

# Service Transcript Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2020

*Leader: Janet Rhea Preacher: Mark Reid*

## Opening Declaration

Almighty God, from whom comes each good gift of life, we remember your loving kindness and your uncounted mercies.

*We thank you Lord*

For all your gifts to us and to our human race; for our life and the world in which we live,

*We thank you Lord*

For the order and constancy of nature; for the beauty and bounty of the world; for the varied joys which every season brings

*We thank you Lord*

For all the joys and comforts of life; for homes and families; for our friends; for the love, sympathy, and goodwill of persons near and far,

*We thank you Lord*

For the tender ties which bind us to the unseen world; for the faith which dispels the shadows of earth for all the hopes which lead us on toward better things,

*We thank you Lord*

For the gift of Jesus Christ, and everything which is ours as his disciples; for the presence and inspiration of your Holy Spirit throughout our days

*We thank you Lord*

## Prayer

Father, thank You that in times of difficulty you are with us. That in you, we have all we need to live our lives joyfully in the middle of trials, that the picture is much bigger than the one we see right now. And that you are in charge, you are always in charge. We pray for our government, that you will fill them with your wisdom and guidance as they make decisions for our country over the coming days and months. Lord, they are under a lot of pressure. And we pray for them that you will guide them the way that they should go. We pray for each other to as we make decisions about our households, decisions about going out or not going out. Financial and health decisions. Help us to be obedient to the guidance we're given and wise about the decisions that we make. Lord, we pray for those who are rising Did and have struggled. We ask that you will comfort them and give them patience and persistence. We know that some will have to stay in isolation longer than others. And we know that that will be really particularly hard. So We lift them up to you in the minute silence that we going to have we live those that we know personally are struggling at this time.

Father, we pray for those not as fortunate as ourselves. We remember those in countries who have little, and whose health services are not good. We remember those who lost their homes this year already through floods or fire or natural disaster, and have had to cope with COVID-19 restrictions under already difficult situations. We remember those who have no homes because they fled their

own country and are refugees. Nor do we remember those who are bereaved, who have had to say goodbye to loved ones, sometimes without being able to be present at their passing. We ask that you comfort them. And above all, Lord, we pray for ourselves that you would call us to be faithful, that you would use us as your hands, your feet, your words and your provision for those in need. Give us a heart for those around us, Lord to intercede for them in their need and to be willing to help them where we can in Jesus name. Amen.

## **Reading**

Ephesians 6: 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. 19 Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

## **Sermon**

We have just celebrated VE Day and have reminded ourselves of how peace came after 5 years of war in Europe. The Second World War was the first major war where details were recorded and filmed in an almost forensic detail. I've recently been looking at the documentary series The Second World War in HD colour, which mixes colourised film and actual colour film. There is so much there that is still so recognisable today even though it's 75 years after the conflict ended.

The wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were ones where the importance of military technology were critical in shaping the outcomes in conflict. The speed of technological development played a big part in helping secure an allied victory. MONTAGE Whether that was aircraft, armour, weapons, or radar for example, new products gave an extra combative edge. One of the biggest contributions was in that they now call command and control. MONTAGE The ability to communicate between commanders with forces on the ground, the ability to gather intelligence and to track the disposition of forces in real time were particularly important as the Allies invaded France and continued across Europe. It was a case of having the necessary technology and the means to use it effectively

### **THE ARMOUR OF GOD**

Paul describes us as God's people in this passage as being engaged in battle, in a war. Who are we battling for? Who against? What is our objective?

