

The church's heart cry

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[0 : 00] ...seconds of panic right there.

Again, for those of you who are new to our church, we are just starting a series in Ephesians. Last week we were in Ephesians 1, 1 to 14. This morning we're in the second half of Ephesians. So that's where we are, if you're not sure where we're at this morning.

So do keep your Bibles open in front of you. There should also be a sermon outline in your bulletin as well. But let's ask God for his help. Heavenly Father, you are the King of all kings, the Lord of all lords.

And we pray this morning, you would help us to comprehend just who you are, would you just open the eyes of our hearts that we might know you better.

And we pray, Lord, that your word would indeed penetrate deep into our hearts and cause us to desire you more. In Jesus' name we pray.

[1 : 15] Amen. Now I wonder how aware you are of all the features on your laptops and phones. Just this week I discovered that on Windows 10, there was something called a snipping tool, which can be used to take different kinds of screenshots on your computer.

So all you have to do is just press Windows key, shift and S, and it will come up. Oh, here's another feature on Windows 10 that I never realised before. So if your screen is filled with too many open windows, all you have to do is grab the top of the window that you want to keep open, and then you shake it.

So you move your mouse as if you are shaking the window. And then it will minimise all the other windows. That's pretty cool. I wasn't aware of that. It's the same with my Bible software.

I use a programme called Logos, as many pastors and theological students do, but I'm probably only using 5% of its capabilities.

So I just discovered, for example, that it can do things as specific as look for all the sentences in the New Testament that apply the Grenville Sharp rule.

[2 : 31] Now don't worry what that is. That's just an obscure grammatical rule that only nerds need to know. But it can even do something as specialised as that.

I just wasn't aware of how powerful it was. All I use it for is just to store my digital Bible commentaries and Bible dictionaries.

As Christians, we're often not aware of what we have. We often lose sight of our Christ-given identity.

Our circumstances in life can cause us to lose touch with what God says is our reality. We lose awareness of his power and authority.

What we're very aware of is our own weakness. Followers of Christ are a minority in this country, although perhaps because we live in Sarawak, where more people say that they're Christians, we don't feel it as much than if we were living in, say, Gadah.

[3 : 40] But we're not that big a group. We have little power and little influence. Recent events in the courtroom, I think, have illustrated that.

And Sunday after Sunday, we gather in this building and it doesn't look too bad. We have about 300 people here. But truth be told, it doesn't look like what we do makes any real difference out there in our society.

And never mind out there, we struggle simply with in here. We struggle with keeping our own heads afloat when work and studies can be all-consuming.

Ferrying the kids around can be so tiring. Or the single life can sometimes feel so uninspiring. We are aware of our own weaknesses.

The Ephesian church was certainly aware of their own weaknesses. Ephesus was a great big city. And in the center of that city was a great big temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis.

[4 : 53] Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And worshipping her was central to the identity of many citizens of Ephesus. Indeed, many people from all around the Roman Empire would come to visit and worship Artemis.

But the Christians didn't worship her. They had come out of the occultic practices associated with her. So that meant they immediately looked very different to the people around them.

They stood out. And they looked weak. They were on the fringes of society. People looked at them and pitied them because they no longer had access to the magic powers of Artemis.

They were small and insignificant and they would have felt it. And Paul writes this letter to encourage them.

He's writing firstly to say, I want to make you aware of who you really are in Christ. I heard, he says in verse 15, that you are people who have faith in Jesus Christ.

[6 : 12] And remember who you are if you trust in Jesus Christ. We heard this last week. You have every spiritual blessing. You may feel weak, but you're chosen before the world began.

You've been predestined to go from orphans to God's children. You're redeemed and forgiven and lavished with God's grace. You have the Holy Spirit as a seal and guarantee.

That's who we are. And you may feel small and insignificant, but you're worshipping someone big and important.

You're following someone who's going to unite all things in heaven and on earth. Remember 1 verse 9 and 10? He made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

The whole universe finds its ultimate purpose in Christ. And because you trust the one who's going to unite the whole universe, you become united to one another.

