

Presence

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 4th August April 2013

Intro

- Ascetism is extreme denial of bodily comfort in order to get closer to God. It is known in different forms in various religions including Christianity.
- There was a Christian named Simeon Stylites who was born in 388 AD, in Turkey. He was very serious about seeking the presence of God and went into a monastery before he was 16 years of age. On one occasion, moving nearby, he commenced a severe regime of fasting for Lent and was visited by the head of the monastery, who left him some water and loaves. A number of days later, Simeon was discovered unconscious, with the water and loaves untouched. When he was brought back to the monastery, it was discovered that he had bound his waist with a girdle made of palm fronds so tightly that days of soaking were required to remove the fibres from the wound formed. At this, Simeon was requested to leave the monastery.
- He then shut himself up for one and a half years in a hut, where he passed the whole of Lent without eating or drinking. When he emerged from the hut, his achievement was hailed as a miracle. He later took to standing continually upright so long as his limbs would sustain him.
- After one and a half years in his hut, Simeon sought a rocky eminence on the slopes of a nearby mountain and compelled himself to remain a prisoner within a narrow space, less than 20 meters in diameter. But crowds of pilgrims invaded the area to seek him out, asking his counsel or his prayers, and leaving him insufficient time for his own devotions. This at last led him to adopt a new way of life. He is most famous for living atop a pillar for many years in the brutal Syrian heat, eating only once a week, and praying continuously. His first pillar was little more than four meters high, but his well-wishers subsequently replaced it with others, the last in the series being apparently over 15 meters from the ground. At the top of the pillar was a platform, with railings which is believed to have been about one square meter. Simeon would not allow any woman to come near his pillar, not even his own mother, reportedly telling her, "If we are worthy, we shall see one another in the life to come." Martha submitted to this. Remaining in the area, she also embraced the monastic life of silence and prayer. When she died, Simeon asked that her remains be brought to him. He reverently bade farewell to his dead mother, and, according to the account, a smile appeared on her face. After spending 37 years on his pillar, Simeon died on 2 September 459. He inspired many imitators, and, for the next century, ascetics living on pillars, 'stylites', were a common sight throughout the region. A statue commemorating St. Simeon's asceticism can be found in Grimsby town centre, UK (source Wikipedia).
- What do we need to do today to get the presence of God?

Read Eph 2:1-22

1. **Jesus has done everything necessary for us to access to the presence of God**
 - 2:14 'He has broken down the middle wall of separation'
 - Every done any scrumping, or trespassing as a child? Remember that nervous feeling? When we think of the presence of God maybe we get the same feeling- this is an area we don't belong in. Certainly that was the feeling conveyed when the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. There were two barriers keeping people out of the presence of God: the dividing wall and the curtain.

THE DIVIDING WALL

 - During excavations of Jerusalem in 1871, two archaeologists, Clermont and Ganneau, discovered what is known as the Soreg Inscription. Written in Greek, the sign warns non-Jews to keep out of the temple area. It states: "No foreigner is to enter the barriers surrounding the sanctuary. He who is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow."
 - Jewish historian Josephus also mentions this inscription in chapter 15 of his work, Antiquities of the Jews: "The centre of the structure was the tallest, with the front wall being built with beams which sat upon interlocking pillars. Highly glossed stones made up this wall, so finely polished that those who looked upon it for the first time marvelled at it in amazement. This was the description of the first structure. Located within it, and nearby, were steps which led up to the second structure, which was surrounded by a stone wall used as a barrier, engraved with an inscription not allowing foreigners to enter into it under the penalty of death."
 - This is the 'wall of separation' to which Paul refers in 2:14. It kept Gentiles (non-Jews) out and allowed Jews through to get closer to the presence of God. It could become a source of enmity between the two.
 - The writer of the passage we have read, the apostle Paul, once was almost killed due to false rumours that he took a Gentile beyond this wall (see Acts 21:27-31).

