

Inside, Outside, Wide, Long, High and Deep

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 February 2024

Preacher: Stephen Murray

[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the New Testament, to the book of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 3. I'm going to be reading from verse 14.

Ephesians 3 and then verse 14 down to verse 21. This is the Apostle Paul writing. And he says these words. He says, For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we study this together this morning. Gracious God, your word is truth. And we come as needy people this morning, needing truth.

[1 : 45] Not that we might just expand our knowledge, but that we might know the God who created us and loves us and has sent his Son. We want to see Jesus clearly this morning in the pages of Scripture. We want to be changed by what we see.

And so won't you help us, Spirit of God, take these truths and put them deep in our heart and transform us. Meet with us now, we pray for Christ's sake. Amen. So this morning is a little bit of a one-off because it is our AGM and it's kind of, we didn't really use this terminology all that much here, but it's kind of like our vision Sunday, looking back to where we've been the last year, where we're going in the year ahead.

In the weeks leading up to Easter, we're doing a series on images of the cross in the Old Testament. So that will kind of get us all the way through to the Easter period.

And then after Easter, we start a marathon-long book study on the book of Acts in the New Testament. So that gives you a bit of an idea of where we're going in terms of our Sunday preaching. But today is, like I said, it's a one-off.

And so I was thinking, well, what am I going to speak to you about on a day when we do our AGM and all that sort of business together? And I thought, I want to talk to you about the heart of what I want for every single person who sits in this congregation.

[3 : 02] Sunday in, Sunday out. It's what I want for myself. It's what I want for my family. It's what I want for you. And that is that we might truly, truly, truly know the depth of the love of God for us that is displayed in Christ Jesus.

This is the thing I actually want for you more than anything else. I want a lot of things for many of you, but this is the thing I want more than anything else. It's what the Apostle Paul actually wants for you.

So in the book of Ephesians, he prays two lengthy prayers for that church in ancient Ephesus. In the first of those prayers, in chapter 1, he prays that people would know God in Christ more deeply. And then in chapter 3, the second prayer, which we just read now, in many ways, he just prays the same prayer again, that believers would know God in Christ more deeply.

It's almost like he's writing the letter to this church and he's like, I know you get it, but I want you to get it, get it. Now, this is a pretty short prayer, but it's an amazingly powerful, amazingly, amazingly rich prayer.

[4 : 07] And here's the thing I actually think. I think that if you repeatedly pray this prayer for yourself, and you begin to see it answered in your life and experience, you will change.

You will be changed. You will transform, and that transformation will, over time, be quite radical, and I think it will be quite beautiful. Really, really beautiful thing.

I think we sit in a world where we're all trying to change. It's why we go to gym. It's why we watch how-to videos on YouTube all the time and stuff like that. We want to get better at stuff. We want to change. I suspect this prayer will change you in ways that you could not even conceive of, were you to give yourself to the sustained praying of it.

So let's look at the content of the prayer together this morning. Here's where we're going to go. Paul prays for you to have a certain type of faith. A faith that is inside out. A faith that is outside in.

And then a faith that is wide, long, high, and deep. Inside out. Outside in. Wide, long, high, and deep. Here's the first one. Inside out. Look down in your Bibles at verse 14.

[5 : 16] Paul starts the prayer, and he says, For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. And I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Now straight away he starts there and he says, For this reason I pray this prayer. And so you naturally read that and go, Well, for what reason are you praying this prayer? And if you look at the verse exactly before that, verse 13, he tells us what the reason is.

There he's talking to the church and he says, I ask you therefore not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. It's actually the only place, the way Paul normally structures his letters is he teaches a whole lot of theology up front.

And then he does a whole lot of application in the back end of his letters. This is the only place in the front half of his letter where he gives an imperative. And he says, I actually want you to do something. I want you to do something. I want you to not to be discouraged.

Now why might they be discouraged at this point? What are my sufferings that he's talking about? This is one of the letters that are known as the prison epistles, the prison letters.

[6 : 22] Paul is actually in prison at this time. And you can imagine a young, fledgling little movement in a place like the ancient city of Ephesus where it's difficult to be a Christian.

It's dangerous to be a Christian to some extent. And now all of a sudden, your leader who's kind of taken you on a journey and you've gotten behind and you're like, we're going, we're joining this Jesus thing. We're praying and we're seeing people come to faith.

