

A Prayer for Power

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[0 : 00] What does God want you to be? What does God want you to be in this world today here in Aberdeen?

I wonder, as I ask a question like that, when we think of an answer, we often can think in terms of work, can't we? What does God want me to be? Does God want me to be a doctor or a homemaker or administrator or whatever? Or perhaps we think in terms of relationships, does God want me to be married or be single? Does God want me to have children or live in this town or that town? Now, the answer to those questions are not unimportant, but the Bible isn't going to give us a lot of steer on those things. It's not going to tell us what job we should have or the town we should live in. So what then does God want you to be?

Our passage this morning in the Bible may not answer it in the way that we just thought about there, but it does answer it. And so let me put the question a little bit differently as we work towards it. What does God want the church to be? And so before answering that and working towards our answer, we need to know who we already are. And that brings us straight away to our first point this morning. Three points. There are a few sub points in there as well, but three points this morning. First, remember that we might pray. Remember that we might pray. This morning's passage in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 to the end of the chapter, we're coming to a prayer of Paul, the second of Paul's prayers in this letter for the Ephesians. And he opens in verse 14, as you look down, you can see it. He opens, for this reason, I bow my knee before the Father. Well, what reason?

What is it that he's remembering that leads him to pray? The answer, it's who we are as the church of Jesus Christ. It's what he's been writing to them up until this point, and especially what he was kind of working towards at the end of chapter 2. If you have your Bibles open, it will be quite helpful for you just to see what we're about to look at here. Paul starts his prayer for this reason, but if you look back to chapter 3 verse 1, how does he open chapter 3 verse 1? For this reason.

[2 : 39] I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles. So most commentators take three, chapters 1 to 13, what we looked at last week as a kind of digression or a kind of, I was about to write my prayer with for this reason, but I looped back around the track one more time to show you again just how brilliant the gospel is. Paul was about to start praying, in other words, at the start of chapter 3 verse 1, but he kind of got so excited again, he said, let's just have one loop back around the track. And all that to say then is what's at the front of Paul's mind in this prayer is who we are as the church, who we are as the church. Now, if you've been here over the last couple of weeks, you will have had a sense of some of this, but in summary, what is some of the things that Paul has told the Ephesians that the church of Jesus Christ is? Well, he said that the church is blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus in the heavenly places, that the Father chose the church, the people of God from eternity, that they're redeemed in Christ, that they're sealed with the Spirit and united to Christ. He said that the church is God's plan in the world, the epicenter of God's plan being worked out in the world, as he brings everything together under Christ's rule, that God took us who were far off dead sinners and gave us life by grace through faith, that the church is the very wisdom of God in this world, that the church, that in the church, God has destroyed the hostility between man and God and Jew and Gentile, and we are now members of his household being built together on the foundation of Christ and the apostles. In other words, that this is now where God dwells. Look at the very end of chapter 2 with me. What has he said? He said, verse 19, so then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him, you are being built together into a dwelling place by God, by his

Spirit. That's what's in

Paul's mind. That is who we are, and all of the rest that he's told us before that. I wonder if you've ever visited a big national trust-type property. There's plenty around Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire, aren't they? But I remember once being down south, visiting a place called Harewood Hall in Yorkshire in England. It's a Jane Austen novel type of house, massive house. Often when I go to these places, we don't get a tour, but I got a tour. Massive house, every single room, priceless artifacts, furniture, books, paintings. You go into the grounds, fountains, mazes, as far as the eye can see. See, it was glorious, amazing, the kind of place you went to go, and you just say, wow, wow. Well, Paul has been showing us around the church of Jesus Christ. Not a building like that, but the people of God being built into the very dwelling place of God, the household of God. And I hope if you've been here over the last couple of weeks, you have gone, wow, wow, look at what God is doing. But Paul has been laying everything out, if you like, and putting it on display and saying, look how glorious this is. That there really is nothing more amazing, more glorious here on earth than the church of Jesus. So that's what's in his mind when he comes to pray. And actually, those kind of things were all in his mind in his first prayer too. I don't know if you remember a few weeks ago when Joe looked through that prayer,

Ephesians 1, 1 to 14 and onwards. And in that first prayer, Joe asked this question. He said, what do you pray for the church who has everything? What do you pray for the church who has everything?

You don't ask for God to give more, but we would know more of what he's already given. And friends, that same idea is in play this morning as we come to Paul's second prayer.

[7:04] What do you pray for the church, the people of God who have been made into the very dwelling place of God? Not to be made into more, but to grow more into how they've already been made. Not to be made into more, but to grow more into who they've already been made to be. C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Last Battle*, part of the Narnia series, he writes of those who are in Aslan's country, that they would go further up and further in to where they already are. That they would come further up and further in into Aslan's country. And it's that idea that Paul has here for the church.