- THE CURTAIN
 - The temple consisted of outer courtyards, a holy place and the holy of holies. The holy of holies signified the very presence of God. No one could go into the holy of holies except the High Priest, and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement to offer ceremonial sacrifices for the forgiveness of the people (Hebrews 9:7).
 - A huge, thick curtain stopped anyone from accidentally going into the Holy of Holies. The curtain was said to be a hand-breadth thick. Josephus says- 'It was large and costly, some sixty feet high, and made of rich materials. Josephus ('Bell. Jud.,' 5:05. 4) tells us of one of the veils in the temple, that it was a Babylonian curtain, embroidered with linen in various colours, woven together with wonderful art, such as the eye loved to rest upon.'
 - When Jesus died on the cross this curtain was torn in two from top to bottom: [Matthew 27:51](#)
At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split
 - The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Mk 15:38)
- [Luke 23:45](#)
for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two.
- the tearing of the curtain- there is no record of this in Jewish writings, but, interestingly enough, there is record of something significant happening. Rabbis claimed that about 40 years before the destruction of the temple (i.e. coinciding with the date Jesus was crucified), it's enormous doors swung open by themselves and were found that way in the morning (y. Yoma 6:43c; b. Yoma 39b), an event which was interpreted by the rabbis as predicting its ultimate destruction (Sifre Deut. §328 [on Deut 32:38]). The event was allegedly "heard through eight Sabbath limits" (b. Yoma 39b)- (that is about 4 miles away!). Josephus himself mentions that the enormous brass eastern gate of the inner court, which could hardly be moved by twenty men, was seen opening by itself at midnight.
 - Jews were a bit closer than Gentiles, but both were really a million miles away as neither could enter God's presence. So Jesus removed the barrier for Gentiles (the dividing wall) and He removed the curtain for both Jews and Gentiles- He was giving ACCESS to both- see 2:18 'For by Him we both have ACCESS by one Spirit to the Father'
 - [19](#)Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, [20](#)by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,... [Heb 10:19](#)
 - The Holy of Holies was a picture of Heaven. The High Priest going through the curtain was a picture of Jesus going into Heaven. The fact that he tore the curtain open through His death meant he was saying to us 'come on in'- 'come into the presence of God'.
 - Eph 2:6 -He made us sit together in the heavenly place in Christ Jesus.
 - **Application-**
 - The key to the presence of God is in believing the gospel. We think that the presence of God isn't going to come until we've 'tarried', 'fasted', 'prayed', 'read the Bible' etc. etc. While all these things may well be good, they could never open up the presence of God to us. But JESUS HAS! He is the Door! He is the Gate! He is the Way!
- 2. We, the Church, are to be the dwelling place of God**
- 2:19 (you are) 'members of the household of God..being fitted together grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in who you are also being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.'
 - There was an ongoing debate between Jews and Samaritans as to where God was to be worshipped. Jews knew God had chosen Jerusalem as the place for His

temple to be built and Jews throughout the kingdom would travel to Jerusalem three times yearly for the pilgrimages of the Jewish holy days of Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot as prescribed in the law. But the Samaritans built a rival temple on Mount Girizim in Samaria, and they said this was the place God had chosen instead. Jesus met a Samaritan woman and she brought this up as a matter of contention, and Jesus said an interesting thing for a Jew- that neither there nor in Jerusalem would be the place where God would be worshipped, but that the true worshippers would worship in spirit and truth. This ties in with what Jesus came to do- give us access to the Father by the One Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Jesus is saying that with Him there comes a shift from needing to constantly **make pilgrimage** to find God, to having access to His Spirit in ANY LOCATION. People love to go where God is 'moving', but what is really happening? What is happening is that in these environments people's faith increases and they start believing that the barrier between them and God is actually less than they had previously thought, and they take the 'move' with them. However, through the gospel God has shown His ongoing willingness to 'move in power' in any location- the earth is His and the gospel of His kingdom is to impact each nation, why don't we start believing in the full gospel more?

- What is a temple? It is a place where God, or a god dwells. But God's ultimate aim is not to dwell in a physical building but to dwell in His people. Originally He did- in Eden, but sin created a barrier to His presence dwelling with us- mankind was expelled from the garden of Eden.
- God gave a picture to us of our restoration into His household- it was the picture of the tent and the temple. Both of these are pictures of the human body, also called a 'tent' and a 'temple'. God was communicating His plans to one day reconcile mankind to Himself so that His dwelling could be with mankind again.
- One of the purposes of the Church is to be the dwelling place of God. It is the fulfilment of the gospel- that Jesus redeemed a people for Him to dwell in. 'In Christ' is repeated so many times in Ephesians! The Church as individuals and also together is the fulfilment of what Jesus came for- to dwell in us individually and corporately.
- FULL GOSPEL- Many Christians have faith for this once we die, but Jesus died that we could have access to His presence now on earth.
- 'Household of God'- 2:19 God has made us family- John 14:23 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'. We obey Jesus' word by firstly believing the gospel- the result of this is that God sends His Spirit to come and live in our lives. John 14:18 'I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you'. Intimacy, adoption Spirit of adoption by which we cry 'Abba, Daddy'- Rom 8:14-17.
- **Application-** let God fill your 'temple' -your body. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Avoid sin because God considers your body to be holy- it's the place He loves to dwell, therefore look after it and don't spoil it with sin (see 1Cor 6:19-20 'Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in you body and in your spirit which are God's').
- 1Cor 3:16-17 'Do you not know that you (plural) are the temple of God (i.e. their congregation) and that the Spirit of God dwells in you (plural). If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you (plural) are'. We must respect the Church and build those in the Church up rather than pull them down- let's be careful what comes out of our lips- we will one day give an account to the One who dwells in the temple of the Church, so be at peace with your brothers and sisters- sort out differences, don't let there be a

dividing wall of hostility between each other.

