly looking. At some large helpings. Of faith and love.

Do thank the Lord regularly. For all the faith in Christ. And all the love expressed. In the Lord's church. It's a wonderful gift from heaven. That any wretched sinner.

[11 : 48] Should come to have faith in Christ. And it's equally wonderful. That Christians should learn. To love each other. In the world out there. Beyond the church. Love. Can be a scarce commodity.

But in the church. There is plenty of it. And if we're prepared. To give love to each other. We shall receive in return. Far more love. Than we can ever cope with. So that is Paul's motivation.

As he prays. He knows of their faith in Christ. He knows of their love. Towards all the saints. And that fills him. With thankfulness. But he immediately then. Turns to ask God.

For certain things. For the Ephesians. So he says at the end. Of verse 16. Remembering you. In my prayers. And prayers there. Really means.

My prayers of request. And then from verse 17. Right through to the end. Of verse 23. He tells them. What he's asking God. To do for them. And the heart of his request.

[12 : 43] Is expressed. In one word. And it's not. It's not the word. Give. In verse 17. It is a verb. So just follow with me.

From the beginning. Of verse 17. 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. Certain. Things. Now we'll look at those.

Certain things. A little bit later. But I first want us. To linger. On that key verb. Know. K-N-O-W. Paul is praying. That the Ephesian Christians. May know.

And this is why. They need. Verse 17. A spirit of wisdom. And revelation. In the knowledge. The knowledge. Of him. And verse 18. They need to have.

[13 : 39] The eyes of their hearts. Enlightened. So that they can know things. The heart of this prayer. All the way from verse 17. To verse 23. Is a prayer for knowledge.

For knowing. It's a greater knowledge. Than simply the knowledge. Of the intellect. Or the mind. Because verse 18. It's the eyes of their hearts. That need to be filled with light.

In the Bible. The heart. Is always the center. Of everything. In a human being. Not only of rational thought. But also of our emotions. And our will. The heart.

In Bible language. Is the central driving force. Of a man or woman. That is where the light. Of the knowledge of God. Needs to shine. To light up our whole being.

As we come to know him better. And this knowledge. Is something which we can't discover. By ourselves. However hard we try. Because Paul says.

[14:36] It can only come to us. As God's gift. Verse 17. The father gives it to us. In the form of wisdom. Or revelation. I can't reveal the things of God.

To myself. Because I'm earth bound. By nature. I'm blind. The human heart. By nature. Is a very dark place. But when he reveals.

True knowledge of himself. To us. We then begin. To know him. And the light begins. To shine. In the dark places. Of our inner being. When the eyes.

Of our hearts. Are increasingly. Enlightened. The dark places. Of our hearts. Are subdued. And diminished. The revelation. We need. Verse 17.

Is the revelation. Of the knowledge. Of him. So in telling the Ephesians. These things. Paul is shaping. Their longings. He's showing them. What they most need.

[15:29] To desire. And it's the knowledge of God. Experienced in heart. And mind. And will. Paul speaks of this kind of thing. Elsewhere. In Philippians chapter 3.

He speaks of the surpassing worth. Of knowing. Christ Jesus. My Lord. In the same chapter. He says. That I may know him. And the power.

Of his resurrection. Jesus says. In John's gospel. Chapter 17. As he prays to God. The father. For his people. He says. This is eternal life.

That they know you. The only true God. And Jesus Christ. Whom you have sent. So the knowledge of God. And of the Lord Jesus. Is the most desirable.

Knowledge of all. Theology. Which is the true knowledge of God. Derived from the Bible. Theology used to be called. In days gone by. The queen of the sciences.

[16:25] That's a great phrase. Isn't it? In that phrase. The word sciences. Really means. All branches of knowledge. It's not just our more restricted. Modern. Use of the word science.

Referring to physics. And chemistry. And so on. But to every branch of knowledge. Theology is the queen. Of the sciences. Knowing God. And let Paul say it again. It is by God's gift.

Of wisdom and revelation. That our eyes. Begin to be opened. To know him. And our primary source. Of this revelation. Is the Bible. There may be secondary sources.