Oh, but our key leader who's set us up on all of this, he's now in prison. What do we do? And life is becoming incredibly hard for us. We don't get invited to all the guilds that we used to get invited to where we used to conduct business in the marketplace and that anymore.

Stuff's all of a sudden very, very complicated. Job security's not there. I've got a whole lot of anxiety in my heart welling up around these things. Paul's in prison. What's going to happen? They're discouraged.

Paul says don't be discouraged. The word for discouraged there in verse 13 is a word that means to lose heart, to be completely dispirited, to be kind of emotionally burdened with anxiety and concern.

[7 : 24] It's a strong word. In their souls, they're deeply troubled. They're thinking about this at night, tossing and turning. What's going to happen? What is Paul's imprisonment going to mean for us?

Now, when you know that that is the reason for why Paul prays this prayer, then it makes the prayer quite incredible. And here is why. Paul says nothing in his prayer about the circumstances that have created the anxiety and the loss of heart.

Nothing. He doesn't pray, God, please get me out of prison so that everyone can stop worrying about me and calm down a little bit. He doesn't pray, Lord, please can you get us more favor with the Romans or whoever else is in the city who's giving us a hard time so that we won't be so anxious about our job security and our family and our well-being and our livelihood.

There is none of that sort of language in the prayer, anywhere in the prayer. He doesn't pray about what's going on outside. He prays about what's going on inside.

Inside the heart of the believers. Their inner beings there, verse 16. And here's what he says. I pray you get spiritual strength in your inner being, your heart, so that Christ will dwell there through faith.

[8 : 37] It's this focus on the inner being, on the heart. See, I think he's demonstrating something by this prayer, by the nature of this prayer. More than anything else, he's saying you need inside change before you need outside change.

You've got to get this clear. You need inside change before you need outside change. He's not saying it's not important to pray about circumstances and external things. There are other parts of the Bible that pray for those very things. But he is saying it's more important to pray about what's going on inside of you.

Now, I think for the most part, we behave in our culture at least. We behave in such a way that demonstrates that we think human well-being works the other way around. That is, we are largely the product of our environment.

So you want happiness in this life. What you've got to do is you've got to work really hard on the externals of your life. Get everything right on the outside and then the inside will follow. We probably wouldn't verbalize it quite like that because it sounds a little bit crass when you say it out loud.

But we behave that way. If I get a new job, my life's going to be better. If I get a bigger house or a bigger apartment, I'll be happier. If I have more money, I'll have more peace of mind. If I had a romantic partner, I'd feel more secure.

[9 : 47] That's outside-in thinking. If I can improve the external quality of my life financially, romantically, relationally, professionally, then my inner life is going to get better.

That, friends, I think is a subconscious culture that we live in. Even if you might sit here this morning and say, well, intellectually, I reject that. I don't believe that. But we swim in it. We behave in accordance with it.

We're caught up in it. Kirsten Powers is a CNN political analyst and a USA Today columnist. Not that long ago, she described contemporary Western culture as, and I quote, a culture that values people based on ever-escalating financial and personal achievements.

Now, if we are swimming, you and me, if we are swimming in a culture that repeatedly assigns value to escalating financial and personal achievement, can you see how easily we'd all just be sucked into that idea?

You're going to have to. To survive, you're going to just kind of go with the flow there. We're going to start to think that essentially you've just got to move stuff around on the outside in order to make the inside better.

[10 : 56] Now, Paul, Paul in his prayer says, well, that's wrong. That's wrong. That's not how we work. It's not how faith works either.

Faith is not outside in. It's inside out. Now, again, in some sense, we kind of know this as a culture. We do actually know this as a culture because we know deep down at the end of the day that outside in doesn't really work.

We know it because every now and again we get to hear stories. We get to hear stories of people who have rearranged the furniture of their external lives exactly the way that they wanted it to be, actually, and then have still kind of felt really empty and broken on the inside.

James and I were talking. James, our student ministry director, we were talking the other day, and he said, did you guys get Jim Carrey here in South Africa? I was like, we weren't that backwards when I was a kid in this country. We did get Jim Carrey. When I was growing up, and this dates me, Jim Carrey was kind of like the king of slapstick comedy, right?