[7 : 32] That's what happened to the Ephesian Christians. Just look at verse 15 again. Paul says that he's also heard of their love for all God's people.

You care for one another. You want to encourage one another. You seek the best for one another. That's who you are. And Paul says that means you are significant in God's plan.

And that's why I never stop giving thanks for you. But Paul's writing now also to say I want to make you aware of more.

I know how you feel. Despite that reminder of who we are in Christ, you still feel weak. You're filled with doubts. You feel powerless.

You feel numb. You feel that this whole Christianity thing isn't doing it for you and you're tempted to walk away. You still find church completely boring and lifeless. So Paul keeps praying for you.

[8 : 42] What does he pray for? What is his heart's cry? Verse 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.

Reveal yourself, Lord. Open our eyes, Lord. Give us spiritual insight. Help us know you. This is Paul's prayer for any believer who is feeling weak and apathetic and insignificant.

Now, at first glance, isn't that a strange thing to pray for? Don't they already know him? They are Christians. Well, yes. But knowing God doesn't stop at the point of becoming a Christian.

After all, think of the moment you met your best friend. that you stop getting to know him or her after your first encounter? Of course not. You soon got to know their mannerisms, their way of speaking, how they handle themselves in different situations.

And so it is with God. Yes, we know him. The moment we believe in Jesus, the moment we first encounter him.

[10 : 10] but Paul cries out, God, help us to know you more. Help us know you better. For often, our relationship with God is a bit like me and Windows 10 or me and my Bible software.

We kind of know that God has all these features. We sort of know that he is powerful but it's all a bit vague to us. We don't know exactly what it means when we say that he is powerful or holy or gracious or kind because we haven't quite gotten to know him properly yet.

We don't know the fullness of all that he is, probably not even 1%. We know we have every spiritual blessing in Christ but we haven't experienced how that plays out in our lives.

And just like me and my Bible software, we can become content with our surface knowledge. We're just happy to know just one or two features and ignore the rest.

We're happy to be just Christian enough to get by. Do the bare minimum. Read the Bible here and there. Pray when things get a bit hard.

[11 : 40] Help out at a church event once in a while. But let the rest of our lives be untouched by God. He becomes like the friend from overseas that you see once a year.

But Paul is praying that we will be filled with holy discontent. Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit in us will cause us to realize, hang on, God is the most glorious, most overwhelming, most awe inspiring, the most desirable and irresistible being in this entire universe, who has a master plan for the world from beginning to end, who wants a relationship with me, and I'm simply happy to know him the way I know someone's Facebook profile.

Paul is praying that we want to know God beyond simply looking at the profile pictures, reading the status updates, and seeing who's commenting on the statements made.

He's praying that we won't just know God from a distance, on our territory, in our rooms where we remain in control, and it's safe.

And he's not even praying that we would just collect more information about God, or just show some appreciation for what he says, the way we appreciate nuggets of wisdom we hear second hand from other people.

[13 : 14] No, Paul is praying for God to cause his indwelling spirit within us to move us to a place where we are closer to him.

He wants us not to follow God from a distance. He wants us to know him personally. He wants us to experience his grace and mercy more and more, even if that means no longer playing it safe, even if that means we have to venture onto his territory.

He asks God to reveal to us that when we don't open our Bibles to know him more, when we prefer that our knowledge of the gospel remains superficial and shallow, when we don't take risks and live according to his master plan, not ours, we miss out.

We miss out. When we don't confess our sin to him, we miss out on experiencing true forgiveness. When we don't learn to give up things for him, we miss out on experiencing true contentment.

When we don't depend on him as our heavenly father, we miss out on experiencing his fatherly care. We don't get to know him beyond high and by.

[14 : 45] So this morning, let's already be praying that we won't be content with superficial knowledge of the Lord. Pray that we will allow him to blow our minds.

