

Guess How Much I Love You...

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[0 : 00] And as we learn from Paul how to pray, let's pray to ask for God's help as we hear his word. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed yourself to us in your word.

And thank you that you have given us everything we need in your word to be saved and to live for you. And so we pray that you will speak to us this morning.

And that by your spirit you'll give us heads that can understand and hearts that are willing to change and follow you. In Jesus' name. Amen. So we've reached this great power prayer in the Bible.

And there's been a lot about power in the news this week. One of my friends said this, The most powerful person on earth is about to hand over control of the most powerful nation in history voluntarily and peacefully.

But if someone was describing a church to you and they said to you, It's a powerful church. I wonder what would come into your mind about that.

[1 : 04] Maybe you would think about the minister, the pastor. Hopefully you wouldn't, but maybe you would. I thought I'd tell you about a powerful minister. When I was at college, we used to have college jobs at theological college.

And my job was, I was part of the furniture moving team. If there was a conference or anything, you had to move the tables and chairs. And it always took us twice as long if Mark didn't turn up.

Mark had been in the Marines. He was like a machine. When he turned up, everything was moved in minutes. We both left college and we went off to work for churches. And Mark went to a small town in the southeast of England.

One day he was walking down the high street and he noticed there was a robbery going on in a jewelry store. He saw the robber making off with his stash. And he confronted him and the robber pulled a gun on Mark.

So Mark stood back while the robber got on his bicycle and cycled off. But Mark wasn't finished with him. He chased him down, running. And after about 20 minutes, the robber slowed, exhausted on his bicycle.

[2 : 11] Mark caught him, rugby tackled him to the ground and held on to him until the police arrived. And the guy was convicted of robbery. In court, the prosecutor said this.

Unfortunately for the defendant, he was witnessed by Mark Oden, who was a local church minister and a former member of the Royal Marines. Unfortunate indeed.

So Mark is a powerful minister. I wonder if that's the kind of thing we think about when we think about power, about strength physically. What makes a church a powerful church?

Could it be that we think about lots of money would make it powerful? Dramatic, supernatural signs and wonders. Physical healings. Huge numbers of people coming.

Maybe we think about political power. A church that is consulted by the local government or the national government when it's making decisions. Maybe a church that's kind of powerful within its own network and denomination.

[3 : 14] Well, we're continuing in our series in Ephesians. And in this section, Paul breaks off, if you like, from his teaching to pray this prayer, to let people know what he's praying. And he's praying for this little church.

It wouldn't have looked powerful or significant at all. It was a little group of people meeting in the city of Ephesus, probably in somebody's home, probably in fear. And this prayer is a brilliant model for us of what we could pray for each other today.

And Paul prays for power. So as we look at this power prayer, we find out what a powerful church should really look like. A church that has the power of God pulsing right through its veins.

But you might be here and wondering, well, why would I pray? Why do Christians pray? Why should we pray like this? So Paul introduces his prayer with just some little signals of why he would be praying.

I don't know if you noticed that. In verse 14, he says, For this reason I kneel before the Father. Paul prays to God because God is the Father.

[4 : 19] He's the Father of our Lord Jesus eternally. And he's our Father when you become a Christian. You're adopted into his family. So we should pray because we're asking Dad for things and we know he loves us.

Paul also prays to the Father because he's a powerful Father. So he goes on in verse 15, describing the Father, I kneel before the Father from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Now when the Bible talks about somebody's name, it doesn't just mean what they're called. Your name is who you are. And Paul is saying here, every single being, every man and woman and even angel in heaven gets its existence from God.

It derives its very self from our heavenly Father. So we should pray to a God who is that powerful. And did you notice that Paul said in verse 14 how he prays?

He says, For this reason I kneel. Now that might not sound very surprising to us because in Scottish culture we would know that lots of people might kneel to pray.

[5 : 23] Perhaps you kneel to pray from time to time. But in first century culture that's very unusual. Because people used to pray standing up with their arms in the air to God. That's how people would pray.

But Paul gets on his knees as he thinks about how awesome God is. It's a position of reverence. I don't know whether you yourself ever pray on your knees.

