

Welcome to our podcast.

(pause)

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' Come now to worship, and receive rest for your souls.

Let us pray

Come to God, all who are weary and tired.

Come to God, all who are burdened by life.

Come to God, all who feel trapped and under-appreciated.

For you will find: the rest you need,

the peace you seek,

and the love you long for.

Come to God, in Jesus Christ. **(pause)**

We come before you Lord, with all our cares
and worries,

laying them down before you.

We come before you, setting aside this time
to hear you,

opening up ourselves to you.

(pause)

come to us in your living Spirit and show us
our Saviour, Jesus.

(pause)

In Jesus name we pray, **Amen**

Ephesians 3.1-13 For this reason I, Paul, the
prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you
Gentiles, pray to God. **2** Surely you have
heard that God in his grace has given me this
work to do for your good. **3** God revealed his
secret plan and made it known to me.

(I have written briefly about this, **4** and if you will read what I have written, you can learn about my understanding of the secret of Christ.) **5** In past times human beings were not told this secret, but God has revealed it now by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. **6** The secret is that by means of the gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus.

7 I was made a servant of the gospel by God's special gift, which he gave me through the working of his power. **8** I am less than the least of all God's people; yet God gave me this privilege of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ, **9** and of making all people see how God's secret plan is to be put into effect.

God, who is the Creator of all things, kept his secret hidden through all the past ages, **10** in order that at the present time, by means of the church, the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms. **11** God did this according to his eternal purpose,

which he achieved through Christ Jesus our Lord.**12** In union with Christ and through our faith in him we have the boldness to go into God's presence with all confidence.**13** I beg you, then, not to be discouraged because I am suffering for you; it is all for your benefit.

Sermon

‘For this reason

I, Paul,

the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles,

pray to God.’

For what reasons do we pray to God.

If we do pray to God.

What brings us to come before the Father in prayer?

What inspires us

Or motivates us

To come to pray to God.

(pause)

Many people don't pray unless it's an emergency.

They talk to God when they see no other way out.

It's almost an automatic response

Help me God.

I can't do anything to help myself so will you help me.

(pause)

But what's the reason that Paul is praying.

What has brought Paul to come before God in prayer.

‘For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, pray to God.’

(pause)

He prays for them because they are being built together into a place where God lives through His Spirit.

He prays for them because they need God’s help.

They need God to be working things out.

They need God to be bringing them together as one people

And keeping them together as one people.

(pause)

Paul prays for the Gentiles because they are now part of God’s people.

From a Jewish perspective you have those who are Jews,

The people on the inside

Who are part of God's people,

part of the church you could say

and then you have the gentiles

That's everyone else

They are on the outside.

Not part of God's chosen people,

well not till now anyway,

They are on the outside of the church.

(pause)

Paul prays for them that they will know they
are now fellow citizens with the Jews

As God's chosen people.

That they are members of the family of God as verse 19 says in chapter 2.

‘So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or strangers any longer; you are now citizens together with God's people and members of the family of God.’

(pause)

There is still a lot of work to be done

Before they will feel like,

Before they will believe that they are being built together.

Before they will really know and understand what it means for them to be the body of Christ.

And so Paul prays for them.

Prays that they will know Gods blessing in their individual lives

And in the life of their fellowship. **(pause)**

Paul sees the praying for them as an important element of his work.

As an important thing to do.

As something that will have an effect.

He,

Paul,

Prays.

(pause)

God hears what he prays

And God answers his prayers.

(pause)

Prayer is a key and fundamental thing for Paul to do.

As we read the gospels we see that prayer is a key and fundamental thing that Jesus did.

Prayer should be a key and fundamental thing in our own lives?

(pause)

And we do have much to pray about,

There are so many changes going on in the church nationally that will have a big impact on our church here, locally, and how we will be the church going forward.

Where we will worship and who will lead us in our worship and in our life as a congregation is going to change.

And change quite drastically

and we need to pray that the right decisions are made

And that God, through the Spirit, will work through the decisions that are made

(pause)

Prayer,

What does it mean to us.

How do we go about it?

How often do we do it?

And why

or when

do we pray?

(pause)

In chapter 1.16 and 17 of Ephesians Paul talks of praying for the people.

He talks of remembering them in his prayers.

‘I remember you in my prayers

and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the glorious Father,

to give you the Spirit,

who will make you wise

and reveal God to you, so that you will know him.'

(pause)

He prays specific things for them.

That they will be given the Spirit

That they will be made wise

That God will be revealed to them.