So The Mask and Ace Ventura and Dumb and Dumber, all those classics. If you've followed his career in later life, so he did like all these art and indie movies later on, but if you follow his career in later life, you'll know that he's actually undergone kind of a very public existential crisis, existential crisis, and now he's talking a lot about where that's led him, these sort of awakenings in his life that he's had, things that have dawned on him.

[12 : 19] And in an interview that he gave four years ago, the interviewer actually asked him and said, what do you think has prompted all these aha moments, these awakenings in your life that you seem to be having right now?

And in response to the interview, he said this. He said, I guess just getting to the place where you have everything everybody has ever desired and realizing you're still unhappy.

And that you can still be unhappy is a shock when you have accomplished everything you ever dreamt of and more, and then you realize, my gosh, it's not about this. And I wish for everyone to be

able to accomplish those things so they can see that, he says.

He says, look, I got there. I got there. I actually got to arrange my outside world exactly the way that I wanted it. And I'm still unhappy.

Outside in didn't work. And that's exactly what the Bible says. Outside in doesn't work. The Christian faith works inside out.

[13 : 23] The Christian faith starts with the transformation of the heart, the inner being through faith in Christ. It starts with God regenerating our heart so that you trust in Christ. In the inner recesses of your being, you submit yourself to him in faith.

Christianity, unlike other religions, doesn't start with following rules, external rules or regulations or performing certain rituals and practices. That's external.

That's outside. Christianity starts with Christ dwelling in your heart by faith. It starts inside. It starts inside. Now, friends, I think that is actually amazingly good news.

And here's why this is amazingly good news. It's amazing because very few of us will ever get to be like Jim Carrey. Very few of us get to order the outside world of our lives in the way we'd like to order it and achieve that kind of level of success.

Most of us just tend to get tossed around by the outside world. Most of us are like little boats out at sea in a violent storm and we're just trying to stay afloat. We don't get to rearrange the furniture of our lives.

[14 : 25] We're just trying to stay afloat. We're just trying to tread water, keep our head above water, completely subject to the wind and the waves. Just like those first century anxious Christians that Paul is writing to here.

And so Paul comes along to them and he says, I'm not going to pray for the wind and the waves to go away. Instead, I'm going to pray that in your inner being you would completely surrender yourself through faith to the one who has the power to still the wind and the waves.

To Jesus Christ. Now, friends, think about how that changes you. How that thought, how that theology changes you. How it equips you to live a stable, balanced, grounded life in this turbulent world that we inhabit.

You do this and what you get is at the center of your being, at the core of who you are is Christ. The one person who in history actually demonstrated that the waves and the wind are subject to him.

So you think, you think, well, if you can get more money, you can subdue the wind and the waves.

You think you'll just get married or find the right romantic partner. Then that's going to calm the seas of your life. You think professional advancement is going to give you like kind of cloudless skies ahead.

[15 : 39] I think you're mistaken if you think those things. I don't think any of those things can give you a whiff of power against the coming storm. But I can point you to Jesus.

I can point you to Jesus. I can point you to the one who stood up in the boat and said, be still. I can show you the king who stilled the raging forces of sin and death through his own death on the cross.

And one better, you can have this king come and live in your heart. In the center of who you are.

With power. Real power. So that your inner being is strengthened to stand in the storm.

So Paul prays for. So you can sing the words of Edward Mote's famous hymn. In every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil. On Christ the solid rock I stand.

All other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand. And so the apostle Paul prays first of all that you'll have a faith that's inside out. But you also need a faith that is outside in.

[16 : 48] Now you say, what on earth do you mean by that? Are you confused? Let me try and explain. You might say, Stephen, that sounds great.

But how do I get that strength of belief in Christ dwelling in my heart? Because I intellectually believe it. I intellectually believe that Jesus is my savior. That he died for my sins.

I prayed that prayer at some youth rally or some young adults Bible study somewhere along the line.

I intellectually believe that Jesus is my savior. That he died for me. How do I get the strength of belief? How do I get that belief to go so down deep into me that it anchors me in any storm?

And that's a really, really important question. In fact, it's almost the question for the Christian.

Answer that question well and you will live well as a believer. Answer it badly and you're really going to struggle and limp along in your faith.

So let's have a crack at it together. Remember, these are believers that the apostle Paul writes to.