But it's worth doing sometimes. Or even pray lying down on your front. Just to try it. Just to think, how does this posture help me think about how awesome God is? And Paul also prays just now because of the role that God has given him in terms of the people he's writing to.

If you just look back at verse 1 of chapter 3. That was when he started this sentence that he finishes here. He sort of broke off last week. So if you have a look at verse 1. He says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles.

And then he has this digression that we had last week. Verses 3 to 13. And in that digression, Paul describes how God's given him a special job to do. That he was the one who had to bring the gospel, the news about Jesus, to this group of people.

[6 : 36] The nations, the Gentiles. And because God gave him that ministry, he prays for them. It's good to remember that, isn't it?

If God has given you a group of people to work with and be a minister to. And pray and teach. So if you are leading a growth group here at St. Silas.

Will you pray for the people in a disciplined and regular way? If you're involved in kids work here or youth work. Will you pray for the people in your group?

By name. Regularly. As you commit them to God. Because God's given you that role with them. And so Paul's response in that position was to pray for them. As well as to teach them.

And the fourth reason why Paul prays. Really helps us to understand how this prayer relates to the rest of the book. You see, he says for this reason. And back in verse 1 he said the same thing.

[7 : 33] For this reason. Which makes you think, well what reason? Presumably Paul means what he's been talking about in the first two chapters of Ephesians. For this reason. Everything I've just told you.

I pray on my knees. To this glorious powerful father. And what we've seen in these first two chapters of Ephesians. Is that God is powerfully at work in history.

With a great master plan. To bring glory to himself. God's glory is like his brilliance. He wants to show people how brilliant he is. And so to do that.

He's doing something immense in the church. First of all, at the beginning of chapter 2. He's bringing people to life. So without God's intervention. We're spiritually dead.

In that we don't know God. And what God does. Is he takes spiritually dead people. Helpless people. And he breathes his spirit of life into them. To make them alive.

[8 : 27] So that they can know God. Be saved from the judgment that would have been facing them. To live with him forever. And when he breathes that life into them.

So that they accept the news about Jesus. He's created good works for them to do. For the rest of their lives. As his masterpiece. And then what we've learned.

Is that God takes those people. And he unites them together. People who could never otherwise be friends. Become brothers and sisters. In God's family. The church. And we heard in chapter 3 verse 10.

This amazing verse. Last week. That God is doing that. To display his wisdom. Wisdom. To the heavenly realms. So in heaven there are angels. And in the heavenly realms.

There are demons as well. Fallen angels. And God shows his wisdom to them. By what's going on in the church. As people become Christians. Give their lives to Jesus. And unite together.

[9 : 23] And they can see that in heaven. Whenever someone becomes a Christian. But representatively. You see that at St. Silas. You see that at any local church. As we ordinary people.

Decide on a Sunday. To come and meet together. As we gather. As we spend time with each other. In love and fellowship. Through the week. That shows God's wisdom. To the heavenly realms.

As we are a new humanity. So the local church. Might look very weak. It certainly looks very unfashionable. We're unfashionable. To be in church. It might look quite pathetic.

The local church. But whatever it looks like. God says. The local church. Is his people. It's his family. It's his new humanity. Brought together for his glory.

And the way that we treat each other. Has cosmic significance. As it shows God's glory and wisdom. So Paul's explained all of that. And he says.

[10 : 20] For this reason. I get on my knees. And I pray. And we need to do the same. So let's see what Paul prays for. So that we know. What we should be praying. In light of what we've heard.

In Ephesians. There are two big requests. The first is for power. That we would become a suitable home for Christ. And the second is for power to grasp. The incredible love of Christ.

So first of all. Power to be a suitable home. For Christ. Have a look with me at verse 16. I pray. That out of his glorious riches. He may strengthen you with power.

Through his spirit. In your inner being. Why? So that Christ may dwell in your hearts. Through faith. Now when you become a Christian.

Christ comes to live in your heart. So it's worth thinking. Why does Paul pray for something. That they already have. It's because we need Christ.

