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Preacher: James Day

[0 : 0 0] I'll do open your Bibles up again at Ephesians chapter 1.

Ephesians chapter 1. We're particularly going to look at verses 15 to 23 this evening. And really, much of this sermon is a sermon on prayer.

A sermon on prayer. And when it comes to praying, how we should pray for our fellow Christians. How should we pray for one another? What is the content of those prayers?

Or to turn the question another way, if someone were to come up to you and to say to you, look, as a fellow Christian, I want to pray for you. Anything in particular that I can pray for.

Anything that you would like me to pray about. How would you answer? What would be the priority amongst the things that you would ask for when you asked for prayer? There are many ways that we could quite legitimately answer that question if someone were to ask us.

[1 : 0 9] If someone were to ask you. There may be a particular crisis going on in your life at the time or in your family. And it needs urgent prayer. And of course you would mention it.

You would say, we need prayer maybe about a family issue, a health issue, an employment issue. Please bring it before God in your prayers. Absolutely right, of course, that we do pray concerning those sorts of issues when they come up.

But there are other certain aspects of our prayers for one another that should be constant. So when someone asks, what would you like me to pray for? There are themes that should be recurring as we remember one another in prayer.

Key features, if you like, that need to be hallmarks of our prayers for one another. And we're going to look at this section in Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus this evening.

And a section that covers prayer. And focuses on prayer. As we've already alluded to, Paul has opened this letter by outlining a number of the great blessings that believers have already received in Christ as God's people.

[2 : 2 0] Paul blesses God for the glorious work that he's done. And is continuing to do in and through Jesus Christ. A work that's reversing the effects of our rebellion against God, of sin.

And doing that by uniting everything in his Son, in Jesus Christ. It's arguably that first few verses, well for me it's one of the most amazing passages in Scripture.

It's a mind-blowing passage in Scripture. As Paul describes how God has blessed us in Jesus Christ from eternity past to eternity future for the sake of his own glory.

To the praise of his glory. As Paul considers these great blessings that we have received in Christ. Blessings that will culminate in us sharing God's inheritance with Christ.

He then begins to turn to the subject of prayer. So what then does he pray about? Whenever he turns to God to pray for his fellow believers, his fellow Christians in Ephesus, what does he say?

[3 : 29] What can we learn as well from what he says? Well two very basic things really to consider. I think if you have an NIV Bible in front of you, the passage will be entitled Thanksgiving and Prayer.

And I've titled two points, Thanksgiving and Requests. Basically Thanksgiving and Requests. First of all then Thanksgiving, as Paul comes to pray.

Thanksgiving in verses 16 and 17. Now the first thing that Paul does as he describes the prayers that he makes for these believers in Ephesus is that he gives thanks.

He gives thanks. He gives thanks to their faith, which is in the Lord Jesus Christ, and for their love, which is thrown towards all of the saints.

That's all of the Christians. All of the followers of Jesus. His prayer begins with Thanksgiving. But before going any further and delving into that though, in thinking about Paul's Thanksgiving as he prays, I want to take a step back first of all.

[4 : 43] A step back. As I've said, we're learning about prayer in these verses, but that's not all we're learning. That's not all we're learning. I want to ask an important question first of all of these verses.

A very simple one, but an important one. And that is, who are verses 15 to 23 addressed to?

Who are those words addressed to? The reason I ask is this. Prayer is addressed to God.

When we pray, when we pray, we're talking to God, coming before him. But I ask the question, because we used to jump to thinking, this is just about prayer, and it is.

But in these verses, of course, Paul is actually talking to the believers in Ephesus. He's addressing fellow Christians, rather than addressing God here.

[5 : 46] He's addressing people. That's something that could be very easily missed, as we come to these verses. When I prepared this sermon, I actually prepared it back before Christmas, and preached it in Ingleton.

And as I was preparing, as I began, I just instantly assumed, okay, this is one of Paul's prayers, and what we learn from these verses, is simply how to pray like Paul. Well, we do learn, of course, how to pray like Paul, from these verses.

But actually, this isn't Paul praying. It's Paul telling us, what he prays, when he prays. Now, you might think, I'm splitting hairs a little bit here.

I'm making a rather fine distinction. Is there any point to it? But I think there is. Because while these verses, most definitely do teach us, how to pray, how we should pray, what we should pray, when we come before God, on behalf of one another, they also teach us something else.