### **WHO ARE WE BATTLING FOR?**

Easy that one. We are the people of God in Christ? So it's His kingdom we are fighting for. As Jesus said to His disciples as they worried about things around them, what they should eat, what

they should drink, what they should wear; Jesus said to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

#### WHO ARE WE BATTLING AGAINST?

As Andrew told us last week, there is a bigger picture in creation than the man versus God narrative. Before human beings, there was an angel who opposed God and is described as falling from heaven. He's the devil, satan, and he is hanging around this planet, seeking to disrupt or destroy God's works. So it's a spiritual battle against an enemy we can't see, but whom we know has power. Paul says this:

*12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

That's why we need the armour Paul lists in verses 10 to 18. Armour (TANK) protects you from attack and God's armour is very strong, but only if we use it and use it properly. (ARMOUR) That's why it's important that we understand the nature of our faith, that we live according to what God desires for us and our lives are characterised by truth, peace, righteousness, faith and salvation. All protect us from the enemy. We have two methods of offense. The first of the Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Some see that as the Bible. In one sense, that's correct, because God does indeed speak through His written word. But how does He speak through it. The answer is here too: by the Holy Spirit. It's the Spirit who drives those words into people's lives. It's the Spirit who protects us from the evil one. What so effective about the sword is not the book, but the Spirit of God. We are not to be strong in the Lord through our power, but His mighty power. We put on His armour to stand against the devil's schemes.

#### WHAT IS OUR OBJECTIVE?

As far as we are concerned, it's God's objective for the human race. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. As much as some people see Christians as their enemies, they are not ours. Quite the reverse, our mission is to liberate them, save them. That's what's God's mission is. That's why Jesus died, in order to redeem the human race. That is the salvation we have received and that is the salvation we offer. That's what Paul's mission was. That's what the Ephesians' mission was. That's the mission of the Church.

#### HOW DO WE ACHIEVE IT?

That brings us back to the beginning. We may have all the armour, we may be able to speak in the Spirit, the very words of God, but none of them are any use whatsoever, if we are not following the Commander's orders, doing His will, following His purposes. That's how the military works. The Generals, Admirals or whoever always have the bigger picture. The soldiers on the ground, the sailors on ships or the pilots in the air only understand their part of the operation. But the Commanders see the whole picture.

How do we fight against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms? How do we bring Jesus to a world where we are such a minority?

We don't see the full picture. But God does. He knows. All we do is work out the orders and follow them. So how do we do that? We finally get to verse 18: *Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*

PRAY. We pray.

But so often, prayers are destination of last resort. When all else fails, then people pray. During this coronavirus pandemic more people are looking to pray than ever before. The search engine GOOGLE has seen a huge jump in people searching for information about prayer. Some research showed that the number of searches for the word prayer doubles for every 80,000 COVID-19 cases.

WHY ARE PEOPLE TURNING TO PRAYER? They are anxious, fearful. Fearful of catching the virus, fearful of dying. Fearful because they are facing a disease without a treatment, without a cure, without a vaccine, without full knowledge of its prevalence, or if it can be caught a multiple of times, or why there have been otherwise healthy people succumbing to it. It can be treated, most who catch it recover, but there is a feeling of lack of control. Will it be me who catches it and dies? And then there are those that catch it, and those who are hospitalised because of it? What will happen?

It is leading men and women back to the truth that most are in denial of. Whether we die of coronavirus or not, we are still going to die. Life is 100% fatal. Thousands of people die each day, some suddenly, some with warning. Every day. Why doesn't that bring fear into people's lives? Perhaps it should. Because we all die. All. And what then? It's a question we all have to face.

Of course, God has already provided the answer to life and death and that's Jesus. He offers each man and women the opportunity of forgiveness for sin, a hope and a future. Life after death. All we have to do is just ask Him for it. It's the world's easiest prayer.

Why are Christians in a spiritual war? To do God's work of rescuing men and women – to present them with God's proposition – His gift of eternal life through Jesus. But we don't just do it to offer people an answer to death, but to offer them an answer to life. God wants us to live before death – not live in fear, but in hope.

PRAY IN THE SPIRIT That's why Paul says pray in the Spirit. God's Spirit is in each person who trusts and follow Jesus. God wants each person who follows Jesus that has a life shaped by Him. Communication that is direct, open, honest.

PRAY ON ALL OCCASIONS Prayer isn't something that should be our place of last resort but something *that's on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests*. In a world that's full of pain and uncertainty, where we are battling our own humanity, with the pressures of life on us; when we're being told that if we're Christians that we battle against principalities and powers – things we can't even see, then we need to be in touch with HQ constantly and that's why we pray in the Spirit at all occasions and the rest of it.