Pray that we will be so consumed to desire him more. Pray that we will be able to make time to come to God's big picture and see his great big salvation plan that is far above and beyond what we can imagine.

Pray that we will taste and see that the Lord is good. Pray that we won't be content with Maggie me when there is a ten cost banquet in front of us. Pray this for yourself.

Pray this for your leaders. Pray this for other church members. Pray this for everybody. But what is the specific content that Paul wants us to know about God?

What does he want the eyes of our heart to see specifically? Well, he mentions three things in verses 18 to 23. The first two have to do with the future.

[15 : 52] So here's the first thing he prays that we would know. Verse 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.

That's what Paul wants us to see, the hope that we have been called to. That's the first thing. hope in biblical terms is not wishful thinking. That's how we normally use the word hope.

Today, we hope PN or Pakatan will win the election. We hope Texas will increase, win, increase this year. We hope the teacher won't give so much homework.

But hope in this sense is simply wishing hard that those things will happen without any hard evidence necessarily backing it up. It might or might not happen.

But that's not the hope that the Bible is talking about. Hope in the biblical sense is more like anticipation than wishful thinking. It's grounded in something certain, something factual, something that has already been accomplished, Jesus' resurrection.

[17 : 09] resurrection. Because Jesus is already risen, our certain hope is that every single sin of yours has already been paid for. Because Jesus is already risen, our certain hope is that every outstanding wrong will be met with justice in the end.

And because Jesus is already risen, our certain hope is that there is a far better life awaiting us beyond the grave. it's a bit like this.

I recently gave my sister a movie voucher. So that movie voucher guarantees that she has free entry into the cinema. So let's say that she really, really wants to watch Tomb Raider when it comes out later this month.

I'm pretty sure she wouldn't want to watch that, but let's just pretend that she does. Now with that voucher, she can definitely watch it. it's not yet here, the movie isn't out yet, but it's definitely coming.

Thursday 8 March, I think. And she can be confident that she'll get to enjoy the movie freely. She has the voucher. And Paul prays that we have the same confidence because we know what's definitely coming.

[18 : 29] We know who's definitely coming. And we have the voucher of redemption. we know the hope to which we have been called the glorious future that we'll definitely enjoy.

And all this is not dependent on our will, but God's will. And that's good news because we know ourselves.

We know our own commitment to God is often feeble and fickle. There are days when we live as if our future is all doom and gloom, as if our fortunes as a church are dependent on political outcomes, or having worldly influence, or the need to show our relevancy now.

We've forgotten our future is certain. We already have that voucher. God has given it to us.

And we sometimes forget that our future is not our present. In other words, we need to be patient. Perfection is coming, but it's not yet here.

[19 : 47] In this present world, there won't be perfect justice, there'll be weakness, fragility, and vulnerability. Yes, Jesus is now the ascended, risen king, but remember how he was on earth?

Weak, and fragile, and vulnerable. He knew his future, but he knew it would come on God's timing, not his.

grace. And his glorious future had to go through the cross. But it was guaranteed. God the Father's commitment to his son was absolute, and his commitment to us in Christ is the same.

He has called us to a secure hope, and we should pray to know that hope. Here's the second thing that Paul prays we should know.

Verse 18 again. 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, and the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

[21 : 05] So Paul now prays that we will know we are his glorious inheritance. Let me say that again. Paul now prays we will know we are his glorious inheritance.

Now if you read that verse very quickly, you might have misheard what Paul is saying. You might think that Paul is talking about our inheritance. But that's not what he says.

Look at it carefully. Paul is talking about God's inheritance. And what is God's inheritance? It's us.

It's his people, now made holy. this is not a new idea that the New Testament has introduced. Let me just read to you how God describes his people in Deuteronomy 9 verse 29 for instance.

But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm. So let's think about this carefully.

[22 : 11] What is Paul praying for us to know? Well, look around you right now. What do you see? All sorts of people.

People who are weak, people who are sinful, people who often put their affections on things other than God, who fail to live up to all that God has called them to.