And so it's quite strange then if you read it and you know, well, these are Christians.

[17 : 49] Paul is writing to Christians that he then prays for Christ to dwell in their hearts by faith. Did you not think that was strange when you read it? Because you read that and it sounds like he's praying for them to become believers.

Isn't that how you became a Christian? Isn't that how a definition of what a Christian is? You repent of your life lived apart from God, your sin. You repent of that life and you trust in Christ's life and death and resurrection on your behalf.

And then Christ, by his spirit, comes and dwells in your heart. And it's all by faith. Isn't that how you became a Christian? The answer class is yes. That is how you become a Christian.

It's exactly how you became a Christian. And so it's fascinating then that Paul uses the same language to talk about existing Christians deepening their faith.

Having their faith in Christ deepened. These are people who already have Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith. And yet Paul still prays for them that they might have Christ dwelling in their hearts by faith.

[18 : 52] Do you see that? Why does he do that? Well, this is the same Apostle Paul who, in the book of Colossians, a letter that's very similar to the book of Ephesians, Colossians 2, verse 6 and 7, he says to believers there, he says, Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.

So just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue in him. So how did you receive Christ Jesus as Lord? Well, repentance and faith, what we just spoke about. How then do you, by implication, continue in him?

Well, repentance and faith. See, Paul does not see, believe, or he doesn't believe that the gospel is the ABC of the faith. Something you get at the beginning and then you move on. He believes that the gospel is the A to Z of the faith.

That little saying goes much, much better if you do it in an American accent. So he doesn't believe it's the ABCs of the faith. He believes it's the A to Z of the faith. It goes much better, but it's, we're South African, so we'll say A to Z.

Instead, you don't move on from the gospel in Paul's mind to something deeper. Rather, you simply grow in the depth of your appreciation and application of the gospel to every single area of your life.

[20 : 05] That's what you do. Now, that's the key. That is the absolute key to understanding Christian growth. It's what we're teaching in our gospel-centered life course upstairs on Sunday evenings. So now you can circle back to your initial question.

How do I get the strength of belief in Christ dwelling in my heart? How does that deepen? Well, certainly through ongoing repentance and faith. Paul's just said that in Colossians. But is that all that happened the first time that Christ dwelled in your heart as a believer?

Was it just by your faith or were there other mechanics at play there? The answer in the Bible is actually there was a lot going on. Quite a lot going on. It wasn't just an act of your will where you transferred your trust from yourself or something else to Christ.

There was also working in perfect, perfect harmony with that, the empowering work of the Spirit. God's Holy Spirit. If you listen to hundreds of people sharing personal testimonies of how they came to faith, you'll often hear a phrase that goes something like this.

Well, God opened my eyes to see my need for a Savior. Have you heard people say that? God opened my eyes to see my need for a Savior. God opened my eyes. You'll really, if ever, hear somebody say, and hopefully you'll never hear somebody say this.

[21 : 18] Well, you look. You know, I was really, really smart. And I saw that living my secular, godless way was just not working out well for me. And so in my wisdom, I picked Jesus Christ.

I made a calculated decision. I picked Jesus Christ to save me. You'll never hear people say that. Nobody speaks like that. Because we are intuitively aware that we are not Christians because we are smarter than people who aren't Christians.

And in our great wisdom, we just managed to pick the right religion. We are Christians because God, by His Spirit, out of grace, opened the eyes of our heart to see and believe the truth of the gospel.

And so it's no surprise then when the Apostle Paul, when he prays for the Ephesians, he prays that they will be strengthened through God's Spirit. Verse 16 there. So that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

Through God's Spirit. Are you a believer through personal faith or through God's Spirit working in you? The answer is both. That's what verse 16 says.

[22 : 26] And so really, if you want a deepening knowledge of the indwelling Christ in your inner being, then you need God's Spirit's work in your life to bring that about. In other words, you need a faith, and here's the outside in part.

You need a faith that comes from the outside in. God, by His Spirit, has got to come in and do that deepening conviction from the outside into your heart. Because left by yourself, you will never see and believe the gospel in the way that you need to.

That's why Paul is actually praying in the first place. Think about this. That's why he's praying. Think about the act of what he's doing. He's praying. He's calling on God to do this outside in work. If you didn't need God to come along from the outside and place that conviction in your heart, then Paul, well, he wouldn't pray.