3. We access the presence by faith

- If Jesus has truly taken away all the barriers to us experiencing the fullness of the presence of God now, then why aren't we experiencing it? Two reasons, desire and faith.
- Desire- sometimes we don't want to experience the presence of God because we know it will mean change for us- a giving up of sin that we secretly cherish. Sin is really replacing the satisfaction God brings into our lives with some other satisfaction which is only temporary and never will truly satisfy long-term. He has come to give us life in abundance- He has the best plan for our lives- let's not sell ourselves short.
- Faith- faith is essential. It doesn't matter how much we desire the presence of God, if we have no faith it will be no good to us. Faith pleases God and accesses the promises of God. We can only be saved by faith, not by desire- it's only when we actually believe what Christ has done that we truly find salvation.
- In the same way, if we want to experience the presence of God then we must simply believe that we have access to His presence right now because of the gospel.
- John 7:37 Jesus said 'If anyone thirsts (desire), let him come to Me and drink (response of faith). He who believes in Me (faith), as scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'. The Jews at this point in time were in the process of drawing water from the pool of Siloam and pouring it at the altar in Jerusalem. The reason they did this was the belief that when the Messiah came the prophecy of Ezekiel (47) would be fulfilled and living water would flow out from the altar of the temple in Jerusalem, the belly button of the world. Jesus is here claiming to be the Messiah and saying that He would fulfil that expectation, but again, not in a physical building but rather in the temple of each believer, and also in the gatherings of believers trusting in Him. Ezekiel's prophecy speaks about the water increasing as it flows from the altar and bringing life wherever it goes. This is a picture of the life and 'outpouring' that God always planned for each believer to experience and carry wherever they go. Surely this is what we see in the book of Acts. Surely this is what we have seen in great moves of God during times of revival- there is a spilling over into the community and whole communities, and even countries are saturated in the presence of God. Why not let's believe God and let those rivers flow out of us?
- Boldness is faith with boots on. It characterises faith and also timidity characterises unbelief. God hasn't given us a spirit of timidity. As we realise scriptural truth afresh so it makes us bold- we realise there are priceless gifts before us which we've been able to open but we thought they were out of bounds. It makes us want to boldly open these gifts. One of these gifts is the gift of His presence open to us all. Eph 3:12 '...in whom (Jesus) we have **boldness** and access with confidence through **faith in Him**. We realise and accept what Christ has done it makes us BOLD and we ACCESS the presence of God!
- Eph 3:1 and Eph 3:14 both say 'for this reason'. For what reason? Paul is saying that because we have unlimited access to the presence of God due to the Gospel (bar the actual 'face to face' with the Father, which will come in Heaven) he prays that God would strengthen them all with might through His Spirit (dwelling) in their inner man (v16), that Christ may DWELL IN THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH.....THAT THEY MAY BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD'. Paul certainly didn't think they had to wait to get to Heaven or wait for a move of God- it was available to them NOW they just needed to believe it and receive it!

- **Application-** you may have asked a million times to be filled with His Spirit, but not really believed that God wanted to fill you, or believed that you had to jump through a load of hoops first- simply accept the gospel (repentance and faith) and ask God to fill you, believing He will and you will be filled.
- Have you previously known closeness with God and allowed unbelief to creep in, perhaps because of sin? Repent and allow the river of His presence to flow again in your life.
- Have you always felt like you were missing out, that God was always breaking out somewhere else? Allow Him to 'break out' in your life right here and now. Be filled.