They teach us, that we should tell one another, that we're praying for one another. And more than that, they tell us that we should tell one another, what much of the content, of our prayers, for one another is.

[7 : 12] Paul tells, the Ephesian Christians, what it is that he prays, when he prays for them. And the first thing he tells them is this, in verse 16, he's saying, I'm really thankful for you.

Thankful to God for you, and I'm giving thanks for you, all the time. He tells them that. How encouraging it would have been for them, I'm sure.

What is Paul so thankful for then? Well, there are two things that he mentions here, that he's thankful for. Firstly, he's thankful for their faith. Faith that is, in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And secondly, he's thankful for their love. Their love for one another, their love for him, their love for all Christians.

Now, of course, I very much doubt, that the church in Ephesus, was without its problems. Without defects.

- [8 : 20] And I doubt that everything, was just hunky-dory all the time, with no problems. Such a church does not exist, and never has.
- Every church, including this one here, is made up of sinners. Imperfect people. Forgiven sinners, but sinners.
- People that God is, still working on. And who's often, or always if we're honest, still need a lot of work.
- And the church in Ephesus, the Christians in Ephesus, I'm sure they still needed a lot of work. But Paul knows, despite that, they have real faith.
- They have faith in Jesus Christ, and he knows that they're showing, the evidence of that faith, through their love for one another. So in light of that, in light of the fact, that the Ephesian church, would not be without its faults, isn't it a tremendous thing, that Paul still tells them, that he's ever so thankful for them.
- [9 : 33] The easiest thing to do, in the world isn't it, is to see the faults, in other people. Sadly. And to focus on those. It just seems to come to us naturally. The first thing we tend to see, in other people, is their faults.
- Faults in other Christians, in our church, perhaps, or faults with other churches. And whilst they obviously, have faith and love in Jesus Christ, we might say, they don't do the things, the way we would like, and that's what we focus on, sometimes, if we're not careful.
- We need to learn from Paul, to tell people, to tell people, how thankful to God we are, for their faith, and for their love. So when you see, other people in this church, exercising faith, growing in faith, when you see them, showing their love for others, by sacrificing their time, their energy, whatever it is, make sure you give thanks, to God for that.
- But do more than that. Give thanks to God, he's the ultimate source, of their faith, and of their love, so it's right that the thanks, primarily goes to him.
- But also, make sure that you tell them. Tell them how thankful you are, for their increasing faith, and their increasing love. That you're thankful, not just for the things, that they do for you, but also for the things, you see them doing for others.
- [10 : 57] Have an eye out for it. Have an eye out for it, and thank them. They may well, not know quite where to put themselves, when you tell them that. You might know, quite where to put yourself, if someone comes up to you, and says, I've been watching you, and seeing just how much, you're growing in faith, and the way you love people, and serve people, and I'm so thankful for it.
- They may go bright red, and just turn away, and not look as if, they want to hear it, but tell them. That's what Paul does here. It's exactly what he does here, and how encouraging it must have been for them, to keep on, in that faith, and in that love.
- Encourage the good, wherever you see it. And tell people, that you thank God. So that's the, the first aspect, of prayer here. Thankfulness to God, for other believers.
- And telling them, of your thankfulness, to God for them. But secondly then, Paul moves on, to some requests, doesn't he? He moves on, to some requests, from verse 17 onwards.
- Having told these Christians, in Ephesus, how thankful, to God he is for them. He goes on, to tell them, what it is, that he's asking for, on their behalf, when he prays for them. He's thankful, for their faith in Jesus, for their love, for all of the believers, but that it is more, that he wants them to have.
- [12 : 24] He's thankful, for the progress they've made, but he wants them to go on. And as he prays to God, he's, he's asking that God, by his spirit, would help them then, to know, and to understand, certain things about God, and their faith.

Particularly the purpose of God, in making them, his people, in the first place. He's going to pray, that they would understand, what the end goal, of it all is. So then, let's work our way, through these verses.

First of all, Paul tells them, that he's asking God, in verses 17 and 18, to give them wisdom, revelation, knowledge, enlightenment.

Wisdom, revelation, knowledge, enlightenment. All those words, found in verses 17 and 18. Paul is very concerned, then, that these Christians, should know, certain things, and understand, these things.