'and ask the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the glorious Father,

to give you the Spirit,

who will make you wise

and reveal God to you, so that you will know him.'

(pause)

He goes onto pray other things for them.

He asks that their minds may be opened.

He asks that they will know the hope that God has called them too.

That they would know many blessings of God

'I ask that your minds may be opened to see his light,

so that you will know what is the hope to which he has called you,

how rich are the wonderful blessings he promises his people,'

(pause)

He really cares for the people that he is writing too.

He really cares for all the congregations that he has set up.

He really cares for all the people that he has made contact with on his missionary journey.

All the people that he has introduced Jesus to.

(pause)

And he wants them all to come closer to God
To know Jesus as he knows Him.

(pause)

2 years ago I was called by God to work for him here.

God gave me a work to do here,

As Paul acknowledges he has been given a work to do by God.

To share the gospel with as many gentiles as he can.

‘Surely you have heard that God in his grace has given me this work to do for your good.’

It's difficult to know what the future holds for any of us.

Impossible for any of us to know what the future holds for this congregation

But we need to pray that God would richly bless us.

We need to pray for Gods leading and guidance

We need to pray for unity as we move forward together

Working together to help many new people come to know Jesus

Come to have faith in Jesus and give their lives to Him.

(pause)

And I would encourage all of you to start praying if you don't all ready.

And to keep on praying

And not give up if the answer you are looking for is not instantly forthcoming.

And I encourage you to pray specifically.

To be precise in what you are asking God for.

To pray as Paul did.

To pray as Jesus did.

And to keep on praying.

God will answer your prayers.

He has in the past.

(pause)

And we need to pray about the work that God has called us to do.

As I just said I was called here 2 years ago to serve you and help lead you forward, knowing at that time that much was going to change in the church

Though these changes are now greater than what we were expecting then.

I was called by you to help you work through change.

And the wider discussions of change are just beginning in the presbytery when the elders for Cheviot Churches,

Kelso Old and Sproutson,

Kelso North and Ednam

and ourselves will be getting together on Tuesday, the 23rd of September

to begin the discussions and planning for how we move forward as the church together

How we are now going to do the work that God is calling us to,

together

the work that Paul was called to,

'of taking to the Gentiles the Good News about the infinite riches of Christ,'

(pause)

That was Paul's work,

To take the Good News of Jesus to the Gentiles.

To those on the outside

And it was costly for him to do so.

He ended up being imprisoned because of his faithfulness in fulfilling God's calling.

But he didn't see being imprisoned as a bad thing.

He saw it as a blessing.

He didn't see being imprisoned as something to complain about.

He wasn't a prisoner of the Emperor

Or the Roman Authorities.

Paul saw himself as a prisoner of Christ.

He was in jail for Jesus.

He was in jail because of Jesus.

He was in jail to serve Jesus

And he knew that he could further the gospel

And share the gospel even while he was imprisoned.

‘For this reason

I, Paul,

the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles,

pray to God.’

(pause)

Paul believes that his whole life is controlled by God

So ultimately God is in control of his imprisonment.

It's because Jesus wants it that he's now in prison.

And even if it wasn't God's first plan for him,

Paul knows

And believes,

That God can bring good out of even a bad situation.

“We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him,”

he says in Romans 8.28

(pause)

Our work too is to take the good news about Jesus to the Gentiles.

To those outside the church.

That they might come to know the rich blessings of knowing Jesus, as we know them

Are you doing the work that God is calling you too

Are we taking the good news outside the circle of our fellowship,

to the communities for which we are responsible.

(pause)

Paul's work was to share the good news with the gentiles.

The other apostles are busy taking the good news to the Jewish community.

Paul has gone off on his own and started this new work.

Which he was specifically called and commissioned to by Jesus himself.

" 'Go, the Lord said to me! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" **Acts 22.21**

(pause)

He was sent to the Gentiles to help them understand God's secret.

The secret that God had revealed to him.

'God revealed his secret plan and made it known to me.'

And what was this secret.

What was it that others didn't really know?

And didn't understand.

What was this secret of Christ that Paul was now sharing.

That they, the Gentiles,

Are to be part of God's family too.

(pause)

Paul's work is to help the Gentiles
come in and be part of the people of God.

Paul's work is to help the two mix together,

The Jews and the Gentiles.

The Jews with their understanding of God
and their place in His plan up till now.

The Gentiles with their place being on the
outside up till now.

But now it is time for them to understand they
are on the inside too.

The secret has been revealed.

God's secret plan is now open for all to know.

