

Text: Colossians 1: 1-14

Theme: Prayers of the Early Church

Sermon delivered by Dele Agbelusi during Holy Communion Service on 14/05/2017 at 10.30am

The church at Colossae began during Paul's 3-year ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19). Its founder was not Paul, who had never been there (2:1); but Epaphras (1:5–7), who apparently was saved during a visit to Ephesus, then likely started the church in Colossae when he returned home. Colossae's mixed population of Jews and Gentiles manifested itself both in the composition of the church and in the heresy that plagued it, which contained elements of both Jewish legalism and pagan mysticism. The epistle refutes the heretical teaching that threatened the Colossian church (chap. 2). Paul, who was in prison and had the burden of caring for the churches he founded still saw a need to extend a helping hand to the Colossian church which he did not plant and where he never visited.

Today we will be focussing our attention on the prayer of Paul for the young church which can form a template for our prayer diaries. In verses 9-14, Paul says: *"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."*

In Paul's day, he did not receive regular emails or newsletters concerning the saints in Colossae, but that did not prevent him from being persistent in his prayer for these believers in the Lord, being concerned for their spiritual health, welfare and growth in the faith. Paul is under the direction of the Spirit as he shares this Godly desire in verse 9 that the saints "would be filled with the knowledge of God's will"; that is also God's desire for us believers.

Do we care about God's will in our life? Let us learn from Paul who in this passage teaches us more about the essence of prayer's request than almost any other in the New Testament. From this passage, **the 2 great requests are "the discernment of God's will and the power to perform that will" (C.F.D. Moule).**

Verse 9

Prayer begins by asking that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of the will of God. Its great object is to know the will of God. **This knowledge of God must be translated into our human situation.** Paul prays for knowledge of God's will through the wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit gives. He is not talking about the philosophy of man or political correctness or savviness of the day but that they may be able to apply these knowledge and wisdom to the tasks and decisions which meet them in everyday living.

We are trying not so much to make God listen to us as to make ourselves listen to him; we are trying not to persuade God to do what we want, but to find out what he wants us to do. It so often happens that in prayer we are really saying, "Thy will be changed," when we ought to be saying, "Thy will be done." The first object of prayer is not so much to speak to God as to listen to him.

Verse 10

This knowledge of God's will, and this wisdom and understanding, must issue in right conduct. Paul prays that his friends may conduct themselves in such a way as to please God. There is nothing in this world so practical as prayer. It is not escape from reality. Prayer and action go hand in hand. **We pray not in order to escape life but in order to be better able to meet it.**

So, when Paul prays that his friends may have wisdom and understanding, he is praying that they may understand the great truths of Christianity and may be able to apply them to the tasks and decisions which meet them in everyday living. A man may quite easily be a master of theology and a failure in living; able to write and talk about the eternal truths and yet helpless to apply them to the things which meet him every day. The Christian must know what Christianity means, not in a vacuum but in the business of living.

Verse 11

And to do this, we need power from above. So, Paul prays for power according to God's glorious might. The great problem in life is not to know what to do but to do it. For the most part, we are well aware in any given situation what we ought to do; our problem is to put that knowledge into action. What we need is power; and that we receive in prayer through God's Spirit. If God merely told us what his will was, that might well be a frustrating situation; but he not only tells us his will, he also enables us to perform it.

There was a man who owned a Great Dane. Now this Great Dane was an extremely large and ferocious dog—definitely not the kind of dog you want jumping up in your lap. One day, as the man was walking his Great Dane down the street, he saw another man across the street who was also walking his dog—a little bitty dog with short legs no tail and no hair. It was an ugly dog and, very frankly, looked sick...

Suddenly the Great Dane saw the little ugly dog across the street and decided he hated that dog. He broke free from his owner's leash and dashed across the street on the attack. The owner of the Great Dane yelled to the man, "Look out! My dog is on the loose and he's liable to kill you and that dog of yours! You had better run!"

But the little ugly dog turned around, bared its teeth, and when the Great Dane attacked, that little dog proceeded to grab hold of the Great Dane at the foreleg and began to eat that big dog up. It ate right up the leg, right up the throat, ate its head, right down through its body, right across the tail, right down the back legs, spit out the bones, and smacked its lips—and that was the end of the Great Dane, just like that.

