

## 27.8.08 Ephesians 3:14-21 midweekchurch Ephesians3 (mid)

A while back among the personal ads in the Daily News, I saw something unusual. Amongst the masses of things to be sold, the advertisements for love and lust was a prayer, a prayer that the person who put it into the paper claims has never been known to fail.

Now that's worth reading isn't it! A prayer that has never been known to fail. Can you imagine what you could do with a prayer like that? Can you imagine what it would be like to have that sort of power?

Let me read you the prayer - it is directed to the Virgin Mary and it is to be said three days in a row, and after that, the prayer must be published in the paper. It says, "*O most beautiful flower of MT Carmel, fruit vine splendour of heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in this my necessity. A Star of the Sea help me and show me herein that you are my mother. O Holy Mary, Mother of God, Queen of heaven and earth, I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart to succour me in my necessity. There are none that can withstand your power. O show me here you are my mother.*

*O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.  
O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.  
O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.  
Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands. Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands. Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands. Thank you for your mercy towards me and mine. Amen"*

Now is that what prayer is all about, is it a matter of getting the right words, is it a matter of saying it 3 times, is it a matter of praying to the Virgin Mary?

Well the Bible has a lot to say about prayer. And in the book of Ephesians we come across our second prayer in the first three chapters. Paul is mixing up his teaching about God with his prayers to God. And that should tell us something, shouldn't it? That what we believe and what we pray about is related. What we believe affects what we pray. And we pray for the things where our beliefs touch our world.

So tonight I want us to turn to the second part of Ephesians 3 and learn from Paul's perceptive pastoral prayer. For with prayer I believe it is better caught than taught. So let us remember our prayer published in the paper and compare it with the one published in Ephesian 3. Lets start with

**1. The Posture** So what is Paul's posture in prayer? How does he position his body, mind and soul when he prays? Well he says in v14 "*For this*

*reason, I kneel before the father."*

Now the idea of kneeling in prayer probably gives us memories of pain - knobby knees against hard pieces of wood, bare legs against cold stone floors, and prayers that went on forever. They may not have been that long but when you are uncomfortable, everything seems to drag, doesn't it? Now kneeling has gone out of vogue in Churches and let me point out I'm not here advocating its reintroduction.

But when you kneel, you are being reverent, you are humbling yourself; you are before someone much greater than yourself - that you do not even dare to lift up your head. And when we pray we are before the King. Not just any old King, but the King of the world, the creator of the whole universe. So we must come before him in humbleness, reverence, knowing our true place.

But we are not just kneeling, but kneeling before the Father. Yes he is king of the universe - but he is also our father. This term gives us a familiarity. It reminds us of the special relationship we have with God.

So "*we kneel before the father.*" Thus when we position ourselves for pray we always have two ideas in our minds. Yes he is our Creator but he is also our friend. Yes he is our king, but he is also our father. We must not forget his power, but lets not forget his love.

So how does our posture, our position affect our prayers? Well firstly it reduces the tendency to come into God's presence too lightly. The idea when we snuggle up in bed and we start our prayer before we go to sleep and then in the morning we say Amen because we fell asleep half way through.

Yet it will also stop us from being too formal. Where we share nothing of ourselves, where we use a different language in prayer than we do in normal conversation, where we feel we cant approach God with the full range of our thoughts and emotions.

So when we approach God we need to remember that he is both King & Father - and our posture will help us reflect our attitude to God in prayer.

**2. His Petitions.** But once Paul has his posture right, he turns his attention to some requests. So what does Paul pray for? Especially to a Church he knew so well, one he had planted just a few years before. What does he see as important? Success? Safety? Healing? Money? Promotion? Friendship? Numbers? Because what you pray about speaks loud and clear about what your priorities are. For we will pray for the things we think are most important.

So what do you pray for? What sorts of requests do you regularly ask for? Do you just ask for your own needs? Or wants? Do you pray for others? The Church? Missionaries? People to be converted? Is your prayers full of pleas for people to get better from their sicknesses? These are important questions. For it will teach you a lot about how your Christian life is going. For your prayers teach you how thankful you are to God, whether you are really sorry for your sins, how much you have learned about God recently, whether your relationship with God is a dynamic, growing one, or whether by saying the same thing all the time it is a static, dying one.

Well lets have a look at what Paul prays for. He has three petitions or requests. Firstly in v16 that the Ephesians might be ***Strengthened with Power through the Holy Spirit***. Paul looks at the Christians at Ephesus. He sees the opposition they face; he sees the bright lights & lures of the world; he sees the temptations that the devil places before them; and he sees the Christians themselves. That in their own power they will be too weak, their task will be too great, the difficulties too large.

What will save them? God's strength through the Holy Spirit will. The same mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead is available for our own strengthening. For the Christian gains his strength not from his own resources but from the power of the HS. As Paul says elsewhere "*When I'm weak, then I'm strong.*"

So do you feel weak in any way? What about your friends, your family? Do they? Are they struggling with a sin they don't seem to be able to throw off? Are they falling for the devil's wily teaching? Have they been battered by living in such a harsh and unforgiving world? Then pray for them that they may be strengthened with power through the Spirit. That they will rely not on their own strength but instead lean on God's heavenly resources.

