



How to Live the Life – You are Empowered - Ephesians 1:15-23 Sunday 10th September 2017

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For this reason, says Paul from his prison cell in Rome. For what reason, you may ask. Last week's sermon is the answer, shame on you if you weren't here and haven't listened to the recording. Tom talked about us being chosen for a life lived in the adventure lane, not a lot of security and not too much boredom either, with the same life flowing through our veins as John the Baptist, Joni Erickson, someone whose name escapes me as I'm not a film buff and a car whose name escapes me as I'm not a car buff. I too drive a Skoda, called in for emissions correction only to be told it wasn't powerful enough to have any. Not really!

Today's passage is one of the most dynamic in the whole Bible; I think I learned this by heart in my twenties, a long time ago. Some intros first before the content of Paul's prayer. He's heard two things about the Christians in Ephesus, the 4th largest city of the Roman Empire. One is their upward faith and trust in Jesus, whatever life has thrown at them. The second is their love for each other as Christians and for Christians everywhere. A bit of a challenge this. Funny lot, those Christians. Ever cross your mind that often those who've never darkened the doors of a church or named the name of Jesus other than a swear word are a lot easier to get on with than those that have? I was going to meet a small group of Christians the other day dwelling on all the differences between us and how annoying I found some of them and I'm sure it was mutual. But then I came across this passage to prepare for today and prayed for more love and it actually worked!

I have not stopped giving thanks for you, says Paul. Two things here. Not stopping being thankful and not stopping praying. I start grumbling and praying gets harder and harder. Felt like giving up lately?

Who's he praying to? The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father. Not a boring, remote, disinterested God, but a glorious God, 0-60 in a couple of seconds.

And so on to the content of his prayer. A spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may know him better. Spirit capital S, Holy Spirit, or spirit small s? Translations differ, it could actually be either. I think it's both. The Holy Spirit is actively involved, making it actually happen. But a spirit of enquiry and an openness to supernatural revelation and insight is also a must. To know him better.

It doesn't come naturally with the ageing process as a Christian, even as those who've been married for donkey's years don't necessarily love on an incremental sliding scale. Unless you're a vicar maybe. Someone who lives close to me told me the other day of coming into a room thirty odd years ago and finding me strumming a guitar and singing an intimate love song to Jesus. While Jesus may be glad I don't strum the guitar now, where is that intimacy?

I was in Cheddar Gorge the other day, crowded, the height of the tourist season, teaching my wife and children how to play crazy golf. Forty years ago we were up here each summer presenting Jesus in song, literature and conversation. 'You'll settle down', people said to me, even Christian people. 'A bit more of life and you won't be so black and white'. Today, do I actually care more about coming a sorry fourth place than all these people coming to know Jesus Christ?

In Revelation 2, there is another letter to the church in Ephesus. 'I have this against you: you have forsaken your first love.'

Three crucial things Paul still prays for them and us. First - Hope. The West Indies were down and out after the first Test this August. Thrashed by England, not won a Test against us since the year 2000, dismissed by cricket pundits as a waste of space, perhaps there ought to be 2 divisions. Ridiculed. Hopeless. 2nd Test they win comprehensively. Star batsman's name, century in both innings - Hope.

I may put hope in my children, my job, my marriage, my board games, Bristol City, Somerset cricket, the Monster Raving Loony Party, even the President of the United States of America, but if for this life only we have hope as Christians we are pitiable, as Paul says elsewhere. The hope he is mainly on about here is resurrection bodies, new heaven and new earth, the culmination of salvation history, the church gloriously alive, 0-60 in less than a second, Jesus the blazing, glorious centre of it all, details for now a bit of a blur as hope that is seen is not hope but when the years advance and the mirror does not lie let's hold on....

Secondly, riches. Yes please. But however much we realise that riches here don't equate with happiness, still we strive as if miraculously some day they will. Some Christian movements have joined in with this sentiment and portrayed God as a sugar daddy with an open cheque book and a load of already signed ones. Poverty is not a blessed state Biblically but neither are riches. Not material ones anyway.

'The riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints'. As Christians we have invested our lives in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We have staked our lives on Calvary, the resurrection and so on being the actual pivotal points of human history. But far bigger is his investment in us as we started to see in the CHOSEN theme last week. And he will see the fruits of his investment, his redeemed people starting in this life to live it but then, then.. unfettered, glorious... you know how you feel when you've been partly responsible for bringing someone to Jesus Christ.... Multiply by infinity and Jesus is blessed and will be blessed in his investment in his people.

Thirdly, and here Paul really goes to town and back, POWER. Not in his case to release him from his prison cell, though it is right to pray for the persecuted church. Not in Joni Errikson's case to heal her broken body, though physical healing is part and parcel of the gospel and we need to really go for it. But not just future either. Power for now. What sort of power?

Re-read vv. 19-23. Hear it, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead and put him back supreme over all is at work in us. Not theory. Not theology. But reality. Not future but now. He wants us empowered to live the life. Not just a two-dimensional belief system, believing the right things and heaven one day. But a life empowered by His Spirit, three, four, five dimensional, power over temptation, power to witness, power to praise and worship, power to be changed and help to change others, power to heal and set free, power to love the unlovely, power to pray prayers that impact the world...you name it... the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, at work in us.

So how do we know this hope, these riches, this power? Hearts seeing the light, says Paul, knowing in the very core of our being, not just intellectually. Cooperation between the Holy Spirit and our human spirit. For the power bit, the Holy Spirit enters our lives when we say yes to Jesus Christ, but what happens then is not automatic.

Be being filled says Paul. January 1973 was explosive for me, but I have often back-tracked or been side-tracked since. The challenge to all of us is to open our lives fully to the Holy Spirit, get prayer if necessary, go for it. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us. Let the world around us see it, taste it, long for the life he has given us. You could come for prayer in a few moments...