**Prayer season – Paul’s Prayers**

The prayers of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament are full of Spirit-inspired expressions of prayer that can teach us so much about prayer and how to pray. Reading through the prayers in the Book of Acts along with those contained within the letters gives us a great insight into how the apostles prayed.

Let’s look at a few examples from Paul’s letters to help us.

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. 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—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of 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, forever and ever! Amen.

**Ephesians 3:14-21**

**“For this reason I kneel …”** the whole of this prayer is going to be shaped by the deep reverence indicated by this act of devotion. People usually stood to pray in Paul’s day, so this act of devotion and reverence sets this prayer apart as having a sense of depth and dimension to it.

But what is the reason – v10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known. Paul understood the unique purpose of the church – it was and is to show the many facets of God’s wisdom. The church is more than a club that recruits people, looks after people and does charitable acts. The church is God’s idea, his intent. It is full of God’s purpose. He wants his church to reflect him.

So for this reason Paul prays for the believers at Ephesus. Cathy and I visited Ephesus a while ago. It was very special to walk in the very places Paul would have walked. To stand in the Amphitheatre where he was dragged into on one occasion to address an angry crowd. It was also very clear that most of the people in Ephesus worshipped idols and the place was full of immorality in Paul’s day. And the church was there to show a different way; to show who God is, his wisdom, power, compassion, love and mercy.

Although a very different time and context, we also live in a community that worships many things other than God. Our world isn’t that far removed from Paul’s. So his prayer for the believers is important for us too. This is the sort of prayer we can pray for each other:

**“I pray that out of His glorious riches …”** From the place ofhumility before God, Paul now asks for great and wonderful things for the believers. Some of the words he uses are so expressive:

**Strengthen, power, dwell, rooted, established, grasp, know and filled.**

When the apostles pray for believers the focus is often on revelation and empowerment.

**Colossians 1:9-12**

**“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you …”**

The prayer Paul prays for these believers again reflects these themes of revelation and empowerment.

In terms of revelation he prays for **knowledge** of God’s will, spiritual **wisdom** and **understanding**.

In terms of empowerment he asks for power to **live worthy** of the Lord, **bearing fruit** in every good work and **growing in the knowledge** of God.

He goes on to pray that they will be **strengthened** with power, have **endurance** and **patience** and an attitude of **joyful thankfulness**.

**2 Thessalonians 1:11**

**“We constantly pray for you …”**

Paul prays that God would **fulfil** the **purpose** and **actions** of the Thessalonians.

That He would make real, bring about, complete, make happen, achieve and realise every good **purpose** they set themselves to and every **act** of faith they do in His name.

In this, Christ is glorified in His people as they walk in fruitful fulfilment of God’s calling upon their lives.

Going back to the Ephesians prayer - Paul requests that we would have a revelation of the vast dimensions of God’s love. V17

God’s love is outrageous. It is extravagant. It is vast. It is unconditional. It is generous. It is unprecedented. It is powerful. It is sacrificial. It is selfless. It’s all embracing. It is full of mercy. It is overflowing with forgiveness. It is unfailing, unceasing, unending. It is the greatest thing in the universe. It is eternal, extraordinary and empowering. It is out of this world. It is incomparable.

This love brought Jesus from heaven to earth. This love gave Jesus to our world. It let him be brutally executed so that we could live forever. It allowed his blood to flow from the cross so that we could be forgiven, cleansed, healed and reconciled to God. It closed hell and opened heaven for us.

When Paul is praying this he uses three different Greek words for knowledge. One that means Head knowledge, one that means Intimate and Experiential Knowledge and one that means Overwhelming Knowledge as if you are possessed by that knowledge.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to be absolutely possessed by how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know intimately and experience this love that surpasses head and theological knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

To know this love, to receive this love, to be possessed by this love, to experience this love, changes our lives.

But there was something else that Paul goes onto to pray after he prays this – his prayer is a bit like climbing a ladder – every step takes us to a higher place – and he prays that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

He knows that God is love – love is who God is. And so when we have received the vastness of God’s love we have received the fullness of God himself. It is as though we become full of God when we are overwhelmed by how much He loves us.

But God is more than love. He is powerful and supernatural.

Often we talk here about the Kingdom of God. Next week we will be looking at Jesus’ prayer – he teaches us to pray for God’s kingdom to come, for his will to be done here on earth as it is in heaven. What does he mean by these things? It means more of God’s rule and reign on earth, more of what happens in heaven on earth and less of what does not happen in heaven on earth, like sickness, sin and selfishness. I suppose we could be praying for more of God on earth. More love, more power, more supernatural.

One of the songs we used to sing some years ago was a Michael Smith song – more love, more power, more of you in my life.

I think that is the essence of this part of Paul’s prayer. That we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Imagine a church full of people full of God. Full of his love, his power and his supernatural activity bursting out into our world. That vision excites me. This is a powerful prayer and Paul is full of confidence and faith that God will answer it – because, as he puts it, God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

How many of us want to be filled with the fullness of God?

Let me say this, we will not be filled with the fullness of God until we are really hungry for that to happen. God wants his church back. His people hungry for him, thirsty for him, serious for him, filled with him so that the world can see his glory through the church.

Hungry people will go to great lengths to obtain food. They may have to walk for miles to find food or water. Hunger will drive people to desperate measures – they may search through other peoples rubbish for food, they may steal their food, they may beg for some food. They may eat things they would normally find difficult to eat.

I was reminded the other day of a time when I was staying in Cairo many years ago– I was on my own in a cheap hotel – it was getting dark and I didn’t want to venture out – but I was very thirsty. So thirsty, that I just had to drink something. If I was Bear Grylls, I might have found a few cockroaches and sucked the juices out of them – but there were not even any cockroaches in the room. I was thirsty and the only thing to drink was the tap water. But I knew that the tap water was not safe to drink.

It didn’t go through the same treatment processes that our tap water goes through. But I was thirsty and thirsty people take risks to quench their thirst. There were no cockroaches, but there was water in the tap. So I took the risk and drank the water. Immediately after drinking the water I turned luminous green and my muscles expanded beyond the size of Phils! No, not really, in fact the tap water had no effect on me at all.

Why are people hungry? An obvious question – because they are empty. Their bodies know they are empty through various receptors and produce a desire to be filled again. If we don’t feel hungry for God, maybe it is because we are full of ourselves.

What we need is a spiritual hunger and thirst for the fullness of God. For spiritual receptors to be firing up and telling us we are empty without him. For our spirits to be desiring to be filled to overflowing with the Holy Spirit. A hunger to live a kingdom of God lifestyle, where miracles, healings, justice and righteousness flow from us so easily, where heaven invades earth, where hell is plundered. A hunger that is even stronger than our physical hunger - a hunger that will not stop until we are filled with all the fullness of God.

I think that is what this season of Prayer is about. Inspiring us to pray and seek God.

May God sweep across this church by his Spirit and give us fresh revelation of his love for us. May hunger arise for his fullness. May prayer be ignited in our hearts.

May a spiritual hunger overwhelm us – may we have a fresh understanding as Jesus did when he was physically hungry after fasting for many days – that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God. Indeed, Jesus is the bread of life and the source of the living water.

Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled.

Jesus encouraged us to knock, and seek and ask for God’s gift of his Spirit. Keep knocking, keep seeking, keep asking and he will answer.

Video – Build your kingdom here.