Of this revelation. For example. The lives. Of tested and tried. Christian people. Who are living examples. Of putting the knowledge of God. Into practice. Of course. There are plenty of good. Christian books. Which open up. The Bible's teaching to us. And help us to understand it. But these secondary sources. Are all derived from the Bible. They're not independent of it.

[17:21] The Bible is the source. Of our knowledge of God. And if Paul. Who speaks as the very apostle of Jesus. Really meaning that he speaks. With all the authority of Jesus himself.

If Paul shows us. That what we need most of all. Is to know God. Let's set our hearts. On getting to know him. Better and better. As a major. Lifelong.

Project. Let it be the big project. The great concern. Of our lives. To know him more deeply. As the truth of the Bible. Is unfolded into our hearts.

Now we will want to gain. Knowledge in many other ways. Of course we do. That's that's. That's the way human beings behave. The desire to find things out. The desire to understand things.

Is a desire that is deeply wired. Into our natures. So we'll want to gain knowledge. About all the usual. This worldly things. Sport and music. Politics. History.

[18:17] How to tell an ash tree. From an oak tree. Or a swan from a goose. How to grow vegetables. How to bake cakes. All these things are very interesting. But on the scale of real value.

They pale into insignificance. Compared with. The knowledge of God. Let that be. Our chief longing. Paul doesn't pray. For the Ephesians. To understand the workings.

Of the world better. He prays that. The father of glory. As he describes him. In verse 17. May give them. The priceless gift. Of revelation. In the knowledge.

Of him. Years ago. When. When I was a youngster. At Christian camps. For teenagers. Some of our leaders. Used to say to us. What we need.

Is not to know about God. But to know him. But I think that's a false distinction. Because the way we come to know God. Is precisely by getting to know about him.

[19:14] That's why we read the Bible. To get to know as much as possible about him. In order to know him. It's knowing about him. That leads us to know him. And it's the same as.

As the process of getting to know another human being. We need to know about people. If we get to know them. So if you meet somebody new. That might well happen in about half an hour's time. After this service is over.

You'll want to set about getting to know about this person. You'll ask one or two questions. Inevitably. You'll put them gently and nicely. But you'll say things like. Where are you from? And the person might say.

I'm from Oregon. And you say. Oregon? Is that in the north of Canada? Or the south of Canada? And he says. It's in the USA.

What do these British people teach their kids at school? And then you say. And what is your name? He says. My name is Alistair McDonald. And you say to yourself.

[20 : 11] A McDonald from Oregon? I thought they all came from Sky. And so the conversation develops. And it's fun. You talk about your work. Your hobbies. Your family. Your background. Your experience of church.

Lots of other things. But you only get to know this new friend. By getting to know all sorts of things about him. That's the same with God. We get to know him.

By getting to know about him. And our source of all this knowledge. Is the Bible. The Bible teaches us. His identity. Who he is. His character.

What he is like. His plans and purposes. What he has been doing. What he is doing. What he will be doing finally. That's how we come to know him. By absorbing over a long period of time.

All that the Bible teaches about him. And the Bible is his word to us. God's own word. It's his message to the whole world. So as we read the Bible carefully and thoughtfully.

[21 : 09] What is actually going on. Is that he is revealing his character. And purposes to us. He is saying to us. This is who I am. The Bible is my self portrait.

Keep looking at it. Keep gazing at it. And you will inevitably come to know me. Better and better. Now in our passage for this evening. Paul is shaping our longing.

To know God better. In three specific ways. And I want to spend the rest of this sermon time. Looking at these three things. So perhaps we can pick it up together. In the middle of verse 18. Where he says. That you may know. So the more general idea. Expressed in verse 17. Of the knowledge of him. Is now made more specific.

In the verses that follow. Paul is about to teach us three things. Three things for us. To long to know better. And they are. First. God's call.

[22 : 06] Verse 18. Secondly. Still in verse 18. God's inheritance. And thirdly. God's power. In verses 19. To 23. So first of all.

God's call. Verse 18. That you may know. What is the hope. To which he. That is God the father. Has called you. God the father.

Calls Christians. To a hope. And what Paul is praying for. Is that the Ephesian Christians. And of course us. Might know. What this hope is. To which God.