Well, the owner of the Great Dane was absolutely astonished by what he had just witnessed. "Man, what kind of dog is that?" the man exclaimed. "I've never in my life seen a little dog that could do something like that!"

"Dog? Dog?" the other man said. "Before he got his nose run over by a truck and his tail cut off by a train, this used to be an alligator!"

Appearances can be deceiving. Sometimes we judge people by how they look, but we fail to realize that on the inside, they are quite different. "Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

You may feel like a puppy dog on the outside, but inside, you're an alligator. You have the power of God at your disposal to do mighty things. "I can do everything through him who gives me strength," wrote Paul (Philippians 4:13). When you are under attack by the Great Danes of the world, you can eat them up with the power of Christ that lives and dwells within your heart.

Through prayer we reach the greatest gift in all the world--knowledge plus power.

Verse 11b.

The glorious might of the Lord is to provide you with endurance and patience.

Paul prays for the endurance which no situation can defeat, and the patience which no person can defeat. He prays that the Christian may be such that no circumstance will defeat his strength and no human being defeat his love. The Christian's fortitude in events and patience with people must be indestructible. Added to all this there is joy. The Christian way is not a grim struggle with events and with people; it is a radiant and sunny-hearted attitude to life. The Christian joy is joy in any circumstance. As C. F. D. Moule puts it: "If joy is not rooted in the soil of suffering, it is shallow." It is easy to be joyful when things go well, but the Christian radiance is something which not all the shadows of life can quench.

So, the Christian prayer is: "Make me, O Lord, victorious over every circumstance; make me patient with every person; and in addition, give me the joy which no circumstance and no man will ever take from me."

Verses 12-14

Prayer Great Thanksgiving (Colossians 1:12-14)

In verses 12-14, Paul turns to grateful thanksgiving for the benefits which the Christian has received in Christ. There are two key ideas here.

(i) God has given to the Colossians a share in the inheritance of God's dedicated people. The Jews had always been God's chosen people, but now the door has been opened to all men.

(ii) The second key idea lies in the phrase which says, that God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. In the ancient world, when one empire won a victory over another, it was the custom to take the population of the defeated country and transfer it lock, stock and barrel to the conqueror's land. So, Paul says that God has transferred the Christian to his own kingdom. That was not only a transference but a rescue; **and it meant four great things.**

(a) It meant a **transference from darkness to light**. Without God men grope and stumble as if walking in the dark. They do not know what to do; they do not discern where they are going. Life is lived in the shadows of doubt and in the darkness of ignorance.

- The power of darkness lulls us to sleep.
- The power of darkness is skilled at concealment.
- The power of darkness afflicts and depresses man.
- The power of darkness can fascinate us.
- The power of darkness emboldens some men.

Still talking about the great rescue from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Son he loves in in whom we have redemption.

(b) It meant a **transference from slavery to freedom**. It was, freedom, redemption, and that was the word used for the emancipation of a slave and for the buying back of something which was in the power of someone else. Without God men are slaves to their fears, to their sins and slaves to their own helplessness. In Jesus Christ, there is liberation.

(c) It meant a **transference from condemnation to forgiveness**. Man, in his sin deserves nothing but the condemnation of God; but through the work of Jesus Christ he discovers God's love and forgiveness. He knows now that he is no longer a condemned criminal at God's judgment seat, but a lost son for whom the way home is always open.

(d) It meant a **transference from the power of Satan to the power of God**. Through Jesus Christ man is liberated from the grip of Satan and is able to become a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Just as an earthly conqueror transferred the citizens of the land he had conquered to a new land, so God in his triumphant love transfers men from the realm of sin and darkness into the realm of holiness and light.

In conclusion, Paul's prayer for the Church in Colossae is God's desire for the Church today. We are taught the principle of "walking worthy" of the Lord, being empowered by Him, in constant thankfulness. So, as we live our lives, moment by moment and day by day, we glory in Gratitude for this saving Gracious Gospel, walking in the God-given strength by His Eternal Holy Spirit in us and by the Light of His Word; Our greatest desire is to be "fully pleasing to Him" with lives that mirror our Saviour as we grow up in faith, knowledge and obedience in Christ Jesus our Lord.