4. We must keep on the right foundation

- 2:20 '...having been built on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone'
- What does this mean? It means that the Church is built on the revelation given to the original Apostles and their teaching directly from the mouth of Christ as well as their eye-witness testimony of His life along with their prophetic revelation of the gospel (such as Paul having received the gospel by revelation without chatting to the other Apostles). It means this because of Eph 3:5- the Gospel had been previously hidden from other generations but what was formerly a mystery hidden in God alone was now revealed to the Prophets and Apostles of that generation to be passed on to future generations. This is the unadulterated gospel as recorded in the Scriptures which must be our foundation. It means that our foundation is not our own thoughts or feelings or individuals revelations, but that which is recorded in scripture and passed on to us- Apostolic doctrine (which is what the early Church dedicated to -see Acts 2:42)- let's never veer away from scripture, it is foundational.
- Does this mean we reject modern day Apostles and Prophets? By no means, but what they bring must be lined up against the foundation of what the new Testament Apostles and Prophets have written down for us in Scripture.
- Does this mean that we throw out our personal revelation? By no means, we love personal revelation from God, but we weigh everything according to scriptural truth, hold on to the good and throw out the bad.
- Keeping this foundation of the truth of the gospel of grace will protect us from thinking that we have 'lost' the presence of God or need to earn it in some way by our spiritual disciplines. We do spiritual disciplines, not to earn the presence of God- we already have that, but rather to engage the Spirit of God- we tune ourselves into Him through our disciplines. This is what it means to keep on the right foundation. It is what Paul wanted for all the Churches he wrote to and what he was so concerned about in the Galatian Church, that they had drifted from trust and were relying on their own efforts to earn God's presence. Let's keep our foundation correct.

Summary

- Jesus has opened up access to God's presence for us
- We are the dwelling place of God
- We access the presence by faith
- We must keep our foundation right

Song?

Ministry time

Presence Part 2- Lifestyle Implications of the Presence of God

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 25th August 2013

Intro

- Last time we looked at the issue of what was necessary to access the presence of God. We gave the extreme example of the lengths one man, Simeoen Stylites, went to, in order to get closer to God. We concluded that accessing the presence of God is the privilege that all Christians have, because of the gospel. Jesus has taken away the barriers to God's presence, and we enter in by faith in what He has done on our behalf. We, as the Church, are now the dwelling place of God by His Spirit.
- However, is that the end of the story? What about spiritual disciplines? Spiritual disciplines, such as bible study and prayer are important, and do indeed usher us into the presence of God- they provide the vehicle for God to speak to us and for us to meet with Him, but must never be seen as 'Brownie Points' which earn us the right to get into God's presence- we can only do that by the work of Jesus already completed on our behalf. We will look at the importance of spiritual disciplines in another session.
- This session we will return to the book of Ephesians and answer the question: What are the *lifestyle implications* of having free access to God's presence? Put another way, how should the fact that God dwells in us effect the way we live?

Read Eph 2:2, 13,19,22;4:1

We are to 'walk worthy' of our calling

- v2 says we formerly 'walked' in disobedience to God- this means we lived our lives without regard to God.
- V13 says that Jesus shed His blood and died for us so that we, who were far away from God, could be 'brought near' to Him.
- V19 says that we are no longer strangers and foreigners to God but family
- v22 says that we are now, together, the temple where He dwells!
- 4:1 says that because of what Jesus has done we should walk worthy of it- i.e. live our lives in a way that shows we appreciate and receive what He has done for us, rather than living or 'walking' as we used to, in disobedience. Paul uses the 'walk' metaphor for lifestyle in 4:1 'walk worthy', 4:17 'walk no longer as the rest of the Gentiles', 5:1 'walk in love', 5:8 'walk as children of light' and 5:15 'walk circumspectly'. We'll summarise what he says in three points and in so doing look at what it means to 'walk worthy' of our calling.

THREE WAYS WE ARE TO WALK WORTHY:

1. We are to love, unite with, and build up, the rest of the body (The Church)

- v2-4, v16
- In order to make it possible for everyone to attend church the following Sunday a Church planned a special 'no-excuse' Sunday. On the advertising was the following:
 1. Cots will be placed in the vestibule for those who say, "Sunday is my only day for sleeping in".
 2. Eye drops will be available for those whose eyes are tired from watching TV too late on Saturday night.
 3. We will have steel helmets for those who believe the roof will cave in if they show up for church services.
 4. Blankets will be furnished for those who complain that the church is too cold. Fans will be on hand for those who say the church is too hot.
 5. We will have hearing aids for the parishioners who say, "The pastor doesn't talk loud enough." There will be cotton for those who say, "The pastor talks too loud."
 6. Score cards will be available for those who wish to count the hypocrites.
 7. We guarantee that some relatives will be present for those who like to go visiting on Sunday.

8. There will be take-away dinners available for those who claim they can't go to church and cook dinner, too.
9. One section of the church will have some trees and grass for those who see God in nature, especially on the golf course.

10. The sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies to create a familiar environment for those who have never seen church without them.

See you in church!