Has called us. Now in the New Testament. This hope. Is often mentioned. And it's mentioned with joy. Because it's a certainty. We need to grasp.

That the word hope here. Is not being used. In the way that it's. Very often used. In regular conversation. In normal usage. It carries with it. A feeling of uncertainty.

[23 : 03] I hope. It's not going to rain. On Wednesday. I hope. That John's broken leg. Is not going to finish. His career in rugby. I'm hoping for the best. But I'm fearing for the worst.

Now in the New Testament. The word carries. No such uncertainty. Because. It is grounded. On the certain facts. Of the death. Resurrection. And ascension of Jesus.

And his reliable promise. To return. So what is this hope. To which all Christians. Are called. It is the certain expectation.

That we shall be with the Lord. In his eternal kingdom. Forever. Now Paul has a lot to say. About God's call. Throughout his letters.

So I just want to pick out. A few other short passages. In which he fills out. Our understanding. Of God's calling. In Romans chapter 1 verse 6. Paul tells the Roman Christians.

[23 : 58] That they are called. To belong to Jesus Christ. And in the next verse. Romans 1 7. He says they are called. To be saints. Then in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 9.

Paul writes. God is faithful. By whom you were called. Into the fellowship of his son. Jesus Christ. Our Lord. The fellowship of God's son. Of course. Is the whole church.

So God is calling people. Out of the world. Out of the realm of death. And darkness. To belong. To belong to Jesus. To belong to Jesus's people. And to be saints.

Which means to be set apart. For a holy life. So you could sum up these verses. I've just quoted. By saying that God calls us. To a new identity. But there are other verses.

About God's call. That speak of the lifestyle. Of Christians. If you just turn over a page. To chapter 4. In Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 4. Verse 1. You'll see the calling.

[24 : 58] Mentioned here. I therefore. A prisoner for the Lord. Urge you to walk. In a manner worthy. Of the calling. To which you've been called. With all humility. And gentleness.

Patience. Bearing with one another. In love. Etc. So it's about a lifestyle. We're called. To live this appropriate lifestyle. A manner of life. Which fits God's call.

A manner of life. Which is worthy. Of God's call. And Paul is going to unfold. This lifestyle. In the bulk of chapters. 4 and 5. It's the lifestyle. Of the saints.

It's the lifestyle. Of those. Who belong to Jesus Christ. And it is a lovely. And beautiful lifestyle. And it's quite different. From the lifestyle. Of human beings. Without God. So we're called.

To a new identity. We're called. To a new lifestyle. And to move. For a moment. From Paul. To the apostle Peter. We're called. To be willing. To suffer.

[25 : 53] For our faith. Peter writes. In his first letter. Chapter 2. Verse 20. If. He's writing to Christians here. If when you do good. And suffer for it.

You endure. This is a gracious thing. In the sight of God. For to this. You have been called. Because Christ also suffered for you. Leaving you an example.

So that you might follow in his steps. Christ suffered. Peter is saying. And you too will suffer.

Because our allegiance to him. Will always attract the hostility. Of the world.

And this suffering. Peter is saying. Is something to which God. Calls you. So his implication is. Don't be afraid of it. Don't take offense at it.

It's part of the package. It's an inevitable ingredient. In the Christian life. So we're called to a new identity. To a new lifestyle. To a new relationship.

[26 : 47] With suffering. Now these are all aspects. Of our Christian life. In this world. But the crowning glory. Of what God calls us to. Is beyond this world.

And this brings us back. To Ephesians 1.18. This hope. To which we are called. Is the sure. And certain expectation. Of being with the Lord. In the kingdom of heaven.

In the eternal kingdom. Where we shall enjoy. Delightful. And unbroken fellowship. With him. And with all the hosts of heaven. With all those who've been redeemed. By Christ. Paul is in no doubt.

About the eternal nature. Of our hope. Just listen to what he says. In 1 Corinthians 15. As he teaches the Corinthians. About the resurrection of Jesus. He writes.

If Christ has not been raised. Your faith is futile. And you're still in your sins. Then those also who have died. Trusting in Christ. Have perished.

