
Sunday 22nd November – Christ the King

Readings: Ephesians 1:15-23 & Matthew 25:31-46

Ephesians 1:15-23

Thanksgiving and prayer

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 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. 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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power 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, 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 one to come. 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 fills everything in every way.

Matthew 25:31-46

The sheep and the goats

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

'Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger

and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?”

‘The King will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

‘Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was ill and in prison and you did not look after me.”

‘They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or ill or in prison, and did not help you?”

‘He will reply, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.”

‘Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.’

Reflection

As I read the passage from Ephesians, I wish that Paul was praying for me! The words he uses are so beautiful and powerful and I’d like to unpack them a little and see how they may differ from our prayers and how we can be inspired by them.

Paul starts by saying that he **hasn’t stopped** praying for the Ephesians - how often do we pray once or twice for someone and then either forget, lose hope of our prayer being answered, or move on to other things?

He **gives thanks** for them. When we pray for people - both those we love and those we may find more challenging - do we spend time thanking God for who they are, for the gifts they have, for the good things they bring to our lives or to the wider world? Or do we focus on the things we want God to do for them or change in them?

He asks God to help them to **know him better**. It’s not wrong to ask God to bring change in people’s lives but our first priority for others and for ourselves should be to know God more, to have a deeper relationship with him, to be more aligned with him. When we know him better we will gain an understanding of who he is and what he wants for us, our prayers will become more in line with his will and more effective, and we’ll become more like him.

He prays that they would **know what God can do for them**. These words in verses 18 and 19 are a beautiful reminder of what it means to be a Christian: *“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, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,*

and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” I need hope - our world needs hope - I'm sure you need hope too. This year has been incredibly hard and we all need hope that better times are ahead. But the hope that Paul is praying for isn't based on earthly things, it won't come through a vaccine for Covid or through the restricting of social distancing or the economy recovering. The hope that Paul is speaking of is the hope of eternity, the hope that even if we don't ever see an end to our suffering in this life we will one day experience a glorious inheritance and complete perfection in heaven. That is the hope we can hold on to.

My prayer - for myself and for all of us - is that we'd look at this passage and be inspired by the opportunity to pray a little differently. To be less focused on the things that we want God to do for us and for those we pray for and more desperate to know him better, to gain a deeper experience of his love, and to understand the truth of what it means to live a life in the hope and power of his name.

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