

Ephesians 1

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴ For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that He lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵ For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, ¹⁶ I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 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 his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Introduction

I am sure that we are all deeply shaken by the news about Val and our hearts go out to her and Ant and the family. The news underlines for us the deep uncertainties in our lives at a time when we don't know who is going to be prime minister, which party or philosophy is going to be governing us in a few months' time, whether we are going to be in or out of Europe, In addition to all that we seem to have an unpredictable and volatile leader of the Free World and no one knows *where* he is going to end up leading us.

Life if anything was even more uncertain for the Ephesians. At the time Paul was writing in about AD 62, there had been 5 different Roman Emperors since the time of Jesus and there would be another 7 in the next 20 years. Most of them were assassinated, 2 of them committed suicide and Titus would die of fever at the age of 41 after reigning for a mere 2 years. You never knew what kind of regime the new Caesar would bring in – more harsh or more lenient. At a deeper level, most of the population believed in a whole range of different gods – either Roman or local pagan deities who were capricious and unpredictable and needed to be placated or manipulated by all sorts of different sacrifices.

It's against this background that Paul writes to Christians not just in Ephesus but to be circulated to a number of different churches in the region. And Paul's prayer and longing for these Christians and so for us as well is that they might have a new perspective

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In fact, he has begun his letter by doing all he can to enable us to see what God is like and not only all He has done for us, but all He is going to do. Paul gives us the big picture – *Like the London eye – an overall view of God's whole purpose – focusing in on particular places, but always aware of the whole view.* Paul shows us God's cosmic plan and what he sees fills him with praise and joy at the extraordinary grace and generosity of God.

He says that despite what life might feel like, despite what the world around you thinks and is constantly telling you, you don't live in a world of uncertainty, controlled by capricious unpredictable forces. No

you live in a world created by an infinitely loving and gracious God, who has a plan and purpose for this world and what's more His plan involves you as being part of that purpose. *4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will ...11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,*

God has given us a new identity: We live in a world where people are really struggling with who they are. Facebook has over 70 different gender and sexuality categories, no wonder so many of our young people are confused or having mental health issues. But it's not just young people who struggle – there's the young couple looking forward to becoming parents and yet can't, the middle-aged man who is made redundant or the older person who retires and loses all the fulfilment and respect they had found in their career. All are having to deal with the profound question: *Who am I?*

But in Christ, our heavenly Father gives us an identity that is more important and more secure than any identity this world has to offer. He has adopted us into his family and made us his own children and heirs.

With that new identity God gives us a new hope. *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 his holy people.*

Some put their hope in fame or success or their work or their friends.

All of these things can let us down:

- The most famous can be forgotten,
- success can be short-lived,
- the most dedicated employee can be made redundant,
- our friends can desert us:
- our hope for happiness can be wrecked by illness or accident.

But we have a glorious hope that God is gradually making us into the people He created us to be and that one day we shall be part of that heavenly city, that shining and restored and united community living in perfect love and harmony in the company of Jesus (*the Repair shop – we are Jesus' treasured but worn out battered heirlooms.*)

3rdly God give us a new purpose *v.11 having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we... might be for the praise of his glory.* What does this mean? God has chosen us not just that we might praise God in all his glory but in order that **others**, indeed the whole Creation, might see us and praise God. We might ask: how on earth is that possible that God can actually expect ordinary fallible people like us to lead others to praise God? Well actually it's precisely because we are so ordinary and fallible that we will cause others to praise God. God has chosen us in Christ *to be holy and blameless* i.e. like Jesus so that people – indeed the whole universe will say:

Truly, a miracle has happened!

How extraordinary is the power and grace of God,

What's more, God has this destiny not just for us as individuals but even more so for us as a community as his new family.

When the world sees a transformed community – people from totally different backgrounds, people who would normally have nothing to do with each other, people who otherwise might even have been enemies, living in unity, full of love and compassion and forgiveness, it will say:

What an extraordinary miracle, what an amazing God first of all even to think of this and then to bring it to pass.

In other words, we will be **to the praise of God's glory.**

We might well ask *How on earth is this possible?* This is why Paul says:

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ...his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,

If God can take the mangled dead corpse of Christ and not just resuscitate it but transform that corpse into the glorious resurrection body of Christ, so filled with vibrant life, love and energy, power and authority, he can certainly transform the frail bodies and fallible natures of you and me.

The problem is we constantly lose sight of our true identity, our true hope and purpose and destiny and the transforming power that is made available to us by the Holy Spirit. We are like blind Bartimaeus. We can't see, but we are surrounded by the noise of the crowd. We feel useless and at the mercy of whatever is going on around us. This is why gathering to worship is so important. For it is in our gathered worship that we are encouraged to call out to Jesus *Lord Jesus! Have mercy on me! I want to see!*

And it's in our gathered worship, through the songs and the liturgy, the readings, and I hope even through the sermons, through the prayers and the bread and the wine, that God opens our eyes again to who He is, to his great love for us, to what He's already done for us, to his glorious plans and purposes for us and the whole world. Until 9 months ago, I was very short-sighted and I had cataracts. This meant that without glasses I could barely see a thing. But now I've been given brand new lenses and all of a sudden I can see you perfectly – in full technicolour. This is one of the great blessings of worship: it gives us new eyes new lenses to see God clearly and to see his world, to see others, to see ourselves, to see his plans and purposes and our role in them through his eyes.