[27 : 47] If in this life only. We have hoped in Christ. We are of all people. The most to be pitied. But in fact. Christ has been raised.

From the dead. You see what Paul is saying there. If our hope in Christ. Is simply a this worldly thing. We are pitiable. Miserable creatures. We might as well pack up. And go home. We might as well disband our churches.

And head for the pub. There's nothing to live for. If Christianity is only about today. And tomorrow. And next week. No. Thank God. We are called to an eternal hope.

Which is assured to us. By the resurrection of Jesus. From the dead. So there's the first thing. That Paul wants the Ephesian Christians to know. As they develop their true knowledge of him.

The true knowledge of the true God. That you may know. What is the hope. To which God has called you. He wants them to long for it. To be focused upon it. Sorry about my cough.

[28 : 47] Ha. I've got a cold. So I'll just. I'll take another sip of this water. Oh cough. I command you to go. Be gone. Stupid cough. Okay.

We're on to point number two. Secondly. Now we're still here in verse 18. Paul wants them to know about their inheritance. As he puts it there in verse 18.

What are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. J.B. Phillips. Who made a very idiomatic fine translation of the New Testament about 60 years ago.

He puts it more clearly like this. The magnificence and splendor of the inheritance promised to Christians. So this glorious inheritance Paul says is full of riches.

It is ultimately and infinitely valuable. And God promises it to all his people. To every Christian. And that's what an inheritance means. It's guaranteed to come in due time to the person to whom it's promised.

[29 : 49] There's a very similar passage in Colossians chapter 1 verse 12. Where Paul writes giving thanks to the father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Now I imagine that some people here may have received an inheritance at some point. Or perhaps you're hoping to receive an inheritance eventually. But inheritances in this world can be problematical.

For example I remember talking to a man who had been a contemporary of mine at university. A Scotsman. Who had inherited a family estate in Stirlingshire. And you might think it's very pleasant to inherit an estate anywhere in Scotland.

But he didn't think so. He said to me. Our estate is hemorrhaging money. I thought to myself. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes for anything. But the inheritance promised by God to his people is in Paul's phrase.

Rich and glorious. You'll know this passage. But I can't resist quoting it. The apostle Peter writes lyrically about this inheritance in chapter 1 of his first letter.

[30 : 58] God has caused us to be born again to a living hope. Notice that word hope again. A living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

Kept in heaven for you. That imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance is promised to all Christians. And in Ephesians 1.18, Paul is shaping the longing of the Ephesians and of us to look forward with eager anticipation to the time when we will enter upon our inheritance.

Now we're bound to ask, what will it be like? The New Testament doesn't give us a lot of detail about it, but it does say certain things very clearly.

Perhaps the greatest feature of all will be that we will be with the Lord Jesus and with God the Father. When a Christian person dies, we sometimes say, Uncle Jack has gone to be with the Lord. That's right to speak like that. He has gone to be with the Lord. The entry of sin into the world separated God and man. And the great goal of the gospel is to reunite God and man, to be with him.

[32 : 14] Jesus said, John 14, in my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you and I will come again and take you to myself.

That where I am, you may be also. So we shall be with him and we shall see him. As John puts it in his first letter, when he appears, the Lord Jesus, he means, when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is, as he is in his resurrected glory.

And we shall be like him. Our own bodies made glorious and new. Our minds filled with joy and understanding and every particle, every atom of sin removed.

We learn from the book of Revelation that in the eternal kingdom, there'll be no mourning, no tears, no pain and no death. None of those agonizing things that throw our lives into dismay and bewilderment.

And heaven, we're told in Revelation, will be like a huge city, enormously large and beautiful. Our longing to look at beautiful things will be satisfied at every street corner.

[33 : 27] But I think the New Testament teaches us that the greatest thing of all will be to see our Lord Jesus and to be reunited with him, to see him as he is, with the marks of his crucifixion still upon him, lest we should ever forget how much it cost him to rescue us.

So there's the second thing. Paul is shaping our longings so that we should desire this gloriously rich inheritance. Now, thirdly, Paul wants the Ephesians to know, still that verb to know is still governing verse 19 and all that lies beyond.