- We are not to be an island- we were created to be part of a body- the Church. We glorify God and walk worthy of His presence when we commit to His body- the Church.
- This means that we are not to remain aloof. God has not called us to an isolated lifestyle, but a connected lifestyle- we are called to belong to His family, this is what He died to accomplish, so why would we throw it back in His face?
- Solitude is important- Jesus regularly spent time alone with the Father, and so should we, however fellowship is also essential.
- Some go from Church to Church getting offended and causing offence and come to the conclusion 'I will just fellowship with my family or close friends'. This is not walking worthy of our calling- we need to commit to the wider body, not just those we particularly 'get on with' or share a common interest with. There is 'one body', this means, as much as it depends on us, we should be at peace with all of God's Church.
- Relationships in any family take working at, and the Church is no different. V3 says that we are to endeavour to 'keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace'- this means that we do our best to restore peace in our relationships within the Church. 2:14 says that Jesus Himself is our peace and He has not only reconciled us to Himself, He has also reconciled opposing groups to each other (Jews and Gentiles) through the cross. This peace, which the gospel brings into our lives, is a bond, a glue, which enables us to stay together in our relationships and weather the storms.
- If we know we are out of sorts with others let's remember how out of sorts we were with God and yet He took the initiative to restore our relationship with Him- let's do the same.
- V16 says that as we all do our share of work in the body of Christ using our individual gifts so the body grows and is built up. This means that we have a responsibility towards the Church to serve others using our gifts- they need us and what we bring and we also need them and the gifts they bring in order for us to reach maturity. The Church is not so much about 'self- development' but 'body- development' – interdependence, team. Is there a balance of giving ministry and receiving ministry in our lives? If not, what steps can we take to address this?

2. We walk worthy by imitating God, not the godless

- 4:17 & 5:1 encapsulates this next point of Paul's.
- 4:17 'no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk'
- 5:1 'Therefore be imitators of God as dear children'
- There is a video on You Tube with David Attenborough commentating, where he goes into a wood in Australia to film the Lyre bird. This bird has an incredible mimicking ability and as part of it's attraction of the female will copy up to 20 other bird songs of the forest, often fooling the other birds. In addition to this it also mimics other noises it hears, very authentically- car alarms, camera shutters, auto-wind cameras, gunshots and even tree felling complete with the noise of the chainsaw motor, sawing sound and falling tree.
- We all have a desire to imitate something, Paul urges us to imitate God rather than the godless lifestyles we see in the world.
- We need to be strong enough to influence others for good rather than them influencing us for bad. 1Corinthians 15:33 says, "Do not be misled: 'bad company corrupts good character.'" Jesus hung out with undesirables but He knew He was influencing them rather than the other way around. We need to be wise in our friendships, but also be a light to others. We must be honest about our temptations rather than flirting

with danger.

- The reason Paul gives for not walking as the other Gentiles is the 'futility of their mind' (v17), that they are following 'deceitful lusts' (v22). The lifestyle they live promises so much but delivers so little- it's futile- the lusts they run after promise to satisfy but in reality do not bring the long term satisfaction that holiness brings into our lives. God wants us to have abundant life- 'The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy, I have come that they may have life and life in abundance' John 10:10.
- Also Paul says we have been made new creatures, the old you has gone, therefore don't put the old 'you' on any more (verse 22)- it's not the real you, any more than an old set of flared trousers from the 60's.
- Paul lists 4 areas to particularly watch out for where we are not to walk in the old ways any more:
- **1. Telling lies (v25)** - The world is forever telling 'white lies' to cover things up, but we are to speak the truth in love (i.e. don't go about saying 'you're ugly'- that's not speaking the truth in love- love has tact and is gentle). Paul says that if we lie to a Christian we are lying to ourselves as we are members of the same body of Christ- v25.
- **2. Sinning when we get angry(v26)** - The world loses the plot when it gets angry and this quickly leads to sin. Choosing to sin when we are angry is giving a foothold to the devil. We are to be angry at certain things, but that anger is to lead to positive action rather than sin- we are to learn to control our anger and channel it correctly so that it is constructive rather than destructive. When you are angry you will make the best decision you will later regret so try not to be reactionary. Equally, we are also 'not to let the sun go down on our anger'- this means sorting issues out quickly, don't allow resentment to build up. Jesus advocates speaking to a person on their own first- tell them what they did in terms of their action and how it made you feel, rather than insulting their character i.e.- 'you're a liar etc.' Try and avoid terms like 'you always', be specific, nobody is always bad. Give them time to think about it and put it right. If you don't get joy bring along another (i.e. a leader) to arbitrate. If this still doesn't work it goes into the hands of the leaders of the Church to address it as a pastoral issue with that individual.
- **3. Stealing (v28)**- The world thinks nothing of 'borrowing' things from work. Everything gets justified as 'one of the perks of the job', but this is not to characterise our lives. This includes stealing work days to 'throw a sickie' after a night out or 'having a mental health day' as a sham. Even though 'everyone else is doing it' we are to be different. Paul advocates working and giving to the needy instead as the opposite of theft- if this is a stronghold for us this is the way to break it.
- **4. Speaking evil of others and building resentment to others (v29-32)** – We grieve the Holy Spirit when we do this- they have been made in God's image. Therefore we are to refrain from gossip. Imagine the person is in the room listening to your words- how would you feel. If you were the person how would you want to be treated- do to others as you would have them do to you. V32 says forgive as God forgave you- let this characterise your life rather than being someone who says 'that's IT now'.
- Who are your role-models? Who do you admire for their godly character? Paul says we are to imitate God, but elsewhere he encourages people to imitate his lifestyle as he follows God. It is right to have godly role-models, but ultimately our role-model should be Jesus- WWJD- what would Jesus do in this situation?