That includes the person standing in the pulpit right now. And yet God causes pressures in his sight. He wants us to know that we are his, that he won't reject us, that he wants to bring us into his eternal kingdom as his treasure trove.

Once again, God wants us to realize who we really are. And just as a good parent tries to ensure a secure future for his children, so our father has already prepared the most exciting future imaginable with him.

It's a home of rest, where you are free from any worries, where you feel the most relaxed. It's a home of righteousness, where you are free from any inclination to think bad thoughts about others, to be envious of your neighbor.

[23 : 35] You are free to no longer say hurtful things to your loved ones. It's a home of relational perfection, where as part of the father's multicultural family, you will create something even better than the most cherished memories of family time that you currently have.

As his inheritance, God is bringing us into this kind of kingdom. And consider this. Imagine you decided to do an act of kindness and brought in a homeless beggar into your home.

You fed him, clothed him, provided him a bed. But then you discover that he trashes your home, steals all the heirlooms, and worst of all, planned to attack your child.

How would you feel? You would never let him into your home again. And yet this is what God did. we came and did great damage to his world and great harm to his son.

But he not only welcomed us back into his warm, beautiful home, he declared we are now part of his family. That's his legacy, that's the gospel.

[24 : 57] We are his inheritance. And it will transform us when we come to terms with that. And that's why Paul prays for us to know we are his inheritance.

Now, thirdly, here's the final thing that Paul wants us to know. He wants us to know the power of God at work in us. That's in verse 19.

Notice how Paul tries to power up all sorts of words to try to communicate just how immense this power is. He says it's incomparable. It's great.

It's full of might and strength. He's reaching for all sorts of adjectives to describe this power. And God's power is not just a matter of words. What is this power?

Verse 19 again. It is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

[26 : 04] 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 age to come.

Wow. This is the same power reaching into the depths of the realm of death and elevated Christ to the highest domain in the universe.

It says that he is seated at the right hand which is the position that symbolizes the highest honor and deepest intimacy with God the Father.

This is a stunning reversal, a power that has no known equal. But get this, go back to the beginning of verse 19 again.

This resurrection power, the one that raised Jesus from the realms of the dead and seated high in the highest domain of the universe, it's at work in us who believe.

[27 : 12] It's for the here and now. If the first two things that Paul wants us to see are found in the future, the third thing is found in the present.

God is saying to his people, are you feeling marginalized? Are you feeling weak? Well, hear this.

God is at work in his church. Resurrection power is at work in us now. Taking what was dead and bringing it to life.

if you know this kind of power is what fuels our engines today, well, you can keep living in this world now. You can persevere to do his will.

You can labor to ensure that we are working in conformity with his master plan to live all of life under his rule and bring people to come to know his rule.

[28 : 10] If we know this, we will have a totally different vision of the world. We will have a totally different vision of our day-to-day lives. Within our weak selves, God's resurrection power dwells.

And this power is so overwhelming and so foreign to our normal way of thinking that Paul spends the rest of the passage unpacking this. Let's look at verse 21 again.

And remember the kind of world that the Ephesian Christians lived in. Occultic activity is present. People constantly look to incantations or magical symbols or certain rituals to gain access to power.

And they wanted power so that they could manipulate people to do their bidding. Well, here in Sarawak, that's still the kind of world that quite a number of people live in, don't they?

I recently counseled a young couple whose father-in-law claimed to be Catholic but was resorting to all sorts of magic spells to try to gain influence. And he even tried to trick this couple into visiting a bomo by claiming that this bomo was a Christian pastor.

[29 : 29] But Paul tells us we don't ever have to resort to such things anymore and we don't have to be scared of them. Indeed, he himself doesn't need magical objects or special formulas to gain access to God's power.

All he simply does is to pray for increased awareness of God's power which is already available to all believers.

For Jesus has won the victory. Evil powers that oppress humanity no longer have any authority for Christ has broken their grip.

when Jesus was lifted up to his exalted position, it wasn't just a peaceful coronation. It was a dramatic conquest.

