

## **“A Prayer For The Father’s Family”**

21 June 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call to Worship:**

Good morning everyone, and welcome to our service of worship where our theme today is prayer. One of the positive outcomes of the present crisis has been an increasing interest in prayer by many people, an increasing desire, I think, because they know they need God for people to be prayed for. And, of course, when Jesus taught us to pray, He began His prayer with the words “Our Father who art in heaven”, emphasising that we approach Him as a father, and we are His children. A good father, of course, loves his children and his children will love to approach him. And that actually changes everything, because if we know that He loves us, then we’re more likely to approach. And if we know that He loves us and has already dealt with the issues and the sins in our lives by punishing His own Son, then there’s nothing that we need to hide from Him. We can come to Him with absolute confidence. And that’s what Paul reminded us last week: *“In Him and through faith in Jesus we may approach God with freedom and confidence”* (Ephesians 3:12).

Another positive is that we’ve listened to many more worship songs and been introduced to the hymns of Matt Boswell and Matt Papa. And today, we begin our service by singing a hymn called “Magnificent, Marvellous, Matchless Love”.

**Praise:** Magnificent, Marvellous, Matchless Love

### **Prayers of Adoration and Confession:**

Heavenly Father, all praise to You this morning, all glory and honour. You are all-powerful, eternal and perfection itself. You need nothing from us, and yet You delight in our coming to You as little children might. How wonderful and how relieving to know this morning that with You every day is Father's Day. We praise You for involving us in Your wonderful plan for the world You created and love so much. Lord, we turn our hearts to You just now. For some, this feels easy and natural; for others, it's a choice or even a struggle. But we put our trust in You because of the hope we have.

We have so much to be thankful for: our health and incredible wealth by global standards, our families, friends, community, education, purposeful work, security. We want to thank You. We *want* to thank You, Lord, but so often we don't. Something holds us back as though, if You were to notice how blessed we are and how well we're doing, You'd realise we are due for some misfortune, a portion of suffering. God, this is not Your character and we repent of that thinking. Lord, as we lean into simple thankfulness today, we pray that You would open up our eyes to eternal truths. Dulled, distracted and even embarrassed at our comfort, we confess that at times we find it hard to get our heads around the spiritual blessings, immeasurable riches and glorious inheritance that are ours in Christ. Don't let us off the hook. We need to see and know Your power today, and Your purposes for us, Your church.

Physically apart, we join now in prayer using the words Your Son taught us.

*Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

**Reading:** Ephesians 3:14-21

**Sermon:**

Thanks, Ricardo, for reading and if you have a Bible close by, do open it and follow along in Ephesians 3:14-21, *A Prayer for the Church*.

I. Paul's Posture (v.14)

Now, the idea of taking the knee is all around us at the moment with the Black Lives Matter campaign. It is a symbol of protest and a call to have racism acknowledged and defeated. Taking the knee at its best is a serious call to justice and reform. The idea of Paul taking the knee, or kneeling, captivated me. To think of him, in prison, kneeling before God as his heavenly Father (v.14) shows serious intent. Bowing causes us to be serious. Literally, "I bow my knees to You, Father" - the very posture of Paul challenged me about prayer.

So why is Paul serious about prayer? Well, he says, "For this reason I kneel before the Father" (v.14). *The reason* is a summary of all that he has said in Chapters 1-2 of this letter. Remember that he has been sidetracked from verse 1 of Chapter 3 and is now getting back to where he started. The reason: namely, that Paul has received grace from God, has had new insights about God and His mission to the Gentiles revealed to him (the mystery), has been given a ministry to the Gentiles and called to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, so that God would bring together many people from every nation under Christ, a new humanity in a new society called the Church. And he summarises this in verse 15 as God's family, in heaven and on earth, the Church triumphant in heaven and the Church on earth, whose origin and existence is solely from God. Paul talks to God about every aspect of that work in the Church in prayer. *For this reason I kneel before the Father*.

II. Paul's Petitions

But what is Paul praying for?