[11 : 18] To feel at home. In our hearts. And that only happens. As we change. As we change more and more. To become more like him. It's a bit like. If you move into a new house.

And it needs a lot of work doing. I was talking to Nicola Underdown. Earlier this week. I can't see where she is. But she's. Here's where she's waving over there. And Nicola and Nick.

Her husband. They bought a house. Up north. On the Black Isle Peninsula. Back in September. A few months ago now. But they only moved into it. Last week. Because they had to clear it out first.

They had to get rid of the damp. With dehumidifiers. And over the coming months. Now they've actually moved in. There's still loads of work. They've got to do in the house. They have got to bring the floors up.

Nicola told me this week. The roof still leaks. In three different places. Hopefully this isn't too upsetting. To be reminded of at church. All the jobs that await you. Back up north. And once they've dealt with the back door.

[12 : 20] That won't open or close. The ground level that's too high. The roof. Once the roof isn't leaking. They might want to redecorate it. And make each room. Fit more with their own taste.

As lots of people would do. When you move into a new house. And there will come a point. Won't there. After a bit of time. And a lot of effort. When Nicola and Nick might be able to look around.

In their house. And think. This feels like home now. You know. We've owned this house now for a while. But at last. It feels like it's home. It reflects our taste.

And our desires. For where we want to live. It suits us. And it's a bit like that for Jesus. When it comes to our hearts. He comes to live in us. The moment we put our trust in him.

But there's some serious demolition work. And rebuilding. That has to be done. He can't stand the resentment. And bitterness. That we've still got lurking.

[13 : 18] Down in the cellar. He needs to get rid of the greed. And the pride. That are in the cupboard. Under the stairs. The lust and anger. That are in the attic. And so we need God's power.

To change. We have to work hard. It's not that he does that. Without our efforts. He uses our efforts. But the energy. To change. Comes from God. As by his spirit.

He works in our hearts. To change. Our desires. So that we want. Better. To reflect. Him. So we need to pray for that. For ourselves.

And for one another. Paul could have prayed. Couldn't he? For their physical health. Life was hard. In the first century. There was no antibiotics. Dentistry.

Was not in good shape. But Paul's priority. Is their inner being. Why? It's because Paul knows. If God gives you this.

[14:13] You can handle anything else. So God's priority. Is our character. Not our comfort. So when your kids.

Are keeping you awake all night. What you need above all else. Is power from God. To become a suitable home. For Christ. When your boss. Is a bully.

And never says thank you. What you actually need. More than anything else. Is God's power. To become a suitable home. For Christ. When your employer.

Announces redundancies. When your job is boring. When you get your shift pattern. For Christmas. And you realize. You're not going to get to see your family. What you need above all else. Is God's power. To become a suitable home.

For Christ. If God gives you that. You can handle. Anything else. So that's our first point. We've seen. Paul's prayer for power. To become a suitable home. For Christ.

[15:09] And secondly. Paul prays for power. To grasp. The incredible love. Of Christ. Just have a look with me. At verse 17. From halfway through the verse.

And I pray. And I pray that you. Being rooted. And established in love. May have power. Together with all the Lord's holy people. To grasp.

How wide. And long. And high. And deep. Is the love of Christ. And to know this love. That surpasses knowledge. Now. Every Christian.

To an extent. Understands. The love of Christ for us. But Paul's power prayer. Is that we'd have the strength. To grasp. The infinite dimensions. Of that love.

Grasping. Is more than just knowing it. In your head. Believing it. In your mind. It's about experiencing. That love. That it's real to you. In your heart. Knowing it. Because you've taken hold of it.

[16:04] And what I think is really fascinating. About this prayer. Is where it sits. In this book of Ephesians. See this is the turning point. Of the book of Ephesians.

In the first half. Paul has told us some extraordinary truths. About what God has done for us. In Jesus. And what he's doing today. In the church. In the second half of the letter.

Paul caches all of that out for us. In terms of practical implications. How we should live differently. Because of what God is doing. In us. And in the church. Practical love.

Things to do. Things to stop doing. And this prayer. Is the bridge. Between. Doctrine and duty. If you like. Between truth. And application.