He wants them to know what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power towards us who believe. Paul is saying that God's power is directed towards us and will be experienced by us.

So what does that mean? Now, I ask that question because most of us feel pretty weak most of the time. Isn't that true? Weak in the morning, weak in the evening, exhausted at bedtime, feeling like zombies in the morning.

What kind of power can Paul be talking about here? Well, he tells us, verse 19, The power directed towards us, he says, is according to, meaning the same as, the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

[34 : 56] Now, just think for a moment of Jesus actually hanging on the cross moments before he died, scarcely able to draw breath, scarcely able to lift a finger, just managing to croak a few words. Here was the son of God reduced to utter weakness. And then he died and then he was buried. He really was dead.

There is nothing weaker than a corpse. But then, in an act of power that cannot be quantified by any measures of physics or chemistry, God raised him from the dead.

Look again at verses 19 and 20. According to the working of his great might that he exerted, I think that's a good translation, that he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

But the power of God did much more than raise Jesus from the dead. Paul goes on here. He can't stop himself. The power of God also seated Jesus at God's right hand in the heavenly places.

[35 : 57] So the power of God has worked the resurrection of Jesus and the ascension of Jesus to heaven. But there's more still. Verse 21. Having seated Jesus at his right hand, God positioned him 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 age to come.

So God, in effect, has declared to the whole universe, my Jesus, my son, is your ruler. And that's not all. Look at verse 22.

And he put all things under his feet. Thus fulfilling some words in Psalm 8 where King David says, You have given him dominion over the works of your hands.

You have put all things under his feet. And verse 22. God gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Now, could any of us invent other superlative categories with which to describe the power of Christ?

We simply couldn't. In the final verses of this chapter, Paul is showing us the immeasurable power of God who took the cold corpse of his beloved son, weak, motionless, lifeless.

[37 : 16] He raised him from the dead. He exalted him to heaven. And there he proclaimed to the whole universe that his son is the matchless, incomparable ruler of everything. And that power, says Paul, is the immeasurably great power that is directed towards us who believe.

So what can that possibly mean? It means that as God raised the dead Lord Jesus to immortal life and took him to the place of power and rule in heaven, he will do the same for us who believe.

We who are followers of Jesus will follow in exactly that pattern. Death, then resurrection, then exaltation to heaven, and then rule over the universe.

Because the New Testament promises that we shall eventually share Christ's rule and reign with him. Now, if that doesn't make us want a cartwheel down the aisle, I don't know what will.

Here is Paul in prison in Rome, in chains, in a deeply weak and vulnerable position, and yet knowing what the great future holds for him. And he is shaping the Ephesian Christians and us to long for this and to be as convinced about it as he was.

[38 : 31] Now, I'm finishing in just a moment, and we'll be sharing the bread and wine. But let me close with a brief analysis of what Paul is doing here. He is shaping the Ephesians to long for the eternal future.

When he gets to chapter 4 and 5 and chapter 6, he's going to give them some very practical teaching on how to live the Christian life in this world. There's plenty of need for that.

But before he gets to that, he has to open up the gospel for them. And the gospel is about eternity. Let me repeat that sentence.

The gospel is about eternity. Years ago at a conference down in London, I heard Dick Lucas say this. The focus of Paul's gospel is always fundamentally eschatological.

Eschatological means dealing with the great eternal future, the return of Christ, the day of judgment, and everything that lies beyond. Christ has rescued us for eternity.

[39 : 33] Remember John 3.16, that great summary of the gospel. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have a happy life in Pollock Shields.

Oh, no, it's not that. You see, we're not rescued to have a happy life in Pollock Shields. The verse goes that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

It's about eternity. That's what Paul is shaping our longings for. We're only here for three score years and ten, maybe a little longer. It's quickly over.

Paul is showing us what is really important. The hope to which God has called us, the riches of our glorious inheritance in heaven and the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us, the power

demonstrated to the world in the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Our dear Heavenly Father, enlighten the eyes of our hearts, we pray, and in your kindness enable us to know you, to know the greatness of all that you have prepared for those who love you.

[40 : 57] Deepen our longing to be with you and accept our thanks today for the glorious good news of our salvation. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.