A. For More of Jesus in the Christian's Heart (vv.16-17a)

Well firstly, in vv.16-17a, we see that he is praying for more of Jesus in the Christian's heart. In Christ, we already have the Holy Spirit, as we have heard in Ch. 1:13 and Ch. 2:22. It is the Holy Spirit's presence that makes Jesus real in our hearts. Paul recognises that the Church needs more of Jesus and that happens as He resides in the hearts of the members through the Holy Spirit by faith. The word for dwell is not one of temporary residence, but is used of a home, a permanent residence. He is praying that Jesus would be more at home in our hearts. Now, if anyone has moved home, you will know that it's hard work, taking ownership of a new place and making it suit your needs and to serve those needs. For it to happen, you need a good deal of energy and strength, and Paul realises that for Jesus to be at home in his heart and ours that power and strength are needed to make that a reality.

In Greek mythology, Hercules was the strong guy, and he proved that by cleaning out (apparently) Aegean stables that had 3,000 horses and had not been mucked out for 30 years. . . and he completed that task in one day. It was, as we say, a Herculean task. And Paul prays that God will deal with all the muck in our hearts, with His glorious riches and with the power of the Spirit, to enable Christ to dwell with us and to be more at home in our hearts.

Paul understands that we are weak. He understands his own weakness, his thorn in the flesh, his opposition from Jewish authorities, the opposition of the Roman authorities, and worldly and even demonic opposition as well. We are tempted by the attraction of the world, we are duped by the duplicity and subtlety of Satan, and we are resistant, in our hearts, to Jesus' residence, because of the sinful nature and the reign of self!

You see Paul, as a pastor, understands that struggle, and that's why we need power. Our **minds** can be dull. We can be depressed. We can think despicable thoughts. We can have no discipline. And we need power. In our **hearts**, we can be discouraged and fearful, and we need Jesus. In our **wills**, we can dilly dally and not want to make decisions, and have no resolve. And we need Jesus and His power. And in our **physical bodies**, well, we age and we sometimes have illnesses and disease. And we need Jesus, and we need power. And so, despite everything, Paul prays that these believers will know Jesus more and more in their hearts and be more and more comfortable in His presence. He prays that Jesus would  *dwell in their hearts through faith.*

B. To Know How Much They Are Loved (vv.17b-19a)

And next, he prays that they would know how much they are loved (vv.17b-19a). Our development and growth as human beings depends on being loved. All of us were, I think, in the past shocked by images of children in certain orphanages that were developmentally stunted because of a lack of love in its many forms. Paul knows that it's just the same with Christian growth. It occurs in the context of love. So, he prays that they would be established in love, that they would grasp the reality of how much they are loved, and that they would know and understand and experience that love.

He pictures them as being planted, rooted, and of foundations being laid - established - in love. And the Scriptures teach the fact through the life and the cross of Jesus. They reassure us of God's love for us in that act. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. However, because Satan and the world and our sinful nature oppose this truth, we need power - power to grasp and know the reality and extent of that love. Paul prays that the Ephesians will know God's love - its width, length, height and depth. You see, God's love is *wide* enough to embrace every nation, tribe, culture, language, and skin colour. God's love is *long* enough, and it lasts for eternity. God's love is *high* enough and brings us to heaven. God's love is *deep* enough to reach the most broken, most disgraceful, most disgusting sin in our hearts. *You are loved by God.* Paul prays that we might grasp it.

C. To be Filled to the Measure of the Fullness of God (v.19b)

And thirdly, he prays that we might be filled to the measure of the fullness of God (v.19b). When you read what Paul prays, it's incredible! There is a possibility of so much more than we have known and experienced of God. It is a prayer that's surely focused on heaven, and the capacity of the resurrection body being glorified and able to be directly in the presence of God. And presently, we can only think of this possible reality as a future hope, but it is a direction of travel and we have the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of that hope.

Paul has been captivated by the purpose of God for all humanity in Christ Jesus within the church. It is for this reason that he kneels before the Father. He prays for the Church to have more of Jesus in their hearts, that they would grasp how much they are loved and be filled with all the measure of the fullness of God. How does that compare with the content of our prayers? I have been deeply

challenged and encouraged to pray like Paul for more of Jesus in my life and in yours, and I would love you to join together with me in such prayer. It will also mean that we continue to prioritise prayer in our church.

### III. Paul's Praise

And you'll see that Paul finishes his prayer with a doxology, that is "praise to God", with a strong reassurance that God *can* answer prayer!