3. We walk worthy by a lifestyle of worship

- 5:2 'And walk in love, as Christ has also loved us and given Himself for us, an

- offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma'
- Paul here described Christ's sacrifice on our behalf as being like one of the Old Testament sacrifices of a burnt offering of worship to God which pleased God like a 'sweet smelling aroma'. This becomes our example for a life dedicated to the worship of God.
- This is our response of love to Jesus laying down His life for us- he gave His all for us, so therefore we give our all in return.
- Worship is a whole lifestyle it's not limited to singing songs. Jesus gave us the example by becoming a sacrifice to God. Worship involves sacrifice- Rom 12 says we should be living sacrifices- this is our reasonable worship. It costs to put God first in our lives, but love is willing to pay the cost, no matter how high.
- Our previous pastor, Tony, used to tell us of a story of a skiing trip where a boy was slipping off the edge of a snow covered cliff to certain death and the crowd gasped in horror, but helpless to do anything, aware that if they ran towards the edge they too would slip and go down off the edge. Suddenly a brave man raced out from the crowd, grabbed the boy and dug his heels into the snow, managing to pull the boy to safety. Who was the man? The boy's father. Love is willing to sacrifice.
- Worship in the Old Testament was all to do with purity. Things were cleansed, set apart for God. The people set themselves apart for God by abstaining from certain 'unclean' foods and only eating 'clean' ones. There is here in picture form our worship- our worship is living a life set-aside for God, remaining pure and abstaining from impure practices. This is no longer certain foods, but certain behaviours, which Paul lists- covetousness (wanting what other people have), filthiness, foolish talking, coarse jesting (we are not to be known for innuendos and filthy jokes, bad language etc.- this is not a lifestyle of a worshipper of God).
- V5- Paul brings out the reason we are to abstain from these things- it is idolatry- putting certain things before God- he also mentions fornication- sex outside of marriage- when we value anything above what God says we fail to keep it within boundaries and it takes over our lives. God created sex and partly for our enjoyment, but it is not to be idolised and is to be kept in Godly boundaries as part of our worship to Him. The same with our use of money and anything else- alcohol in moderation is okay if it is not an addiction to us, but outside of moderation it becomes a snare.
- Paul warns that these behaviours characterise those who are perishing rather than those who are being saved, so we are not to follow them.
- Paul then brings a helpful teaching on what to do about them- v14 bring them into the light- confess them to Christ, tell a Christian about your struggle, get prayer, break the bondage, get accountability. Don't let it be a secret any more because Satan will continue to use it against you.
- The opposite to filthy speaking is to praise and thank God- v4. We are to be a thankful people, characterised by our ability to praise God always-v20. This is the lifestyle of a worshipper. V18 encourages us to replace drunkenness with being filled with God's Spirit and worshipping Him. V19 encourages us to be regularly singing our own songs of praise to God 'making melody in your heart'- are we habitually doing this?
- The last part of a lifestyle of worship is 'submitting to one another in the fear of God'- v21. This means that in our family relationships we are willing to show true humility and serve one another effectively, not because we necessarily feel like it, but because we consider being a better husband, wife, son or daughter etc. part of our duty of worship to God. Paul lists responsibilities for the wife to show respect for her husband's leadership by submitting to it (the husband must not negate his responsibilities in leadership too). The husband is responsible for showing love to his wife, making her feel loved and secure by him. The children are encouraged to obey to their parents and the fathers are encouraged not to provoke their children to

- wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.
- How are we doing in our relationships in the home? Are they glorifying to God? What is it like to be your husband/wife/son/daughter/parent?