That's what he's praying for the church this morning. That God's people would come further up and further in that they would mature and grow into more of who we already are.

So what does God want you to be? What does God want for Bon Accord, for any local church, any local healthy gospel church? That we would mature, that we would grow more and more into who God has already made us to be. So remember that we might pray. Pray then that we might grow. In verse 16, Paul gets into the meat of this prayer. But before we move onto this prayer, let me ask one question. Why might Paul need to pray this anyway? Why might he pray as we're going to come and see that we need to grow, that we need to mature, that we need to go further up and to further in to who God has already made us to be? After all, we are the dwelling place, the household of God. He's given us every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. There's no more to give. Look at who we are. So why does he pray that we need to grow and mature? Well, friends, have you ever felt discouraged? Have you ever felt discouraged? Have you ever thought, is this really all there is in the Christian life? Have you ever been tempted to lose heart when suffering comes? When churches closed? When the gospel doesn't appear to have the power in our life or the life of our nation or people or family that we thought it should have? Well, I think most of us have. We felt those things. We've felt discouraged or downcast or downbeat about the life of the church or our own Christian lives and the power of the gospel. And if you've ever felt like that, then you're not alone because these

Ephesians have felt like that too. Artemis of the Ephesians, her temple dominates the city. False worship abounds around them. And Paul, Paul who first came in power and miracles is now in chains.

[10:04] So what did Paul write to them last week? It's the last verse of the passage of last week, chapter 3, verse 13. He says to them, so I ask you, do not lose heart over what I'm suffering for you, which is your glory, that you would not lose heart. So this prayer then not only builds on chapter sort of 1 and 2 and the first half of chapter 3. No, it doesn't just build on all of that, but I think another reason comes into focus as well. The other reason that comes into focus that they would become more of who they are is so that when external circumstances read like the power of the gospel, that the life of the church isn't going well, that they've grown to maturity in their hearts to understand

more of who God is and what he's doing in the church so they're not tempted to lose heart and give up. That's why he's praying. That's why he's praying for them to be more of who they are because when external circumstances, when what they see with their eyes doesn't look like things are going well, the apostle is in chains, the gospel is suffering, they've matured and grown to know, no, the power of God is at work and we won't lose heart and we'll keep going. And that is why then Paul turns to pray for their hearts. He says, don't lose heart, verse 13. And then in verse 16, what does he pray?

He prays this, that according to the riches of God's glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being. That is just him saying, in your heart. The inner being is the heart. And so it's interesting, isn't it, that Paul doesn't pray for a change of external circumstances. He doesn't now turn to pray that he would be released from his chains. He doesn't pray that Artemis would fall. He doesn't pray that the external pressures would lift to make life easier to be a Christian there in Ephesus. No, he prays for power to be strengthened through God's spirits in our hearts. Now, would it be wrong for Paul to pray to be released from his chains? No. Would it be wrong for Paul to pray that Artemis worship or worship of Artemis would stop? No, certainly not. But it is interesting, isn't it, that it's the inner life, the heart. In the Bible, to speak of the heart, that is the seat of the will and the affections. That's what Paul is praying for. Henry Scogel was a minister here in Aberdeen in the 1670s. He taught divinity at Marshall College, what, 450 years before it became a council building. And in 1677, Henry Scogel wrote a friend, a letter. After he died, he died a young man at 29. After he died, that letter was published as a book. The life of God in the soul of man.

The life of God in the soul of man. What was it about? The necessity that Christ be formed within us. And so, dear friends, as we pray for Bon Accord and as we pray for other churches, let's pray for that for our hearts. It doesn't mean we don't pray for any kind of change to external circumstances in our lives or in the world. God cares very much about those things. But I wonder if it does mean that we can certainly add this to the list or perhaps even prioritize it on the list. What does he say in verse 16? Pray for strength, that we would be strengthened with power through his spirit in our inner being. So, dear friends, whatever you face today, whatever you face today, as you look at your own life and especially as we look at the life of our church family or the life of the church around the world, let's be praying for people's hearts, that they would be strengthened with power in their inner being. And so, that's the main petition of this prayer. That's the main petition of this prayer. And the rest of it kind of cascades down from there. You'll have noticed it's kind of one big long sentence. And it's a little bit, if you like, like a folder in your computer files, you click on the folder and another couple of files pop out of that. They're all kind of joined in that way. But the thing that moves this prayer forward is the word that or so that. You'll see that as we read through it. It's the so that's that help us see the kind of parts of the prayer that Paul's then going on to pray. So, what's he praying for? He prays for power that they might be strengthened. Firstly, so that we might desire more of Christ. So that we might desire more of Christ. Verse 17, what does Paul say? There's our so that, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

[15 : 33] Now, there's a question there for that prayer, isn't there? A question pops up straight away. If we're already a Christian, why do we need to pray for Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith?