John Stott has an excellent comment on these verses, in which he lists them as a composite which builds with every phrase, assuring us that God can answer prayer. So, God is *able to do*. That means that He is able to work. He is not inactive, He is not asleep, He is not lazy, and He is not dead. God is able to do *what we ask* - He hears and is not deaf or disinterested. God is able to do *what we ask or imagine* - our thoughts are not hidden from Him and He can do what we dare not ask of Him. And so, He is able to do *all* we ask or imagine - He knows it all, He can perform it all. And He's able to do *more* than all we ask or imagine - literally, beyond our expectations. His expectations are greater than ours. And He can do *immeasurably* more than all we ask or imagine - there are no limits to what God can do.

God is able to do  
God is able to do what we ask  
God is able to do what we imagine  
God is able to do *all* we ask or imagine  
God is able to do *more* than all we ask or imagine  
God is able to do *immeasurably* more than all we ask or imagine

The power at work in us as individuals and as a community is the resurrection power of Jesus Christ, the power that made us new creations, that raised us from spiritual death to eternal life in Christ and continues to work to make us more like Jesus. Paul prays for more of Him in the life of the Church. And we pray it, of course, for the glory of God, and the glory of the church and Jesus. We, His whole family, are to honour the God who has graciously given us so much, throughout all generations forever and ever! Amen.

So now, let us praise God by singing a simple prayer which expresses a desire of longing to be in God's presence: "To Be In Your Presence".

**Praise:** To Be In Your Presence

### **Prayers for Others:**

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, thank You that You welcome prayer and that You are listening to us now as we talk to You. We know that You love each and every person who is watching and listening to this service. Indeed, it has been good to be reminded of the extent of Your love as we study the book of Ephesians. There's no greater joy than to know we are valued and loved by You. We are sorry that we do not always fully appreciate Your love or respond by loving You.

We come to You now, loving Father, with many things on our minds. We pray for the people in our congregation who are experiencing a variety of challenging circumstances. You understand, Lord, exactly what each person is going through and we pray earnestly that You will minister to the needs

of each one. Give them strength to hold on to You in faith and help them to experience Your deep love for them at this time. Give them peace, Lord, and help us all to trust You even when we don't understand or like our circumstances. We pray that Your Holy Spirit will give wisdom and direction to all involved in the very responsible decisions relating to the reopening of our church and related activities.

Father, we were so sad to hear of the death of Detective Garda Colm Horkan. We pray for his father, brothers and sister, friends and colleagues in their grief. Please comfort and strengthen them as they cope with this tragedy and surround them with all the love and support that they need. Thank You for the members of An Garda Síochána and for their service to our communities, often sacrificially and sometimes, sadly, paying the ultimate sacrifice. We pray for their safety, Lord, as they seek to keep us safe. We pray that they will have all the support they need from the relevant authorities and from the general public, in carrying out their responsibilities.

We are thankful, Lord, for the progress made regarding a Programme for Government and we pray for wise decisions by the members of the parties involved in the ongoing deliberations.

We also thank You, Lord, that the incidence of COVID-19 is decreasing in Ireland and that many of the restrictions have been lifted. We pray for continued wisdom for our current and future Government as they guide us through the reopening of our society and economy safely. We also remember before You, Lord, those who remain ill and those grieving the loss of loved ones in very difficult circumstances – we pray for Your healing and comfort. We pray particularly for other countries, which are experiencing a surge in the virus at this time. Knowing that You are able to do more than we ask or imagine, we bow our hearts before You now, call on Your mercy, and pray that You will rid the world of this pandemic.

Heavenly Father, on this Father's Day, we thank You for Your perfect, loving example of fatherhood. We also thank You for the many loving fathers who give their children all the love and protection that they need. For those fathers who are experiencing trials, we pray for protection, strength, wisdom, and discernment to help them through whatever they may be facing.

Finally, we pray for Your help to rid our hearts of the things that prevent us from grasping the full extent of Your love. We ask that we will be so rooted and grounded in Your Fatherly love that this will give us the desire, confidence and freedom to tell others about that love. We know You long that everyone would respond to Your love and recognise You as their Saviour and Friend, and so experience the peace that only You can give and be assured of eternal life in heaven with You. Please equip us, Lord, to share what Christ has done for us. Father, we pray all these prayers in the powerful name of Jesus and trust in Your unfailing love. Amen.

**Closing Praise:** Before The Throne Of God Above

**Benediction:**

And we finish our service with these good words:

*“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work in us to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)*