If a soldier's radio is off, he or she is out of touch with the commander and on their own. God wants us to be in touch all the time. He's the place of first resort, not the last.

PRAY FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

Secondly Paul says this *With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people*. We pray for one another as God's people. Prayer is always more outwards than inwards. We pray for others and the most obvious are people who hold our attitude to prayer. Here's an interesting set of words – be alert. That's the Governments advice as we come out of lockdown. We're not to stay alert because Britain needs LERTS, but what is meant here and by the Governments is the same thing Paul says in Colossians 4:2 which we looked at a couple of weeks ago: *2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful*. Look at what and who needs

prayer. God changes lives when people pray. We are calling on God to act in power, the same way in which soldiers on the ground call for support in battle or out on patrol -t needs them to be watchful, alert.

#### PRAY THAT OTHERS MAY KNOW ABOUT JESUS

Both here and in Colossians Paul asks for prayer for himself that he may speak boldly to others about Jesus as he was in prison awaiting trial before Caesar. Central to our mission as church is that we pray that others may know the mystery of Christ. That they will know Jesus for themselves. We have already seen how people need hope and Jesus brings it.

We are about to embark on Thy Kingdom Come this week. It's an important time for us as God's people to take prayer seriously. If we believe prayer really does change lives, then we should pray on all occasions as we read, or as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:12, pray without ceasing.

Part of TKC this year is to pray for our communities as well as the five people God has called us to pray for. Why? Because so many are anxious and Paul says this in Philippians: Philippians 4:6 *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* It's called Prayer and Care. Not only do we pray for others, but we look for opportunities to care for others; to be the hands and feet of Jesus to them, particularly those we know who are isolated. We have a God who loves them; and we should love and care too. That's our challenge too this year.

As part of that, it has been suggested that throughout the TKC period we light a candle in our windows from 7pm each evening until it's dark to remind people that in darkness, Jesus is the light. If you want to know more about TKC, then there's a page on the MRBC website that has these and other ways of how to get involved and all the things we are doing as a church. We may not get to worship and pray in person, but we can pray; please get involved.

#### PRAYER

Prayer changes lives. It's a life-changer and a game changer and in this world where so many are desperate for hope. Perhaps you have tuned into this today and you realise that you need to ask Jesus into your life. If that's the case, feel free to pray with me now and ask God to bring you forgiveness, to fill you with His Spirit, to make you one of His children, and give you hope – hope as you continue your life here and hope for eternity. So let's pray.

Father, I realise that I have lived my life in my way. I come to You now in my need. Thank You that You love me and that Jesus came to die for me. I come before you asking your forgiveness for my sin. Please accept me as your child. Fill me with Your Spirit and open my understanding to know who You are. Give me strength to live my life walking with Jesus and the assurance of the eternal hope I have in Him. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

As we close, let's commit this period of Thy Kingdom Come that starts this week.

Father as your people, we commit ourselves to this period of prayer for others that so need to know you. We ask you to place others on our hearts who we should pray for during TKC and afterwards if we haven't got anyone yet. May this be a time when they become more aware of their need of you. Gove us opportunity to be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus to the. May we be a people who pray and care for others not just during the 10 days of TKC, but may it characterise our lives. Thank you Father that prayer makes a difference. Through the drama of what's happening in our nation and the world at the moment, may people come to realise what's most important in life – knowing You.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

Read Ephesians 6:10-20 and Colossians 4:2-6

1. Why is it essential that we put on the full armour of God? What does the armour actually consist of? Why is each part so important in the spiritual battle? Why could it be argued that the most important part of our armour is prayer?
2. There are three elements to verses 18-20. How do you think these may help shape our prayer lives?
  - Pray on all occasions
  - Pray for the Lord's people
  - Pray that the mystery of Christ be made known
3. Allow time to reflect on who you should be praying for during Thy Kingdom Come. Particularly think of ways in which you could help them during this difficult time.