‘The secret is that by means of the gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God's blessings;

they are members of the same body

and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus.’

We're told in v6 of Ephesians 3.

(pause)

Our job is just like Paul's

To share the good news.

To help those who don't know Jesus come to know Him.

To help those who don't have a faith to come and be part of the family of God.

To come and be part of Christ's body,

The Church. **(pause)**

And if we are going to reach out to those not part of the church many things will have to change.

Just as they did for the Jewish Christians when Gentiles began to join the church in bigger and bigger numbers.

Following the law

And living as Jews as well as Christians couldn't continue for long.

Not if they were to be one body,

One fellowship.

(pause)

We,

Like the Jews,

Can become exclusive.

And not really want others to join in.

We can see ourselves as God's family

And not want to admit others into our close family network.

But the church should be an open place.

The church should be a welcoming place.

And just like the Jewish Christian community had to change drastically to welcome the Gentiles in.

We need to look at how we need to change to make this a community where the outsider can feel welcome.

(pause)

In a sense us in the church are the Jews

Those outside are the Gentiles.

It's our job to do what Paul did.

Mix the two together.

Paul was not afraid to challenge Peter and the other apostles when they weren't open to change.

He was not afraid to break eggs.

We need to not be afraid to challenge the status quo.

If the status quo is excluding the outsider.

(pause)

So as we look forward what do we need to do to change

What might we do to become a more open, inclusive fellowship.

What is God challenging us to do so that the outsider will know that they are welcome,

That they are included in the family of God.

(pause)

We,

The body of Christ,

The Church

As God's family need to make the conditions right.

We need to make it a place where all are welcome.

(pause)

And just like Paul we need to share the Good News with the Gentiles.

With the outsiders

Share with them that God loves them.

That He doesn't just love us.

(pause)

The key thing is the Church,

Is the body of Christ.

‘by means of the church,

the angelic rulers and powers in the heavenly world might learn of his wisdom in all its different forms.’

(pause)

It is by the church that they learn of God’s plan,

Come to understand His secret.

That all people who believe are going to be united into one people.

Into one body.

‘Built together into a place where God lives through His Spirit.’ **Ephesians 2.22**

(pause)

Jews and Gentiles together have become a new people.

That's the secret that Paul has now revealed.

The secret he has written to the Gentiles who are reading this letter.

God loves you just as much as he loves the Jews.

God loves you and welcomes you in.

The secret is that it was part of God's plan that through Jesus death Gentiles would be saved.

(pause)

The secret is that we can all receive God's blessings

Jews and Gentiles alike.

(pause)

We can all know God,

Be touched by him

And welcomed into God's family through
Jesus.

Welcomed into God's family in union with
Christ.

And we need to share that message widely.

That all are welcome in this place

That all are loved by Jesus

That all can

and should come to know the rich blessings
of being a disciple of Jesus.

Amen.

Let us pray.

Father our faith is real.

We do believe.

We do love you but we know that our love for you is not always seen in how we live our lives.

(pause)

Help us Father to put our faith into practise.

To care for others.

To serve others.

To love others not just ourselves.

Help us Father to be obedient to you.

To do all that you ask of us.

(pause)

Father we want to be a welcoming community,

An open fellowship.

A place where all can come and you're your love.

Where all can come into your presence and worship you.

(pause)

Help us Father face up to the challenge that you place before us.

The challenge to change.

And help us Father be one united fellowship as we move forward together with courage to build our fellowship and worship

As we make the radical changes that you are calling us to.

(longish pause)

Father we want to tell others the story of our faith.

But we know our faith needs to be seen in our lives as well as heard by our words.

Give us courage Father to stand up for our faith.

To be willing to be seen as different because we believe in you.

(pause)

Give us the words to say Father as well as the courage to say them.

Give us the opportunities to speak as well as the opportunities to serve and care for others

(pause)

We pray now in the silence of our hearts

Father for the people of our communities who need to hear the good news.

May your Spirit move in their hearts Father.

May they come to know your love and grace.

(long pause)

We pray for those of our community who are ill.

May they know the healing touch of your hand in their lives.

(pause)

We pray for those who are lonely, in need of a friend.

May we be that friend.

(pause)

Help us Father to live lives of humility and obedience.

To live lives of service.

To serve you here and to build your Kingdom together,

In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

Benediction

Go into your week with your ears open to the sound of God's voice calling your name.

Go into your week with your eyes open
to see the face of Jesus in unexpected
places.

Go into your week with your heart open
to receive the Spirit of God, the Spirit of
Peace.