I thought Christ had already come into our hearts through faith. So, why would I pray that? Because it's asking, and what Paul is praying here is that our hearts would be, if you like, more accommodated to Christ. That the heart, remember, is the seat of the affections of the will. So, he's praying that Christ would dwell and live in our affections and our desires and our wills more and more. That's what he's praying. Because if we're a Christian, we already have Christ. So, what do we need? We need Christ to be inhabiting and dwelling all our desires. If you're already a Christian here this morning, let me ask you this then. Does Christ fully inhabit all of your desires? Are all our wants and dreams always orientated perfectly with how God calls us to live? No, right? And they won't fully till glory. But this is a prayer for that. In other words, it's a prayer for our sanctification, our growing in Christ likeness. Perhaps I could illustrate it this way. On the day that you buy a new home, you buy it, you go to the solicitor's, whatever, if you sign for it, it's legally yours. You've got your name on the letterbox, you get the keys. You've now got all the bills to pay as well, don't you? Wonderful, that all comes with it too. But when you arrive at your new home and you

walk into it, usually there's work to do. I want to make my mark on it. I want to accommodate it to who I am.

I don't particularly like the pink carpet or the spotty wallpaper or whatever it is. No, I'm going to accommodate it to who I am. Dear friends, if you know the Lord Jesus, he has taken up residence in your heart by his spirit. We are justified in Christ. We are his. But this prayer then is, Lord, strengthen me with power so that in my heart, more and more, all the old stuff might be cleared out. All the old stuff of the old owner would clear out. If I can put it this way, all the old stuff of our old owner, Adam, would be cleared out. And more and more, our heart would be furnished with you, Lord Jesus, with how you want it to be. That is what this is a prayer for.

So dear friends, whatever trials and struggles and temptations you're facing today, and we will all have them, no matter how young or old we are, we will face them till glory. Pray for God's help.

[18:16] Ask the Lord Jesus to take the darkness away, the old self away, that he would more and more come to inhabit all the rooms of our heart, if I like. I can put it that way. Or let me ask it this way. Are there still parts of our hearts that we, if you like, want to keep from Christ? Is there darkness or sin in there that really we just want to cherish? In praying this prayer, we're saying, no, Lord, take all of me. Make all of me, grow all of me more like you. So pray for power to strengthen our hearts so we desire more of Jesus. The next thing he prays then is for our minds, and he prays for us to know two things, and we'll take them both separately. Let's just read in again from verse 17.

Verse 17, Paul prays, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And here's the next thing he prays, that you, so there's the that, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth. And there's the comma. So what's missing? We're left asking, are we not, when we pray for us to comprehend, to know something, we're left asking, well, what? Comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of, well, what? What are these dimensions measuring? Now, some people think Paul is referring to God's love here. He speaks about them being rooted and grounded in love, and in verse 19, he prays for them to know God's love. Perhaps this is where that Sunday school song came from.

Some of you might know it. Jesus' love is very wonderful. It's so high, you can't get over it. It's so wide, you can't get around it. It's so low, you can't get under it. Anyone sing that in Sunday school? No, okay, maybe just me, but that's maybe where the song came from here, okay? Now, is that true? Yes, Jesus' love is very wonderful, and we're going to talk about that in a minute. But actually, I'm not sure that's what Paul is measuring here. I think he's talking about knowing, comprehending, grasping God's plan for the church, God's plan for the church. And mainly, I think he's using that language, because when in other parts of the Bible, it talks about length and breadth and height and depth and all those things, it's talking about God's temple. And at the end of chapter two, as we just saw earlier, what is he speaking about? The people of God as God's temple, his new temple where God dwells with his people. And so, I think that's what he's talking about. Pray that we would know the dimensions of God's plan for the church. So, let's run these dimensions through it, through the letter of

