

## Resting Assured in Christ Ephesians 1

You may have heard the phrase, ‘the lunatics are running the asylum’. That could have been said in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. The emperor Nero is rumoured to have set fire to Rome so that he can build a new city. In any case he’s blaming it on the Christians, throwing them to lions in the arena or using them as human torches in the streets. Church leader Paul has been incarcerated in the infamous Mamertine prison and may be executed.

Madmen are in control and good people are suffering unfairly. Despite the spread of Christianity it now appears under threat. How should we respond? What should a Christian’s attitude be?

Paul teaches us from his prison cell in Ephesians 1 that the madmen are not actually in control, Jesus is.

Crucified but risen victorious over death, the Son of God is described as seated, enthroned at God’s right hand ‘in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, not only in the present age but also in the one to come’. Quoting Ps 110 the Apostle says God has placed all things under Christ’s feet and appointed Him as ‘head over everything’.

The madmen will strut about and commit their atrocities but their day will soon pass and they will perish. People of faith may suffer in the short term but we hold to these promises – Blessed are the poor in spirit – the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs! More, the meek shall also inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied and those who strive for peace will be vindicated by God as His children.

So says Jesus, Son of God, risen, ascended and ruling from the heavenly realms. And Christians can rest assured in Him! The One in Whom we have placed our trust is the highest authority. We

constantly give thanks for His redeeming love and trust in His resurrection power.

The Apostle thanks God for his readers. He celebrates how God chose them before the creation of the world and predestined them to be adopted as His children and share as one holy people in the cleansed, renewed order of His eternal Kingdom. It wasn't the end of the story when they became Christians but a vital new beginning, so he prays for them that they will continue and persevere in the ways of faith, coming to know God better.

Here is an example of how we should pray for each other. Faced with the often distressing short term uncertainty of a world that rejects God, we pray God would fill us increasingly with the Holy Spirit so that we might find the wisdom and courage that we need in Him.

Paul is a theologian. Every sentence is bursting with spiritual truth. Look at the beautiful triplet here in vs 18 – 19: He prays that his fellow believers 'may know the hope to which God has called us, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.'

Christians have been given the most wonderful hope by God, that the present pain and loss and chaos are not the end of the story. Our promised destiny is heavenly glory with our Lord and Saviour! We may suffer similar resentment and abuse in the short term but in the age to come we will share His resurrection and live free and unspoilt forever.

Even now we can begin to taste this rich inheritance from our heavenly Father. The Lord is generous and rewards those who make sacrifices to serve Him.

A rich young ruler asked Jesus, 'What must I do to inherit eternal life?' and in the ensuing discussions Jesus said, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the

Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and in the age to come, eternal life' (Luke 18 v 29-30)

We pray that we might know with assurance, not just the secure promise of a heavenly future but riches of blessing, fulness of life following and serving Jesus here and now.

With the added bonus of 'incomparably great power' from beyond ourselves! May the Spirit give us power to break free from the binding influence of sin, power to say 'no' to temptation, power to love people as our Master does, power to share effectively the good news of His grace, power to do all kinds of good in His name.

When God works in our lives like this it produces a radically different perspective. The secular world tells us that life is all about the 'pursuit of happiness' and that as long as we and our families have health and prosperity then life is worthwhile. But what about when these things are threatened?

Christians are led to believe differently, that our main purpose in living is to 'glorify God and enjoy Him forever'. Our circumstances fluctuate. Health and prosperity come and go. Yet even when experiencing great hardship and grief, the Apostle Paul and these Roman and Ephesian Christians could see God at work in His creation, fulfilling His purpose through the Holy Spirit building the Church of Christ. Their testimony was that despite general trials and personal tragedies and even the temporary flourishing of great wickedness, people who trust Jesus can know God's powerful working in and through us to ultimately good ends.

And so they kept the faith. They prayed for each other. And they rejoiced in their Saviour.

May we in our day know His strong help to follow their example.

Amen