It matters, and in fact, it matters so much to Paul, that he's basically, using four different words here, or with very similar meanings, to underline his point. Wisdom, revelation, knowledge, enlightenment, underlining the fact, that there are certain truths, that are crucial, in the Christian life.

[13 : 43] Absolutely crucial. Yeah, you may have heard, in some ways, I hope you haven't, of a man called Brian McLaren, an American. He's an American, who's written a book, called A Generous Orthodoxy.

It's proved to be, a very popular book, amongst some Christians, in the states, and probably here as well. But let me read to you, the subtitle of his book. The subtitle of his book, A Generous Orthodoxy, is this.

Why I am a missional, evangelical, post-Protestant, liberal-conservative, mystical-poetic, biblical, charismatic-contemplative, fundamentalist-Calvinist, Anabaptist-Anglican, Methodist-Catholic, green, incarnational, depressed-yet-hopeful, emergent, unfinished Christian.

I wonder what you make, of that list. It sounds, kind of impressive, doesn't it? Lots of, nice long words there. But what is this man doing?

Well, actually he's saying that in terms of truth claims, objective things that we can know about the faith, in terms of knowing things for certain about God, and about what his word teaches, he doesn't really believe anything.

[14 : 57] You may have noticed in his list describing what he is, there are certain descriptions he gives of himself that, actually if you place them alongside each other, they're contradictory. an evangelical liberal.

It can't be both. He reclaims, to believe everything, and nothing, all at once. And to many people, that's hugely attractive.

Usually, it sounds good. So many people, even some Christians, are desperately confused about what they believe, and they don't even realise how confused they are. Believing things that are actually contradictory, contradictory to God's word.

Paul's prayer here is that Christians should understand more clearly what is true about God, and his plan of salvation, in Christ, and know with certainty.

There are definite, absolute truths, about those things that we need to understand, and to know. So Paul prays, he prays that they would have that knowledge, because he knows that only God can provide it.

[16 : 17] You see, if you're going to have wisdom, when it comes to the knowledge of God, hard work and study is important. But in the end, we need the Spirit as well, to give us that knowledge, and that understanding.

Revelation will be needed. In other words, it will need, to be revealed to us. Now that doesn't mean that, that God will, audibly speak to you directly.

That he will, audibly speak to you in such a way, that he provides you with, tailored individual instructions, for your life. But it does mean, when God reveals things to us, that, that he is the one who, by his Spirit, and through his word, will reveal things.

So that we see his truth, and understand it. We need to pray, that he would give us that. That's what Paul is praying here, for these believers.

But of course, all this knowledge, isn't just for our heads. It's to sink down, into our hearts. He's not simply praying, that the Ephesian Christians, would become walking encyclopedias, of the faith.

[17 : 26] Not simply that. There's a phrase, in verse 18, that I alluded to in the prayer. It's a beautiful picture, of what we're talking about here. I pray also, that the eyes of your heart, may be enlightened.

The eyes of your heart. That's a beautiful picture, of what the knowledge of God is. It's not just a collection, of cold, theoretical theories, to be found in, in thick books, of systematic theology.

I'm not decrying those books, by the way, at all. It's not that, that's something, that only ever, ministers and academics, look into. No, this knowledge, is to find its way, right into your heart.

Into your, your very inner being, where it can truly, transform you. And where it can, truly empower you, to live as one of God's people.

Such knowledge, as that, is vital. It's vital, it's vital, in our Christian life, so Paul prays for it. But what exactly, does Paul pray, that Christians, should know then?

[18 : 40] What do they need, to be wise about? What needs, to be revealed to them? What is it, that's so important? What are these, crucial truths, that should sink, from our heads, down into our hearts?

In verse 18, we read, that you may know, and understand, exactly where it is, that you as a Christian, are headed. Where the end goal is.

And secondly, in verses 19 to 23, that you know, and understand, the power that will get you there. That's our next two points. First, in verse 18, that you know, and understand exactly, where it is, that you as a Christian, are headed.