- Archbishop William Temple (Archbishop of York & Canterbury 1920s-40s) on worship: Worship is...
 - submission of our nature to God.
 - awakening our consciousness by God's holiness.
 - nourishing our minds on God's truth.
 - purifying our imagination by God's beauty.
 - opening our hearts to God's love.
 - surrendering our wills to God's service.

Summary

We are to 'walk worthy' of our calling- 3 ways to walk worthy

- Love, unite with, and build up, the rest of the body (The Church)
- Imitate God, not the godless
- Live a lifestyle of worship

Song?

Ministry time

Presence- Part 3 How to be strong in the Lord

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 1st Sep 2013

Intro

- Previously looked at Paul's letter to the Ephesians and saw how through the Gospel Jesus has given us access to the presence of God.
- We then looked again at Paul's letter to the Ephesians to see what are the *lifestyle implications* of having free access to God's presence?
- This week we will finish looking at the book of Ephesians and answer the question- how can we be 'strong in the Lord'?

Read Eph 6:1-19

3 ways to get strong in the Lord and the power of His might:

1. RELIANCE- Trust in Him rather than superstition or self

- v10 “..be strong in the Lord” (i.e. not some god or goddess or magic practise).
- Ephesus was a place where many different gods and goddesses were worshipped (up to 50 of them). Many worshipped a number of gods. Artemis the the most important deity to the Ephesians and her temple was there (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world). Ephesus had a reputation for the occult – Acts 19:17-20 tells of the new believers there burning their occult scrolls.
- The Ephesians believed in Astrology- that the stars ordained people's lives. The goddess Artemis had the signs of the zodiac like a necklace around her neck. They believed that she was the queen of heaven and as such was able to break the power of fate. The silversmiths used to sell statues of the goddess to visitors, but their trade went down as people became Christians and the people rioted and as a result Paul had to leave the city. The city had a population of 250,000 (the third largest Roman city after Rome and Alexandria).
- It would have been a temptation for those who had never met Paul and become Christians to tag Christ onto the end of their list of gods and keep practising magic and superstitious ways. Paul writes to them to make sure Christ is the one they are being strong in rather than the former habits.
- There is a long tradition of six magical names of what was thought to be powerful beings which were associated with Ephesus (known as the Ephesian letters or Ephesia grammata) and which were quoted by the 'magi' (Plutarch says) to cast out demons and by athletes for assistance and protection. An ancient writer named Pausanias relates an interesting and relevant parable about an Ephesian wrestler who travelled to Olympia, Greece, to compete in the games. The athlete was unbeatable in the wrestling event, winning match after match. During one of the competitions, however, the referee discovered he was wearing an anklet inscribed with the six Ephesian Gramata- the magical words invoking spiritual powers. This was immediately removed, whereupon his opponent from Miletus proceeded to three consecutive victories over him because of his loss of magical power (source zondervan illustrated Bible commentary vol3 pg 336 (Pausanias as cited in Eustathius, Comm. ad. Hom. 19.247, also cited in The Suda)).
- Paul's description of our challenge mentions wrestling-v12
- What areas are we tempted to tag onto our trust in Jesus?
- Many see reading their stars as a fun thing, but it is placing trust in something other than God, just like the non-Christians Ephesians did.

- Wales superstitious- 'touch wood', not crossing on stairs, not walking under ladders etc.
- Talismans- protective objects, charms- lucky objects, St. Christophers, crucifixes as charms.
- Christian superstition- God won't bless me if I go to the theatre/cinema, don't tithe, don't say my prayers tonight before I go to sleep etc. Obsessive compulsive, ritualistic behaviour as a protection rather than simply trusting Jesus.
- Faith in our selves rather than trusting in God's power.
- Rigid adherence to the 'medical model' without any acknowledgement of God's healing power also not good. Paul did extra-ordinary miracles in Ephesus by God's power. Let's thank God for medicine and use it, but not discount His healing either.
- Repentance is key for getting set free, and pray, sometimes also deliverance where there is a stronghold to break.
- Fear is a root to ritualistic behaviour and superstition. However, knowing the Truth sets us free from this- let's choose truth instead of the lies.