Practical day to day change. So the engine room. For the Christian to change. Is in this prayer. Something that God can give us. That will fuel us.

[17:00] So that we bring about in our lives. The kind of fruit. And change. That he longs for. From us. And it's worth thinking. Isn't it? What would people out there. In Glasgow. Think. Is what drives Christians.

To change their behavior. I guess a lot of people would think. Well Christians just. Feel guilty. But Paul doesn't pray. That we feel guilty. He doesn't pray.

That we feel burdened. He doesn't pray. That we'd have a kick up the backside. He prays. That we will grasp. The love of Christ. More deeply. And the result.

Comes in verse 19. Have a look at that. And to know this love. That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled to the measure. Of all the fullness of God.

In other words. That we'll be spiritually. Mature. That godly living. Will just flow out of us. So I think that's a breathtaking thing.

[17:59] About the gospel. That we can only become the people. God wants us to be. When by his immense power. Working in us. We grasp. We experience. Just how much.

Jesus loves us. So when someone comes up to me. And says. I'm really struggling. To love my wife. We used to be in love. But now we just.

Get on each other's nerves. All the time. What I need to pray. Is that. God would strengthen them. To grasp. The love of Christ. For them. When someone says.

Whenever I go out. With my uni maids. I drink too much. What I need to pray. Is that. She will grasp. How much Jesus loves her. If someone says to me.

You know what. I'm terrified. Of being single. I don't want to be single. I'm terrified. What I need to pray for them. Is that they'll grasp. The love of Christ. For them. It's only if we can experience.

[18 : 54] More fully. His infinite love for us. That we'll be able to live. For him. It's worth thinking. Isn't it. About that.

That that means. Liberal Christianity. Can never work. So liberal Christianity. Is when. A church decides. We don't want to. We're not sure. We really believe.

Anymore. That Jesus rose from the dead. We don't really want to talk. Anymore. About the idea of. God being a God of judgment. And that. Sin is kind of offensive to him. We don't like all that stuff. So let's just focus. On some of the stuff. We do like. About how Jesus said. You need to. Love your enemies. And turn the other cheek. And let's. Let's build our church. Around some of that moral teaching. Churches like that.

Are common. And they are full of people. Who used to be. Evangelicals. People who used to believe. The gospel. And they went up. Frustrated. Perhaps.

[19 : 51] Wary. Of. What the Bible says. About. Our sin. About. Judgment. And so. In the end. They decide. I'm going to go somewhere. Where it's a bit. Easier.

Where I. I hear what I want to hear. Week by week. And yet. The truth is. That. That kind of philosophy. In the name of Christianity. Can never work.

Because. We only get. The power. From God. To change. By hearing. Again and again. The truth. Of who we are. And what God's done. For us.

God is deeply ambitious. For us to change. His grace means. There is. Nothing we can do. To make us. To make him love us more. There's nothing we could do. That would make him love us less.

But he is very ambitious. For us. That we would be transformed. And the way that he transforms us. Is by. Telling us. Of his love for us. And you'll only grasp.

[20 : 46] The depth of that love for you. If you're willing to accept. Your own sin. That by ourselves. We've deeply offended God. And yet he set his love on us anyway.

And sent Jesus to die for us. We undermine. The depths of his love. When we play down. How much we've offended God. And needed to be forgiven. So we need to experience.

This transforming love. And for some of us. That might come in a. A one-off. Amazing.

Breathtaking. Wow. Experience from God. That just fills us. With an awareness of his love. We never had before. And if that happens.

Praise God. That's a wonderful thing. Perhaps more commonly. For lots of us. What we're looking for. Is to grow over time. In our experience. Of the love of Christ. And we can experience that.

In our own church family. Holy. Paul prays in verse 18. That we'd have power together. With all the Lord's holy people. To grasp the dimensions. Of Christ's love.

[21 : 44] We taste. The love of Christ for us. As we commit wholeheartedly. To our church family. And at times. We're deeply loved by them. And cared for by them. And we love them.