That's important, where the end goal is. And in verses 19 to 23, that you know, and understand the power, that will get you there. firstly then it's really important for us the Christians to know exactly where we're headed look at what Paul says as he prays concerning these Christians in verse 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints he wants them to know the hope the hope that God has called them to the riches of God's glorious inheritance I'm sure you know what it's like to have a goal that you're working towards I may not pick the one that you maybe think of but here's some examples possibly maybe you're working towards and saving up for a dream holiday you're working hard saving your money so that you can maybe go on a Caribbean cruise or maybe it's for something else maybe it's for a lovely kitchen in your home a new kitchen and that's your goal that's why you're working hard and aiming towards a goal and that's what keeps you going maybe it's a new car maybe it's a qualification that will lead to future employment or maybe it's a season ticket to go and watch your favourite football club and you're working towards it things you haven't got yet but in the meantime you're working hard sometimes struggling along with that end goal in sight and it's the end goal that keeps you going that makes it all worthwhile it's the light at the end of the tunnel so once you get there it makes it all worthwhile there'll be that reward at the end well the Christian life is like that the Christian life is like that whether you're at the start of your Christian life or whether you've been a Christian for as long as you can remember there's a final goal in sight that you're heading towards

Paul calls it here a final hope that God has called us to Paul wants his readers to know this he wants them to understand it he thinks it's very important he wants us to know that when God calls us to himself our lives aren't aimless or they're not cyclical going round and round and round and never getting anywhere it's not a case of we're born, we live and then we die and that's it or we're born, we live, we die and then we reincarnate and start all over again so just enjoy the trip enjoy the journey not at all yes our Christian life is a journey but it's a journey with a destination and according to Paul here that is key Paul wants God to give the Ephesian Christians wisdom revelation knowledge a heartfelt enlightenment of the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints he wants us to realise to know just how glorious it will be to one day be with him in that new heavens and that new earth to enjoy him forever in his presence he wants his readers to be as excited and as passionate about that wonderful prospect as he is he wants them to long for it in the same way that he does he wants them to know that that will be true riches that will be glorious being with Christ will be far better than anything that we experience in the here and now to quote him from Philippians for me to live is Christ to die is gain

[23 : 11] I'll be with him he was full of excitement and his anticipation and anticipation for the end of the journey as Paul is here do you look forward to that day because do you know something I don't think I do as much as I should maybe it's because our lives are so comfortable compared with what they might be life in 21st century Britain is very comfortable isn't it by and large of course we do all face hardships we all face trials I'm not belittling now at all but in many ways we have a life of luxury compared to most people on the planet we are fabulously rich materially speaking you're one of the richest people on the planet you might not feel it maybe as a result of that we fail to grasp just how much better heaven will be perhaps we need to recapture something of that don't we

I find it strange even to preach upon it because I'm so often so taken up with the here and the now my eyes aren't fixed on that eternal hope as they should be what life will be like when I see him face to face but for Paul here in his prayer it's a priority that Christians should think about that that they should begin to grasp just how marvellous and incredible it will be and I'm sure that as we grasp more of it what it will be like to be with him it will have a transforming effect on our lives a transforming effect what sustains you what sustains you through the trials through the hardships through the difficulties

I know I've said we have life easy in many ways in the west but I could ask any one of you in this room I'm sure if you've been through tough times and perhaps you're going through them now we all do what sustains you is it the knowledge the understanding that this is not the end of the journey it doesn't end here just like you might perhaps scrim and savour and suffer a little bit to get that new car or that new kitchen or that fantastic holiday whatever it is knowing that it will be worth it when you get it we can know that whatever we go through in this life whatever we go through for the sake of the gospel and our Lord Jesus Christ and at times we will go through it through suffering but it will be more than worth it because of what awaits us at the end Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 4 verse 17 for this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison beyond all comparison so let's let's learn let's pray that we would learn to fix our eyes on the end goal to fix our eyes upon an eternity with God that then brings us to the second thing that Paul prays for these Christians to know the first is that they should know the glorious hope to which they've been called and that glorious inheritance in the saints but the second is that they should know exactly what the power is and how great the power is that will get them there if you've been a Christian for any length of time and even if you're quite a new Christian you may well know something of what it's like to feel that your faith is under attack there could be any number of reasons why you might feel that it could be life circumstances that make you feel well is God really in control of what's going on here it could be a particular sin that you just fall into time and time again and it rocks your faith makes you wonder am I really a Christian if I fall into that sin over and over it could be someone you know who constantly chips away at you trying to undermine your faith questioning you trying to introduce doubt into your mind it could be that actually you go through doubts regularly and you've no idea where the attack comes from you just know that you go through doubts you know that sometimes you're wobbling and your faith feels shaky most if not all