It wouldn't make sense to pray. What would make sense is he'd just say, well, get your books out and study more. Just learn more about Jesus. Let's just listen to more sermons from Stephen every single week. Let's not do all this prayer stuff.

Let's just study the Bible more. But because he knows that God has to do this work from the outside and he prays, he calls on God. Now, what's the implication of this for you and me?

[23 : 34] Well, if it's not something you and I are generating by ourselves and can generate by just studying the Bible more, then the only logical option open to you and me is to pray, to do exactly what Paul does.

To pray to God that he will bring that deep conviction in us. Friends, prayer is so, so unbelievably central to the process of growing as a Christian.

You get nowhere without prayer in your life. Nowhere. Do not fool yourself into thinking that you can get anywhere without a consistent prayer life. We're going to talk later on in our AGM about attendance, some of the metrics, attendance at our services and at the other meetings that the church has during the week and during the year.

You're going to see as I put stats up on the screen there that our attendance is that all our meetings have increased. All of them across the board except in one area. Our prayer meetings.

Now, I know, don't hear me wrong here, I know that formal church meetings are not the only way you can pray and you might have a very vibrant prayer life and not come to a formal church meeting. But they're probably something of an indicator of the temperature of prayer in our congregation amongst our people.

[24 : 49] Please listen to this. I don't know how you get through this life, how you walk confidently in Christ without prayer. I don't know how you do that. You can't do it.

You are setting yourself up personally. You are setting yourself up for years of struggle and frustration and a constant feeling of being a spiritual failure. That's what you're going to feel if you are not, if you will not give yourself to sustain consistent wide-ranging prayer.

It's like saying I want to drive a car but I'm just not going to put any petrol in it. And then you're wondering why you're pushing cars up hills all the time. You need to pray for the Spirit of God to come and bring the love of Christ to bear down upon your heart.

You need an outside-in faith. Now, the last one. Wide, long, high, deep. Getting Jesus to go deep in your heart is not just about faith and prayer.

It's also about having a very, very clear vision of the object of that faith. And Paul knows this. So he doesn't say just look, pray more and trust more and then leave it there.

[25 : 58] He goes a step further and he prays that they might know something specific. The love of Christ more deeply. Look verse 17. The second half of verse 17.

He says, And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And to know this love that surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Having the student ministry here and having a lot of American volunteers here and having partnerships with American churches means we get a lot of American visitors to our church from time to time.

And they're always a little bit bemused by the fact that I sometimes know more about American college football than they do. They're like, what is this person on the southern tip of South Africa doing that he knows about university football on the other side of the planet?

And the reason I know a lot about that is because several years ago a pastor in the U.S. took me to a game at the University of Clemson in South Carolina. And I went to this game and it was the most incredible experience.

[27 : 06] I've been to big live sporting events. And this one, just below my one time going to watch Arsenal play in London, just below, was this game.

The experience was incredible. There was torrential rain and yet at the same time the stadium, 80,000 people, was completely packed. I mean, there are not even 80,000 people in the town there. They wear orange. Everybody's wearing orange.

It's like the sea of orange. There is this sound from the crowd. There are these marching bands. It is this incredible, incredible audiovisual experience. Whether you know anything about what's actually happening on the field or not, it's this incredible experience of just being in this environment.

And when I try and explain to people what I saw when I was there and how I experienced it, I always find that there's a limitation on words to try and convey that. I can try and take out the videos that I shot on that day, but even that doesn't capture it.

I don't have the grasp of the English language to be able to convey into a person's mind what exactly I saw and experienced on that day. What a multi-sensory experience it was.

[28 : 10] I feel like Paul's kind of at that point here. He's saying, I wish I could get you to know this, to feel it, to understand it, to taste it, to experience it.

I wish I could get you to know how all-encompassing the love of Jesus Christ is. I wish you could grasp it. In fact, because I don't have the words, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray that you get it. There's something enormous, beautiful here, and so he just wants us to sense that in a profound way.

He's talking about the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, the love Christ displayed when he allowed himself to be nailed to a piece of wood for our sake, for our good, for our salvation.

You see, the implication of Paul's prayer here in Ephesians 3 is, yes, we need to pray. We need to pray for the Spirit to deepen his work in our hearts.