But for what purpose are we to be strengthened? So we can love. Love our Father with our heart, mind, soul & strength. And love our neighbour the way we have been loved. To do this we will need to have deep roots and firm foundations in love. Paul wants the Ephesians to be like a well-rooted tree and then a well-built house. In both cases the unseen cause of their stability is love. Love is to be the soil in which their life is to be rooted; love is to be the foundation on which their life is to be built.

Yet whose love? God's love, of course. A love that is so wide as to include all mankind. A love that is so long that it will last for all eternity. A love that is so high that it will lift us into heaven. A love that is so deep that it will reach people however low they have sunk. But we can't just

know this love in theory though, we must experience it in practice. We need to step out & follow him. We need to risk our very lives. For when we do this we will know his love personally and we won't want it any other way.

Because sometimes the Christian life can become ordinary. It can lose its sparkle, its dynamic. Is that true of anyone you pray for? Is that true of you? Then maybe they need to be filled with God's love once more. That will show them they are someone special, that God has a plan for them. That will motivate them to follow him once more.

And this prayer of Paul's becomes even more important when you read the next bit of correspondence to the Ephesian Church in the Bible. In the message to the Church of Ephesus in Revelations chapter 2, we hear Jesus say these words: *"Yet I have this against you; You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent & do the things you did at first."*

The Ephesians did not listen to Paul's prayer. Their religion became rigid. They may have done the right things but they didn't love. They may have come to Church but it never changed their lives. They may have heard God's word but they didn't increase their love, their forgiveness, their compassion. And Christ said if they didn't repent he would come and remove their lamp stand. He would come and they would then be judged.

You see the importance of praying that others are rooted and established in love. And that they can see how wide, long, high & deep is Christ's love? For if Christians are constantly surrounded by God's love, they will be compelled to love those around them. Compelled, for their will be no choice. For your environment so often dictates who you really are and how you react to the things that happen to you.

I don't know about you but the more I find out about God, the more I am amazed about his love. He chose me, even though he knows exactly what I am like. He predestined me before the Creation of the world. He hasn't given me what I deserve instead he has given me grace, peace, gifts for ministry, joy, patience and so many other things.

Yet Paul makes one further request. *"That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* Not just strengthened with power through the HS and being surrounded by God's love but being filled with all the fullness of God. So what would it be like if you were filled with the fullness of God completely? You would be like God.

So Paul is praying that these Christians become like God, to exhibit the same character that he shows, to grow in faith, love and holiness. To be like Jesus, the visible likeness of the invisible God. What an incredible

thing to pray for. But logical, also. For what is our aim when we become a Christian? What should our greatest desire be? Surely it is to grow in their faith and to serve God with more and more of their life. It is to put off the old self of sin and put on the new self of holiness. Its to be more like Jesus, isn't it? So what better thing to pray for others than what is the greatest desire in your own life.

Now please notice that he is praying for spiritual realities here not physical ones. I don't know about you but most of my prayer requests are for my friends or for own physical needs. Their relationship with their family. Someone's difficulty at work, their illnesses.

Yet Paul shows us that we should be praying for the things that are really important and often these are spiritual requests. Sure don't neglect the here and now but look beyond the situation to its cause. Just as a doctor must look beyond the symptoms to the cause of the illness - we should be praying for the causes as well as the symptoms.

So do we pray that people are strengthened or that their difficulties be taken away? That others may be surrounded by God's love or that they may be surrounded by good health? Do we pray that people can keep up with the Jones or that they keep up with God and his ways and His plans and priorities for their life? Let us learn from Paul and as well as praying for these things, let us also pray for the most important things.

**3. His Praise.** Yet Paul doesn't finish his prayer without giving praise to God. *"Now to him who is 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, for ever and ever Amen."*

Paul recognises who he is praying to. He is the God who is able *to do things*. But he is more than that. He is a God who is able to do *what we ask*, for he hears and answers prayer. But he's greater than that. He is able to do what we ask *or think*, he can read our thoughts and do things that we dare not ask for. But he's even greater than that. He is able to do *all* the things we ask or think. In fact he can do *more than* we ask or think, for his expectations are greater than ours. No, he can do *immeasurably* more than we ask or think for he is not stingy, he is a God of superabundance.

It's like when it was your birthday and your Mum used to ask you what do you want for dinner. And you would say a roast. And you would get your roast, plus your favourite vegetables and then bread and gravy. And after that you would get a pavlova for dessert!

That's the sort of God we are praying to. So if he is like that. And if he wants you to pray. And if he loves saying yes, then lets not just pray for what's second best, lets commit ourselves to praying that people will be surrounded by God's love, they will know his power in all aspects of their lives and that they will grow to be like Jesus. And as we pray lets thank God that he not only gives us the ability to talk to him but the God of this universe actually takes time to listen and answer our prayers. In the world we may seem insignificant, but to God we are always worth listening to.