All rule and authority, all power and dominion are now subject to him. This morning, if there's anybody present who is dabbling in the occult, well, let me inform you you're on the losing side.

[30 : 41] Whatever name you invoke cannot stand in the presence of Jesus. And you cannot serve two masters. Come and know Jesus' life-giving resurrection power instead.

Come and know the one who can give you confidence about your future, regardless of how challenging your life can be. God will be.

And this has massive implications for the church. Verse 22 and 23. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who feels everything in every way.

Now, this is one of the more complicated sentences in Ephesians, but let me try to simplify it for you. Paul is saying, Jesus is Lord over all.

Everything is under his feet. And in that role, as the exalted Lord over everything, God has given Jesus as a gift for his church, his people.

[31 : 58] That's us. See, the Lordship of Jesus is actually for our benefit. Why? Because Jesus so fills us, his church, and unites us to himself, that his power is always at work in us.

That's the basic meaning. Think again about what he's saying. When we look at our church, church, we can sometimes see only the downsides, can't we?

We might think, okay, we're not young. We might not consider ourselves intellectual. Our singing is not as wholehearted as we like. Our prayers are full of um and ah.

And we can feel intimidated by the smart atheists looking down on us, or the threatening extremists around us. but Paul says, be aware of who we are as we gather Sunday after Sunday.

We are those whom Christ has filled. Be aware, he says, that his resurrection power is at work in us. And Jesus has given us all the resources we need to carry out our mission, to be actively growing towards maturity in Christ, and helping others to do the same.

[33 : 28] So don't be quick to give up. Don't be so quick to feel defeated. Now pray that we will have a fresh sense of his power, a clear grasp of our future hope, a confidence of our value to God.

Then go into the world and live as his disciples. angels. His divine power resides within jars of clay like us.

And strive, strive to know him more. Chase after him. Why come late to church, sit in the pew for the sake of show, and rush off when you can know the king of kings and encourage others to do the same?

Why say you believe in God and then never pay him any attention during the week as to how he wants you to conduct your business dealings, your family time, your media consumption?

And if we can set aside time to go to language classes, to go to the gym, to go and learn new things, how much more should we invest in knowing God?

[34 : 43] God. So let's look to Paul's example. Let our prayers be this kind of prayers for each other. Let's not forget to pray.

Paul remembers the Ephesians in his prayers in verse 16. And these are the kind of prayers that make all the difference. They can make the difference between whether your friend or your child stays Christian in the long run or not.

They can make the difference between whether KEC will still be thriving in 20 years' time or not. So pray for open eyes. Pray for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Pray for us to have God's perspective. Let this be our vision. Let this be our heart's cry. Let's pray now.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we have come to know you because you have chosen us.

[35 : 59] But Father, we pray that we will not be content with that. We pray that you will cause the Holy Spirit that dwells within us to implant in us new desires that we might know you better.

We pray that you will open the eyes of our hearts, illuminate them, so that we might know our glorious future. We might know that we are your glorious inheritance, that we might know your glorious power that is at work in us.

Help us to fix our eyes on the Christ who is seated far above all rule and authority, power and dominion at your right hand.

And help us as a church to know that you will fill us and you empower us to go live as your disciples. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. Christ, we will also pray on second morning.

[37 : 17] Let's make this a prayer. We are my vision. We are my vision. We are my vision.

O Lord of my heart, longing all else to me said that thou find.

Thou my best thought by day or by night, making all sleeping thy presence my life.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word. I ever with thee and thou with me Lord.

thought am there Yeachers, I delight but do■ plotted careers now and then always attracts Let Thou all in you burst in Thy heart.

[39 : 29] My King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art.

My King of Heaven, my King of Heaven, my King of Heaven, may I be blessed, the Lord I can die.

Child of My Honour, forever before, He'll be my vision for the world of all.

I'm just going to give us 30 seconds now, just to reflect again on what we've heard, and say any personal prayers you want to the Lord, before I close this.