2. AWARENESS- Know His power as well as His grace

- v10 "be strong...in the power of His might"
- Many Christians love to hear about God's grace and preach about it all the time and yet have little faith in His power, or no real concept of it.
- Paul prays for Ephesians to know God's power- Eph 1:19
- 2:7 Paul became a minister according to two things happening in conjunction with each other: 1. the gift of God's grace 2. given to him by the effective working of His (God's) power.
- What does this mean? It means that Paul could not have been saved and become a minister of the gospel if only one was true and not the other. God needed to be both gracious to him by forgiving him AND God had to have the power to change Paul as Paul was trying to destroy the Church before becoming a Christian.
- Grace becomes only truly effective through power. What do I mean? Say your computer is broken. I might be gracious enough to offer to fix it for you but if I don't have the power to fix it you still end up with a broken computer. Equally I might have the power to fix it but not the grace to offer and you still end up with a broken computer. However, if I have the grace to fix it for you and also the power to do so, you end up with your computer fixed!
- God not only had the grace to save us, He also had the power to do it.
- A Roman triumph was a huge civil ceremony celebrating the achievements of an army commander in winning a great battle. On the day of his triumph, the general wore a crown of laurel and the all-purple, gold-embroidered triumphal painted toga, regalia that identified him as near-divine or near-kingly. He rode in a four-horse chariot through the streets of Rome in unarmed procession with his army, captives and the spoils of his war. At Jupiter's temple on the Capitoline Hill he offered sacrifice and the tokens of his victory to the god. Thereafter he had the right to be described as "man of triumph" for the rest of his life (source: Wikipedia). In Eph 4:7-12 Paul appears to be saying that Christ had a triumph, plundering the enemy's territory, taking many captives in his train and giving those captives as gifts instead to His Church. Paul, as Jesus' enemy, had been captivated by His love, and given as plunder, becoming the gift of an Apostle to the Church. Christ is the true victor- not only does He have the power to plunder Satan's kingdom, but He also gives that plunder as trophies to the Church- each of us is a gift to the Church from our powerful "man of triumph".
- Paul says that God's power is available to us and that this power is like the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in Heavenly places far above all

other powers (Eph 1:19-22).

- Jesus' resurrection is the greatest miracle that has ever happened- He is the only one to truly beat death- many have been raised (by Jesus) only to die again e.g. Lazarus) but Jesus has defeated death itself and has a physical body which is now beyond death and decay- He's the first to truly become as Adam and Eve were before the Fall. We shall follow on our resurrection day, but even now the power that raised Jesus is operating in our lives- Paul goes on to say that whilst we were dead in our sins God made us alive. It took the same power that raised Christ from the dead to raise us from our spiritual death- whilst we were in rebellion to Him He broke us free by His power.
- Powerful though Jesus' resurrection from the dead was it didn't end there. God's power goes on- Jesus wasn't just raised from death but also exalted to the right hand of the Father- co-regency, reigning with the King of the Universe with all other powers under His feet (like the foot-stall found in Tutankhamen's tomb which had his enemies depicted on it for him to rest his feet on). Jesus has authority over all the powers of the evil one. This same power which exalted Christ has also given us authority now over all the powers of the evil one. We have been lifted to a place where Satan is our defeated foe and he is under our feet. Nothing can now separate us from the love of God, even though we may go through many trials. Christ has also secured a place in Heaven for us- it is a done deal. It took nothing short of the greatest known power in the Universe to accomplish this on our behalf- this power is already working in our lives and God wants us to realise it and live our lives now in the light of it.
- So it took the power of God to save us- 2:8 says we are saved by grace through faith, but that faith which saves us is faith IN SOMETHING- it is faith in God's POWER, ability to rescue us.
- Once we realise that this same power which raised and exalted Jesus, this same power which saved the greatest early persecutor of the Church, Paul, is also working in our lives and has been unleashed powerfully in our salvation then we shall have increased faith for the things we ask of God, because we know He also has the power, the ability, to answer our prayers. If He can do the hard thing by saving us He can do the lesser thing in answering our prayers:
- Eph 3:20 'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKS IN US'. Let's start to trust that power a little more. This is key to Paul's desire that we be 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'
- Paul gives another important insight in 3:16 as to how we get strong in the Lord- we ask him to fill us with His Spirit 'be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man'. It is as we are filled with the Spirit that we are able to move in God's power and live the life He's called us to live. 5:18 literally says 'keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit'- God wants us to have a continual flow and to keep drinking and being filled.

3. DISCIPLINE- Practise discipline as a soldier

- (see other sheet)

Summary

3 ways to get strong in the Lord and the power of His might:

- **RELIANCE**- Trust in Him rather than superstition or self
- **AWARENESS**- Know His power as well as His grace
- **DISCIPLINE**- Practise discipline as a soldier

Song?

Ministry time