



Parish of Finchampstead and California

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

19-26 APRIL 2021

INTRODUCTION

This week and next our readings are from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The passages are those set for the New Testament readings in Morning Prayer, ignoring saints' days. The Thoughts are based mainly on the text in bold type.

MONDAY - Ephesians 1:1-14

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.** ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Thought for the day

Scholars have long argued over whether this letter is by Paul, as the letter itself claims (v1), or by a follower of his, intending to maintain his teaching. In these thoughts I stick to the traditional view that it is indeed by Paul, even if a late one in which his theology has developed new aspects. After the brief introduction (v1-2), the whole of this passage is a single sentence in the original Greek, giving it a unique depth of insight into God's intimate, fatherly relationship with humanity (v3-5) evidenced by the life of Jesus (v6,9,11). The sentence starts with humanity's praise of God (Blessed be God ...) responding to the blessings God has given us in Christ and through Christ's perfection (v3-4). This whole passage is one to be savoured slowly, one verse at a time, giving it space to conjure up pictures and ideas both familiar and new in our own minds.

TUESDAY - Ephesians 1:15-22

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷ **I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.** ²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²² And he has put all things under his feet

and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Thought for the day

After yesterday's blessing, Paul now prays for the recipients of the letter. His prayers are addressed to God, the Father of glory (v17), but always in relation to Christ (v17,20) who is supreme over all earthly powers (v20-23 see also Philippians 2:9-11). The prayer is for 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation' (v17) to recognise the hope, riches and power which their Christian faith offers them (v18-19). Perhaps when our faith seems to falter or to be undermined by doubt or care, we need to lift the eyes of our hearts to the magnificence of this prospect to which we have access through Christ.

WEDNESDAY - Ephesians 2:1-10

¹ You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—** ⁹ **not the result of works, so that no one may boast.** ¹⁰ **For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.**

Thought for the day

The contrast between their life before new converts became Christians (v1-3) and after (v5-7 which reinforce yesterday's reading) is stark. The step of faith they have taken has released the great gift of God's grace to them (v8): nothing they could do for themselves in the way of good works could have earned this (v9), but now they have received this gift they are '(re-)created in Christ Jesus for good works' (v10). We probably need reminding over and over again that God's love for us cannot be earned by good works, but that his gift of grace is bound to result in our wish to do such works in gratitude to him.

THURSDAY - Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called 'the uncircumcision' by those who are called 'the circumcision'—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—
¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.
¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ **So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.** ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

Thought for the day

There is almost no direct evidence about how non-Jews reacted to the very Jewish background they inherited once they were convinced that 'Jesus Christ is Lord'. But in all Paul's letters he is at pains to explain which elements of that heritage had value for new converts and which elements, such as circumcision (v11), had been superseded. Here he develops the idea that Jewish and non-Jewish Christians together, and without distinction, make up the church (v12-18). He uses the idea of Jesus as the cornerstone (v19-20) which Jesus himself had used in the parable of the tenants (Mark 12:1-

11), quoting Psalm 118:22. The Christian fellowship as 'the temple of the Lord' (v21-22) is a metaphor Paul uses elsewhere (see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 and 2 Corinthians 6:16). Too often we think of the church as the physical building; in what ways has our experience during the pandemic altered our perceptions about our identity as members of the household of God (v19)?

FRIDAY - Ephesians 3:1-13

¹ This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— ² for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, ⁴ a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. ⁵ In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: ⁶ that is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷ Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given to me by the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; ¹⁰ so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. **¹¹ This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.** ¹³ I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

Thought for the day

Paul's letters often refer to his credentials as an apostle, perhaps because of the criticism levelled at him by those Jewish Christians who wanted Gentile converts to accept Jewish traditions. Here, as in yesterday's reading, his focus is more on the way in which Gentile converts are equal partners in the transformation inherent in 'the boundless riches of Christ' (v6-8). This is the mystery long hidden from God's people but now revealed to everyone (v9-10). Through Christ believers have access to God directly (v11-12) - a claim that we may be tempted to take for granted, but one which is as radical and empowering now as it was then.

SATURDAY - Ephesians 3:14-21

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. **¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

Thought for the day

The access to God which Paul wrote about yesterday is now taken to its logical conclusion - as a basis for seeking strength and the presence of Christ in his readers' hearts through the Holy Spirit (v16-17). The foundation of their faith has to be the love displayed in Jesus' life and death, whose immensity is hard to comprehend (v18-19). But if they can grasp it, they will, amazingly, start to share in the attributes of God himself (v19). For us, these should not be just words, though they are indeed words of great beauty and power, but words that tell us about the way in which God yearns for us to draw closer to him, in the way that Jesus not only modelled but made possible. At the end of the week, why not turn this passage into your own prayer?