[29 : 08] Yes, we need renewed faith in Christ to live that inside-out life. But what's going to fuel all of that? That prayer and that faith, that commitment to prayer and faith. What's going to drive it?

Well, it's the vision. It's the vision of the wide, long, high, and deep sacrificial love of our Savior. That's what it is. You know, that's why we end, and I hope you see this, I hope you feel this, but why we end every single sermon here at the Union Chapel with a big vision of Jesus and his work on the cross.

It's not because we've run out of things to say. It's why the climax, in some ways, of our worship service is you eat the body and you drink the blood at the communion table. It's because the Bible teaches us that the vision we need more than anything else, the vision that needs to get put in front of us every single day, every single Sunday as we gather, every time we open the Bible, every time we think about the Lord, the vision that we need is the wide, long, high, deep love we see when we see our Savior on the cross for our sakes.

No other vision is going to anchor your soul. No other vision is going to sustain you. No other vision is going to carry you through your darkest moments. No other vision is going to thrill you with an indescribable joy.

We don't have words profound enough to explain this love. That's actually what the hymn writer Frederick Lehman found out when he tried to write a hymn about the love of God in Christ.

[30 : 36] In the end, he actually wrote this stanza. He said, When we look at the cross, we see a love that is beyond description.

It is beyond comprehension, beyond love itself. I mean, think about it for a moment. Just think. Just really think about what he did for you. What Christ did for you.

Meditate on it. A couple of weeks ago, I quoted a quote from Martyn Lloyd-Jones, maybe about four weeks ago in a sermon. And as I was preparing this week, I realized that that quote comes from when he was commenting in a sermon on this exact verse, verse 18.

And so I want to read it to you again. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, fiery Welsh preacher from the last century. Here's what he said. He said, Consider what Christ suffered at the hands of men. The misunderstanding, the hatred, the malice, and the spite.

Think of his suffering from weariness and hunger and thirst. Think of men laying cruel hands upon him, arresting him, trying him, mocking him, jeering at him, spitting in his most holy face.

[31 : 58] Think of cruel men condemning him to death and scourging him. Look at him staggering under the weight of the heavy cross on his way to Golgotha. Look at him nailed upon the tree and listen to his expressions of agony at the thirst he endured and the pain he suffered.

Think of the terrible moment when our sins were laid upon him. He even lost sight of the face of his father for the one and only time and gave up the ghost and died. Was buried, laid in a grave.

He, the author of life, the creator of everything, lies in a grave. Why did he do this all? The astounding answer is because of his love for you and me.

Because he loved us. Such is the depth of his love. There is no other explanation. Prince Paul prays that you and I, it's what I pray for us, it's what I pray for me, it's what I pray for you, but Paul prays that you and I will know how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

And so my question to you this morning is do you know that? Are you running after it in prayer and in renewed faith? You're fixing your eyes on Christ. Is that vision central to your life and your sense of self and well-being?

[33 : 21] I fear that a vision that is not that vision is going to shipwreck you and send you down trajectories of pain and hardship and heartache. And so I want to plead with you as the apostle Paul pleads in some ways via prayer with this congregation.

Set your gaze upon the wide, long, high, deep love of our Lord and our Savior this morning. Let's pray. Father, this morning we pray with the apostle Paul that you will allow us to see Christ clearly. Lord, we know this is the life's journey in some ways. This is what we will spend our lives doing, is gaining a clearer and a clearer and a clearer vision. The older we get, the more we mature in the faith through worship, through prayer, through fellowship, through the study of your word, the more we will clearly see Christ.

This morning I pray for all of us that you just move us further down the line on this. Move us further down the line with this glorious vision so that this vision will start to change us and we will be driven to prayer, we will be driven to renewed faith and we will start to see our lives change as a result, Lord.

And I want to pray for any person who's never started that journey, who's never gazed upon Christ upon the cross and seen that that he's there for them and that if they repent of their sin and trust in him, that love is theirs.

[34 : 46] Bring them to saving faith this morning, Lord, I pray. Father, won't you answer this prayer of Paul's in our congregation here at the Union Chapel?

Make us people who gaze upon and behold the inside, outside, wide, long, high and deep love of Christ, Lord. We ask for the special mercy for Christ's sake. Amen.