

12.08.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

Christian Prayer

Bible Readings = Ephesians 6:18-24; 1 Tim. 2:1-8.

Introduction:

- (1) Over the last couple of weeks we have taken a step aside from the letter to the Ephesians with Dominic's visit upon us, but now we return to the theme, particularly picking up the connection between the armour of God and the vocation of the people of God as his praying community.
- (2) We have seen that the armour spoken of in Eph. 6:13ff., is God's own armour. Whatever the immediate background of the image (e.g. in terms of the armour and equipment of a typical Roman soldier) the theological background we saw to be in the Old Testament, particularly in places such as Is. 52 and Is. 59.
 - a. God himself is the warrior, who clothes himself with his armour and who fights to vindicate his holy name by delivering his people.
 - b. We saw, therefore, that the armour is equivalent to the new man, to put on the armour is to recognise where we are in Christ, and to stand in conformity with where we are in fact placed.
- (3) We also saw that the imagery (and vocabulary) was corporate, i.e. not so much each individual putting on his or her armour, but the whole household of God being in and under the armour. The interlocking shields of the Roman legion allowed the whole company of soldiers to stand against attack and to move forward against the enemy. It has been said that the letter is governed by three verbs 'sit, walk, stand'.
 - a. Seated with Christ, walking in Christ, and standing in the battle.
 - i. We are not to see this as merely a description of our individual position, but the whole community of the household of God.
 - ii. The armour must be taken up *so that we may pray* and in particular so that *we may pray for the gospel to go out with power*.
 1. One of the common strategies of the evil one, the flesh and the world is to get our prayer life centred on us and our concerns!

This week we aim to see that the great gift of prayer is for the empowering and enabling of the word of the gospel, so that in this way our pray-ers are one with the mission of God for the salvation of the world.

1. Christian Prayer is Household Prayer

(1) We have two extensive prayers recorded for us in the letter (Eph. 1:15ff; and Eph. 3:14ff.), both of which are prayers to the Father (see 1:17 and 3:14).

- Prayer is from the children of the household to the Father of the house, in his intimate presence (cf. Eph. 2:19-22).
 - This means that (a) prayer is not something that brings us near to God, but something that arises out of the fact that we *have been* brought near, and (b) it means that the concerns of our prayers are those of the Father.
 - § We do not believe in 'the power of prayer', but we believe in the Father. Prayer is communion with him, finding his will, praying

for it to be done, and spreading out our supplications and petitions before him.

§ Prayer recognises our utter dependence upon the Father for all things, therefore is not a means to our self improvement, or a mechanistic tool that we may employ for our self development project. Therefore Christian prayer is fundamentally different from self-awaking meditation in all its forms; mental 'account keeping' in which we are psychologically better equipped to handle a situation because of prayer; and certainly has no self-justifying power.

(2) Prayer is the life for which we have been created. P. T. Forsyth 'we do not pray in order to live, but we live in order to pray'.

- *All* power in life is derived from the Father for *all* things.
 - See the 4x 'all' in Eph. 6:18 (cf. Luke 18:1ff. 'ought always to pray and not lose heart'; Luke 21:36; Acts 3:42; 6:4; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17; etc.)
- Earlier we have been told that we (the whole household of God in Christ) have been created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10). We do not define these. They have been set out for us in Christ.
 - In particular, the work that we have been commissioned to share in, is the proclamation of the gospel.

2. Prayer for Proclamation

(1) It is notable that often Paul's prayer requests are in the context of proclamation, or for his desire for proclamation to go on with true spiritual power.

- See the parallel passage in Col. 4:2-4 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison-that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
- Also see other passages such as the second of today's readings from 1 Tim. 2:1-8, where in effect the prayers for those in authority are so that the Christian community may live in peace so that the gospel may make its progress through the world unhindered.
- Also other references such as:
 - 1 Thess. 3:1-2 Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.
 - Acts 4:29ff.
 - Luke 10:2 And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest

(2) So the Christian household, is on the move, in prayer, for the ministry of the word, by which word the nations are subdued and the gifts of forgiveness and new birth are brought to the world, which lies under the deceit of the evil one.

- Acts 26:16-18

(3) In this proclamation, the mystery of Christ (Eph. 6:19) is made known to the nations (cf. Eph. 3:1ff.).

3. Proclaiming in the Context of Fellowship

(1) We notice that Paul is not alone.

- He has Tychicus with him, ‘the beloved brother and faithful minister of the Lord.’ Tychicus is also mentioned in other places (e.g. Acts 20:4; Col. 4:7; Tit. 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:12; etc.), but so are many other travelling companions of Paul.
 - Some of these were disappointing to him (e.g. Demas Col. 4:14; Phil. 1:24 cf. 2 Tim. 4:10); 2 Tim. 1:15-16 You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, 2 Tim. 4:16 At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them Phil. 2:19-21 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ
- But the overall context is the positive spread of the gospel in the context of fellowship and prayer. The Lord is the Lord of the harvest, and the Shepherd of all his servants.

(2) So the letter concludes with the settled peace and love of the Father’s household (Eph. 6:23-24). All is from the Father, through the Son, as we stand in Christ, and in him look for the gospel to make its powerful way in the world.