

## **Introduction**

- Start with v.17b:
  - I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power (17,18)
  - Shakespeare, "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dream of."
- Church that prays can touch the world
  - **story** of a church reopened in middle east by prayer - closed by Arab authorities. Bishop appealed for reopening: answer was yes, but only if you can find the original deeds. Prospects poor - 1841, to Queen Victoria. Prayed, but couldn't find deeds... One day walking into archive office asked for money by blind beggar. Gave something, talking... "who are you?" said beggar. Associated with that church, said missionary. "Oh, are you looking for the deeds?" said beggar? Yes! amazed. Beggar knew where they were - he used to work in the archive office! Blind beggar led missionary through labyrinth of rooms to very back of archive building; there in dusty room was a box labelled 1841 - opened box. Termites had destroyed every single document in the box... except one! The deeds - someone had treated it with chemicals at some point. Presented it to Muslim authorities, and even they said "this is a miracle!" - building opened, and that church was still open in 2002.
- Myriads of episodes like that which serve to illustrate and earth the power of prayer in case any of us are taken in by the rich phraseology of Paul's prayers in NT
  - look out, as we read again prayer, for words that speak of superlatives:
    - *read verses, including doxology in 20, 21*
- Here is the mighty apostle, writing to a church hanging on by just a toe-hold in one of the most heathen and hostile environments in the ancient world:
  - blatant immorality and idolatry, and powerful commercial forces
  - centred in temple of Diana/Artemis, a temple that was 4x size of Parthenon in Athens, bigger than the old Wembley stadium, bigger than Earl's Court, bigger than Madison Square Gardens in New York!
  - there cultic prostitution flourished
  - into this Paul had flung the gospel message (Acts 19)
  - riot, because they were threatened
- **A church has started...**
  - and here is the prayer of a man for who has all of Europe in his sights, who has in mind the replacement of all the gods of the ancient world - Artemis, Jupiter, Osiris, Mithras, Apollo...
  - prayer of one who is intent on replacing all of that with a completely new framework of thinking centred on Jesus Christ
  - and Paul prays for the church in Ephesus, for here are the people who are to overthrow this religious edifice!
  - by the power of their witness they were to be trusted to do it - as are we today!
- So it is a prayer for power!
  - but is it really more than just a hot air balloon, a collection of beautiful spiritual phrases?
  - can we really analyse something like this?
  - can't, after all, know something that surpasses knowledge! (v.18)
- Up to now in Ephesians Paul has been explaining how the gospel works, and how its been extended to non-Jews:
  - adopted, barrier down, no longer strangers, fellow citizens, etc
  - and now comes his prayer for these Gentile believers - his fervency indicated by him kneeling (v.14) - normal Jewish prayer would have been standing
  - so lets look at his prayer...

## **Prayer for Power in all its richness**

- *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being (v.16)*
  - out of his riches - what are they?

## **Ephesians 3:14-21 Grasping the love of Christ Fintry, 27/5/2007, pm**

- gift of forgiveness for all those sins that would otherwise shut you out from heaven....
- the gift of the Spirit
- eternal life
- a place in his family and his household
- a share in his final triumph
- supremacy over Satan
- membership in his new covenant
- Those gifts are the measure by which the Lord wishes to strengthen us in our inner lives, these are the riches out of which he will strengthen us.
- And power - power to what?
  - to live to please him, power for service, for the complete transformation of direction of life
  - *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (17)*
- Power here doesn't have anything here to do with money, buildings, influence
  - here it is a moral power that transforms a person's character and can thence change a whole nation's lifestyle

### **Story**

- Into a fellowship group there came a person who was a worker in black magic and witchcraft - after a while he disclosed his identity
  - said he had power - and challenged them, "what can the Christian faith do? What power do you Christians have?"
  - what would you have done if you'd been in the group?
  - group leader was given great wisdom - he led the group in praying that this man would be delivered from the power of dark magic and unseen evil and bring that man to himself
  - within a week he was free from his bond, he was a new baby Christian...
- That is the power of which Paul is writing:
  - power to change, enrich lives as Christ enters in
  - and so this is a prayer for power in all its richness as found in Christ and in his life transforming salvation

## **Prayer for love in all its dimensions**

- *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge... (17b-19a)*
  - There is a permanence about the word "know" - don't need to feel or experience
  - we will at times feel, but don't necessarily need to - this love of Christ doesn't depend on those feelings
  - this is more lasting - will carry us through times of suffering and pain
  - not so much that we may love Christ more, but that we may better know/grasp his love for us.
- Gulf Stream - sweeps even other ocean currents aside
  - compare with current of Christ's love, taking its rise not in the Gulf of Mexico but on the hill of Calvary
  - sweeps through history, overcoming opposing and hostile currents
  - icy waters of hatred and prejudice must give way, ultimately to the current of Christ's love revealed on the Cross as applied and preached
  - political and ideological climates will be changed as they encounter this current
- Augustine said: **"One loving spirit sets another on fire"**
  - who set us on fire? who are we doing it for now?
- So many times church in a land has grown out of the love of Christ's followers - whether to lepers, or to fellow believers in times of persecution
  - a church that knows the love of Christ can touch a community, even a whole city
  - longer - perseveres
  - higher - can lift people to the pinnacle of self-sacrifice, even martyrdom; the skies the limit
  - deeper - can stoop to the very dregs of society

## **Ephesians 3:14-21 Grasping the love of Christ Fintry, 27/5/2007, pm**

- A prayer for the power to take in and live in this love to all its dimensions

### **Prayer for God in all his fullness**

- *...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (19b)*
- Why so important to know the love of Christ?
  - so that we may be filled with all the measure of the fullness of God
  - so that every aspect, every dimension, every facet of our living is filled up with, characterised by, given over to, Jesus Christ
  - so that we make Jesus Lord at every level of our lives, as we do the things that please him
  - so that we may share our blessings with others in service
- Paradoxically the way to be filled is to empty ourselves
  - one of the ways we can prove that is in our giving
  - **if we want to enrich our church here, then let us enlarge our giving away!!**
  - Australian Bishop Alf Stanway: **"Prayer will empty people's pockets far faster than speeches - you pray and God will work"**
- To empty ourselves of our own priorities gives space for God's priorities to grow in us
- So we have here a prayer for power:
  - a prayer for power in all its richness
  - a prayer for love in all its dimensions
  - a prayer for God in all his fullness

### **A prayer answered**

- Answer to the prayer will exceed our expectations - see the doxology:
  - able
  - what we ask
  - or imagine, beyond what we can ask
  - all of that!
  - and then more than all of that!
  - immeasurably more!!!
- At Windsor castle over Easter - incredibly glorious, overwhelmingly large and ostentatious rooms. Signs of glory.
  - how could we ever match the displays of glory human kings can muster?
  - in putting together a meeting of the king of kings, the lamb of God, the head of the church, the son of man, the rider on the white horse... Jesus...?
- The incarnation - God come to us in human flesh, in Jesus - means we can have encounters of glory here:
  - when a handful of folk meet in a scabby church hall or in someone's front room or over coffee somewhere, perhaps opening the Bible together, or praying, and Jesus says: **"I'll join you there!"** That's glory!
  - more than we can ask or imagine!
  - vivid memories of this happening in the YF in Motherwell - God's showing up with glory, taking over the hearts and affections of the most ordinary people
- What a prayer this is!
  - can we model our prayers on Paul's?
  - can we pray with the same priority and passion as Paul clearly did?
  - **prayer with power - out of his riches - to know his love - and his fullness**