Ephesians already. What is the breadth of God's plan for his church? Well, those who were far off have been brought near. What is the length of God's plan for the church? Oh, it's from eternity past to eternity future, as God brings all things to be united under Jesus. What is the height of God's plan for the church? Oh, it's that we're seated in the heavenly places with Christ, with God. It doesn't really get higher than that, does it? And the depth? Well, there, I think it's maybe referring to God's wisdom. But however you want to parse this out, I think he wants us to grasp the unsurpassed scale of what God is doing in the church through Christ. Because friends, as you think about those measurements, does it get any bigger? Does it get any higher, wider, longer, deeper? No. And so, Paul wants us to pray and to know that we need God's help to see that. What God is doing through his church in this world is so big, we can't get our heads around it by ourselves. We need God's help. We need God to strengthen us with his power that we can see what he's doing. We need to pray. And that should humble us, shouldn't it? Often, we think we can do these things in our own strength. And Paul is saying, no, to grasp what I am doing. Paul is saying what Jesus is doing in his church, we need to pray and ask for God's help. Next then, Paul prays that they would grasp something else, and that they'd grasp the love of Christ for us. But do you see, just before we read it, that Paul is kind of running out of words. Throughout all this prayer and other parts of the letter,

it's as if Paul is running out of words or grammar to describe what God has done for us. It's so great. Paul is kind of at the very edges of language. Why? Well, because look at verse 19. He prays that we're to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. How do you know something that surpasses knowledge? Only by the power of God, only by the power of God. Oh, friends, that we would know more of what it is that God the Father chose us and set his love on us in eternity, that we would grasp more and more of what it is for the

[24 : 01] Son to go to the cross, to come to this earth, and to die for us in love, in love. This is a prayer that we would grasp the wonders of God's love. Do you pray that? Do you pray that for your church family? What a great thing for our prayer list. Lord, help us as a church to grasp more and more the wonders of your love. And will we ever exhaust it? No, we will never exhaust it. One hymn writer puts it this way. He's writing a long time ago before word processors, okay? So think old.

Could we, could we with ink the ocean fill? And were the skies of parchment made? Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade? To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry.

Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky. Could you write the love of God on all the sky and all the earth if every person did it? No, no. So glorious that it is.

So dear friends, as you pray for your brothers and sisters here, as you pray for your own walk with the Lord Jesus, pray that he would help us to grasp his love. And so what's the goal of all this prayer? What's the goal of all this? Verse 19, he prays that, that we would be filled with the fullness of God. That we would be filled with the fullness of God. What does that mean? It means that we would grow. It means that we would become more of who we are. That our hearts and minds would be so filled with God and what he's done for us in Christ Jesus of his plan and his love and his riches towards us in Christ that we would grow more like him. That we would journey further up and further in.

So do we want to grow in the Christian life? Do we want to become more of who we are? We pray for God's help and we ask for his spirit to strengthen us that we would desire Jesus more. We'd know more of his plan for the church and his wonderful love towards us. So remember that we might pray, pray that we might grow, grow, that we might glorify. Now we might ask, is all this even possible? And Paul says, yes, it is.

[26 : 38] Verse 20, he kind of bursts into praise. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power at work within us. Paul is saying, yes, praise God. He has the power to do this and in fact so much more. So what does God want us to be? More of who he's made us to be, to be filled with the fullness of him. And does he have the power to do it? Yes, he has the power to do it. And to what end? What is the purpose of it all? It is the glory of God. Verse 21, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen. And that language, verse 21, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus, I think it's really kind of getting it at two different angles of God's glory. First, as a local church, as we as a local church or any local church become more of who we are, it brings glory to God. If you like, as the lighthouse begins to shine brighter in this world, it brings glory to God. I think that's why Paul doesn't pray for his release from prison. In a sense, he's saying, where I am, or even right now, I'm in chains. It doesn't matter.

What's going to make the light shine brighter is not me being out of prison, but you being transformed in your hearts more into the likeness of Jesus. So that people look on and watch on and say there's something happening there, the likes of which cannot be found anywhere else on planet earth.

But second, I think it also means this, that the whole point, that the end of all that we are as a church of Christ, that the reason for being, the reason for maturing, that all that we are is to the praise and glory of God, that we would praise and glorify God in all that we do.

One writer puts it this way, God is powerful enough to bless his people with every spiritual blessing in Christ. He's powerful enough to save them from the power of sin and the devil and the flesh, to reconcile them to one another and to himself, to employ them strategically in his age-old plan for the universe, to reveal this gospel plan to them and to strengthen their downcast hearts with a knowledge of the vast expanse of Christ's love. Is he not worthy of all our glory? Is he not worthy of all our praise? And the answer to that is, yes, he is. Yes, he is. Both now and in all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do indeed marvel. We marvel in all that you've done for your bride, the church, that you chose her, redeemed her, sealed her, seated her in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that you are working through her in this world as you seek to bring your kingdom into this world.

[30 : 01] We thank you for the glorious news of the gospel that's at work in this world to tear down the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile and humanity and God. We rejoice at your awesome plan and we marvel again at your glorious love for us. And so, Heavenly Father, we pray that in all that we do, you would transform us, that we would grow more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus and so grow in giving glory and honor and praise to your name. May all that we do, all that we are, be more and more for your glory, seeking your glory, worshiping you, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.