Christians go through a period like that at some point and it's at times like that that as a Christian you begin to wonder am I going to get there am I going to last the course will I reach that glorious inheritance or am I going to collapse in a heap before I reach the finishing line so important then that you know what is the power that will get you there that will make sure that yes you will cross the line and that yes one day you will meet your Lord and Saviour face to face that your Father will say to you well done good and faithful servant enter your rest so from verse 19 onwards Paul outlines the power that will get you there that will get you there if you believed in Jesus Christ as your Lord and as your Saviour it's a power that in verse 19 is immeasurably great and vitally it's a power that is not your own it's God's you won't get to heaven in your own power under your own steam you get there because of God's power towards you in verse 19

I've addressed myself so far to those of you here who are Christians and who realise that it's God who saves you it's God that sustains you your hope is in Christ and in Christ alone but if that's not where your hope is if your hope is grounded your hope of getting to heaven one day is grounded in saying things like well I do my best I do my best or I've lived a pretty good life you're relying on a power that will fail that power will not get you to heaven you're relying on your own power you're trying to get there under your own steam it will not work you need God's power if you're ever going to face him one day and be entered into that heaven you need faith in Christ and what he has done Paul prays then that the

[30 : 33] Ephesian Christians would understand that the reason they will reach the final goal is because it's God's power that will get them there so what's that power that he will use well Paul outlines for us what that power is he says the power that God will use to get them there is the same power that he exercised in raising Christ from the dead the same power that he exercised in seating Christ at his right hand in the heavenly places so that place where all who have believed in him will head to it's the same power the same power that raised him is the same power that has raised you the same power that took him to his father's right hand in heaven is the same power that will take you there too well that's a power that has placed Christ far above we're told every other power that exists verse 21 because of this power that has worked in Christ he is now far above all of the rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that he's named not only now but forever

Paul wants his readers to know and he prays that they would know that they'll stay the course no matter what no matter what may attack them or seem to undermine them circumstance recurring sin doubt whatever it may be they'll stay the course because God's immeasurably great power that raised Christ and placed him in heaven above every name that is named is the same power that is at work in them the same power verse 22 underlines the point again everything is now under Christ and Christ's people are joined to him he is the head they the church are his body the same power which is at work in him is permanently at work in them they are joined to him the devil may attack you in any number of ways but know that he will not win he will not win not because you're powerful you don't have to rely on your own power but because God is all powerful

Christ is all powerful he's already won the war is won there may be battles and skirmishes along the way but the war is won know that know it in your heart remind yourself of that whenever the doubt creeps in and the attack comes it's God's power look to that power it's God's power that will keep you and carry you to the goal I wish I could move on to chapter 2 really and keep going tonight because there we discover more of the greatness of God's power and how the power that he displayed in raising Christ is exactly the same power that he has displayed in his people in bringing them from death to life but we won't go into chapter 2 we'll round up here for now as you contemplate the week ahead as you contemplate it give thanks for all those that have faith in Jesus Christ that exhibit it in their love for those around them tell them make a point of telling someone this week how thankful you are for their faith and their love it will encourage them and pray as well that you that all of us here would know where we're headed would recapture if you like the glory of heaven the glory of an eternity with Christ and that we would know that the power that will get us there is not our own it's God's power no matter what opposition comes it's God's power immeasurably great power that will get us there the power that raised Christ from the dead that seated him at the father's right hand will one day take you if you're a believer in him there to be at his side as well

I'm thankful we should be to God for that amen father we thank you that in our lord Jesus christ we have a sure and certain hope that we can look forward with certainty to one day being with him to being given resurrection bodies like his lord we ask that we would eagerly anticipate that day that we would look forward to it that we would live our lives with an eye on eternity and lord we pray that whenever perhaps we doubt that that may come those of us who are your people who have trusted in the lord Jesus christ remind us of the power that has worked within us to bring us from death to life the same power that resurrected the lord Jesus christ and has already seated him at your right hand where we are one day headed lord we thank you for these truths help them to sink down into our hearts and lives we pray in christ's name amen