And we experience that love. As we give the time. To think about it more. Some of you feel. Really terribly busy. Don't you? And yet.

Even when we're terribly busy. We still make time. For the things we think. We need the most. So could we say to ourselves. Because what I need.

Most of all. Is to grasp the love of Christ. Then no matter how busy. I feel this week. I need to give the time. To think about his love for me. To think about how wide it is.

Have you thought. About how wide. The love of Christ is. It is so wide. It's for everyone. No matter your skin color. Your nationality.

[22 : 42] Your ethnic group. No matter where you've run to. No matter who you've become. His love is for you. That's how wide it is. How long it is. Have you thought about how long it is.

In Revelation. Jesus is described as the lamb. Who was slain. Before the foundation of the world. Even before the first star was made.

Before the first mountain. Jesus had already agreed with his father. That he would die for you. And he knew you by name. When he said that. And his love for you. Will go on forever. So that when we're with him.

In the new creation. It will never end. That's how long it is. Have you thought about how high. His love is for you. That it takes you from the depths.

Of your sin. From the hell you deserve. And it exalts you. To a place of honor. In heaven. In the presence of God the father. You go from condemnation. To having every spiritual blessing.

[23 : 39] Because God treats you. As though you've been Jesus. That's how high. His love is. Have you thought about how deep. His love is for you. Consider the depths he went down to.

Because he loves you. What did it cost Jesus. To love you. It cost him everything. He suffered hell for you. When he died on the cross. He chose to do that.

Because his love for you is so deep. Christ by highest heaven adored. Christ the everlasting Lord. Entered the pain and muck.

Of a fallen world. He stood up to the self-righteous bullies. Until they put him to death. He looked down on the cross. At his bones all out of joint. And said it's finished.

What he came to do. Had been done. His love for you. Is unfathomably deep. So what will a powerful church look like? It will be a group of people.

[24 : 36] So strengthened by the power of God. That they live like Jesus. It will be a group of people. So strengthened by the power of God. That they're completely overwhelmed. By the love of Jesus Christ for them.

People from different backgrounds. Broken about their own sin. But overflowing with joy. About the dimensions of Jesus' love for them. So that when you look at them.

They make living for God look easy. It's what they want to do. You think well of course they do that. They want to do it. But it's because they're soaked in the love of God.

They're loving other people. Because it's become natural to them. Because they're so amazed. By how much Jesus loves them. Wouldn't it be great.

If we were like that. Wouldn't Glasgow notice us. If we lived like that. Will we dare to pray Paul's prayer. For St. Silas. And as we finish.

[25 : 37] Paul ends his prayer. And this whole section of Ephesians. With those great words. In verses 20 and 21. He asks that God's power will be used. In us. Astonishingly. For God's glory.

Let's have a look. At verse 20. And great verses. If you have a good imagination. Verse 20. Now to him who was able to do immeasurably more. Than all we ask.

Or imagine. According to his power. That is at work within us. To him be glory. In the church. And in Christ Jesus. Throughout all generations. Forever and ever.

Amen. So we want power from God. So that we can be in control. Paul wants. Us to have power from God. So that God would take control. Of us.

And fashion us. In the image of Jesus. So that he is glorified. By the way he transforms us. To be the people he always made us to be. In Ephesians 1 to 3.

[26 : 32] Paul has aimed. To thrill us. With what God is like. And what God is doing in the world. So that what we want more than anything else. Is for him to work like that more and more.

For our good. And for his glory. Let's pray together. Gracious God.

And loving heavenly father. We lay ourselves down. Before your authority. And power. And majesty. We ask that out of your glorious riches. You will strengthen us. With power.

Through your spirit. In our inner being. So that Christ may dwell. In our hearts. Through faith. And we pray that we. Being rooted. And established in love. May have power together.

With all of your holy people. To grasp how wide. And long. And high. And deep. Is the love of Christ.

[27 : 31] And to know this love. That surpasses knowledge. That we might be filled to the measure. Of all of your fullness. We pray these things.

That you would act in us. By your power. For your glory. In ways beyond our even imagining. In Christ Jesus. Amen.