

Ephesians

Let me tell you about a city. A big city. Big buildings in the centre. A multi-cultural city with people from all over the world.

- A very religious city. Both mainstream religions and traditional religions. A lot of witchcraft and magic going on. Adverts on every post and wall for daktari who can sort out your love life, politics, missing items.
- A very money-minded, business-minded city. Lots of business going on. And even religion is business. People are selling blessings, selling protection, selling God. So if someone else's "ministry" starts doing better than mine it's a business issue – I'm losing sales.
- A very confused city. Everyone rushing about, busy doing religion, doing business. And when something big happens instantly a crowd gathers and other people see the crowd and want to know what's going on and the crowd grows and grows and half the people have no idea why they're there.

What city am I describing? Ephesus.

Can read in Acts 19 – magic, money, confusion.

The apostle Paul saw the risen Christ on Damascus Road then did three trips round the Mediterranean. On the second trip he briefly popped into Ephesus but it's on the Third trip that he really lands at Ephesus – about 53 AD – stayed there almost 3 years preaching, preaching, preaching. Loads of people believed. And they got all their magical books (worth 400M KES) and burnt them in a bonfire. Then the guys who are selling their religious stuff get annoyed business is going down. Cause a riot. Paul leaves. Goes to Jerusalem, captured, sent to Rome. So about 62 AD, quite a few years later, he's now imprisoned in Rome. And he hears from someone that the believers in Ephesus are still doing well 7 years later. So he writes them this letter from Rome.

That is a great letter. Now you could study Ephesians for weeks and barely scratch the surface. [St Helen's spend 150 hours looking at Ephesians.]

This week we'll be looking at what Ephesians has to say about the Will of God, Salvation, Mission, Pastoral Ministry, Living in step with the Gospel, Marriage, Parenting, Working, Spiritual Warfare.

There are loads of themes running through – the most important ones being the Gospel (Structure is roughly 1-3 Gospel and 4-6 Gospel-shaped living),¹ the Trinity, the Church (could look at pictures of the Body, the Building, and the Bride, look at the way God is glorified in the Church), Security in Christ (for people who have come out of the 'security' of occultism), Everything being put under Christ (reconciling of Jew & Gentile under Christ is a huge thing), Love and Unity (part of the reconciliation theme).

But I want to particularly focus us this morning on prayer and I want us to see how important prayer is to what Paul has to say to these believers and I want us to see **the necessity of prayer to the full glory of God.**

v1-3 _____

Then v3-15 he explains what he means by 'every spiritual blessing' – chosen by the Father before the creation of the world, redeemed by Christ dying a bloody death, you have been sealed with the Holy

¹ Or, as in the title of Watchman Nee's commentary: Sit, Walk, Stand.

Spirit. In other words the Trinity has saved you, Father, Son and Spirit have grabbed you. You have been swept up in the great plan of God to unite all things under Christ.

You have done nothing – you are not the actor here it is all God’s plan, God’s grace, God giving himself for you and to you. That is every spiritual blessing.

Don’t let people try to sell you blessings. There is an expression, “Selling snow to eskimos”. How can you sell something to people who already have it all.

That’s what Satan tried to do in the garden of Eden – “You will become like God” – they already were. And that’s what the prosperity gospel does – you will get this blessing – you have every spiritual blessing. And these are spectacular blessings:

- adoption – v5 – anyone can call me Mr Harker, a lot of people call me Andy, but only three people call me daddy and when one of them calls me they have my attention in a way that no-one else does – if you are in Christ you can call the God of the universe “baba” and you have his complete attention

- forgiveness – v7 - everything you’re ashamed of, the worst you’ve done – separated from you as far as the east is from the west, thrown in depths of sea

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And that’s the point – these blessings turn into praise – v3: Blessed be _____

v6 _____

v12 _____

v14 _____

And then you get to v15-19 _____

Do you see what the prayer is for – that their eyes would be opened to the spiritual blessings that they already have. They have them (v3-14) – now praying they’d have eyes opened to them.

In Ephesus and Nairobi most people are praying to get blessings – but here it says you have them – praying not to get them or to access them or call them down or activate them – you have them. But you will not appreciate them, savour them, enjoy them unless God gives you spiritual eyes to see these blessings.

Get the logic – v15 _____

Because I knew you were genuine believers, the real thing – faith and love – I prayed the most important thing you can pray for a believer – that you would know the God who has saved you, know the hope you’re heading for, know the power towards you.

Why so important – well lots of reasons – this spiritual sight will be the source of joy, source of confidence, source of transformation, but most important it will glorify God the Father.

Look at the logic again – v3...14-15 _____

Blessed be the God who has saved us so amazingly, glory be to our God and Father SO your eyes need to be open to that salvation and go Wow! and praise God.

Enjoying God and glorifying him are basically the same thing. My wife cooks a beautiful meal for our children, they don't like it – they don't praise the food or their mum - the problem is they haven't acquired the taste – they need to be given new tongues, new tastes and then they can appreciate it and then they will praise.

That's why prayer is so essential – that we would be given new taste buds to relish and enjoy God and glorify him.

Think back to your last prayer time...

- What sort of things do we pray for ourselves and our Christian family?

I compare my prayer requests with this and it's very different.

Paul very rarely prays for stuff or for a change of circumstances, he prays for change of heart, spiritual eyes to see what we have in Christ. That's what we desperately need to be praying for each other.

Then from v19 he starts talking about power – and he defines it v20-23 _____

And in chapter 2 he is basically expanding on what this power towards us is – it is not a power for us to jump over walls or do exams – it is the power *towards* us – the power that raised us from the death of sin and seated us with Christ, the power that created us new people in Christ, the power that brought us from far off to Christ, the power that smashed down the barrier between Jew and Gentile and between us and God, the power that is building a new Temple filled with the presence of God.

In a nut shell it's the power of the Cross – v14-16 _____

Then you get to the logic bit again – 3:1 _____

Then bit in brackets really till v14-19 _____

What's the prayer? That we would know – really know, grasp, experience, taste - the love of Christ that he's just been talking about in chapter 2.

See how this is working: Chapter 1 goes, You have every spiritual blessing and so for that reason I'm going to pray that you see that, chapter 2 and 3 goes, Christ has given us peace with God by taking the punishment of God on the Cross, has made us one body by having his own body torn apart, and so for that reason I'm going to pray that you know that love of Christ.

How exactly is this going to work? Well again it's about enjoying God, appreciating the riches of the banquet we are given in his love for us. But I particularly want us to see here the corporate – togetherness of this. 3:17-18 _____ Your plural, you plural – easy when we read the Bible in English, especially letters to take the "you" as singular – that's why better to read it in Kiswahili. Paul is talking to the church – that they would, together be grasping the love of Christ. This is not just something for individual devotions – this is what's supposed to happen on a Sunday morning as we gather together.

Same 4:11-13 _____

Paul's prayer is that they meet together, love each other, listen to the preaching of the Word and *together* go Wow, Christ's love is so wide and long and high and deep.

And as they do that together, Jews and Gentiles, black and white, Kalenjin and Kikuyu and Luo, all together going Wow, then God gets maximum glory. 3:8-10_____

This is cosmic. Prayer is necessary that we would together as a church experience the love of Christ and the heavenly powers on the planet Krypton or wherever they are would look down at this random mix of people captured by the love of Christ and see that God is amazing.

The glory of God is the point of this. See again - 3:20-21_____

Prayer is necessary to the full glory of God

Then get to the final section 6:10-23 all about spiritual warfare.

There is an enemy – and what is his agenda – opposite of God's agenda – God wants your eyes to be open to the spiritual blessings you have in Christ, he wants you to enjoy his Son more than anything in the world so that He would get the glory – the devil wants your eyes to be closed, he wants you spiritual senses to be dulled, he wants your heart to be drawn after the things of this world so the glory does not go to God.

That is what spiritual warfare is about.

So what's the way to fight? He tells them again that they have it all – v10_____

You have the full of armour of God, so put on Christ, put on the gospel – truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation – it's the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nothing more, nothing less.

Remember these people came from a very magical, spiritist kind of background. But he doesn't give them strategies for mapping territorial spirits, doesn't give them complicated rituals for exorcism or deliverance, doesn't talk about smashing generational curses and soul ties. Just the gospel.

And in all of this v18_____

Not an extra weapon or bit of armour – it's what runs through all of it – you take up the shield praying, you wield the sword praying because prayer is experiencing the gospel, verbalising the gospel – we pray in the Spirit, through the Son to the Father – we've been swept up into the Trinity and now the Spirit of the Son is crying out Abba Father through us.

And notice the four 'All's':

- all times – when get up, as you go about your business, when go to sleep, when you really know you need to pray and when you don't feel you need to, because we always need to see God as he is, we always need a greater experience of the love of Christ
- all prayers and supplications – prayer is asking things – might sound obvious but a lot of people think prayer is listening to God or chanting mantras – no it's making requests, prayers, supplications, asking our Father for what we need and what we really need is to see him and all the spiritual blessings we have in Christ

- all perseverance – because prayer is hard – it’s wrestling – not wrestling with God, wrestling with the world, the flesh and the devil – wrestling with distractions (check phone), wrestling with sleepiness (just me), wrestling with the spiritual forces that do not want us to pray
- all the saints – all our brothers and sisters in the church – this big theme coming in again – we’re together, we’re not fighting this battle on our own, if go to Somalia or Iraq to fight on own not last a day, if go in a battalion different – spiritual warfare is the church praying together – most churches find that the most difficult thing to do – but churches that thrive, growing in faith and love, growing in mission-mindedness, glorifying God, always praying churches.

And then you get a bit of a surprise in v19a _____

Paul wants the Ephesians to pray for him – great apostle Paul needs their prayers. Very different to Catholic idea of saints – pray to them or they pray for you. V different to idea of pastor as channel of blessing. No – Paul is humble enough to say I’m on your level, I need your prayers – your pastors and elders need your prayers, I know they feel that need.

What do you need to be praying for them? v19-20 _____

You’d think he’d want prayer for release – no – prayer for boldness to preach the gospel.

Why? Because it is the gospel that leads to praise of God. It’s the gospel of Jesus Christ dying in the place of sinners, being punished by God to make enemies into beloved sons – that is what makes people go Wow! and glory be to God.

Prayer and the ministry of the Word completely go together. Something really struck me over the last couple of months is this truth that John Piper pointed out –

God loves to open the eyes of the blind when they are looking at his *Son*! God does not reveal his Son to me by coming to me and saying, “Now, John, I know that you don’t see anything magnificent in my Son. You don’t see him as all glorious and divine and attractive above all worldly goods. You don’t see him as your all-satisfying treasure, and you don’t see his holiness and wisdom and power and love as beautiful beyond measure. But take my word for it, he is all that. Just believe it.” *No!* Such faith would be no honor to the Son of God. It cannot glorify the Son. Saving faith is based on a spiritual sight of **Jesus** as he is... given to us through his inspired Word, the Scriptures.

So we preach Christ from the Scriptures, praying that God would open eyes.

So pray for yourselves, and for one another that your eyes would be opened to the riches you have in Christ. And pray for your leaders that they would never cease, Sunday after Sunday, preaching the gospel of Christ crucified.