

There is a danger that verse 13 might appear to be advocating a “prosperity gospel” – a message that we know is advocated in certain sectors of the Christian Communion today.

We remember the message that Paul sent back to the Philippians (4:19), after receiving the gift of their ‘aid’ to him:

¹⁹ And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

Note that God will meet all our **needs**, not all our **wishes**! It is prosperity but not as some see it!

In the NIV translation of the Hebrew text, Psalm 142 carries the ascription “*A maskil of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer*”. Most other translations carry something similar. The New Living Translation has “*A psalm* of David, regarding his experience in the cave. A prayer*”. There is a footnote (*) giving the original Hebrew word maskil, rendered as psalm in the title. It is observed that maskil may be a literary or musical term (there are a total of thirteen psalms which are described as maskils). The New King James Version (NKJV) has “*A contemplation of David. A Prayer when he was in the cave.*”

NKJV gives several cross-references in this title – which throw some light on the time when it was written. The first is to the ascription and heading of Psalm 57 (A Prayer for Safety from Enemies) – “*To the Chief Musician. Set to ‘Do not Destroy’. A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.*”

A second cross-reference sets the scene in 1 Samuel 21 (10-15) and 22 (1-2): (NKJV)

David Flees to Gath

¹⁰ Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

¹¹ And the servants of Achish said to him, “Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying:

‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands?’”

¹² Now David took these words ^{la}to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

¹³ So he changed his behaviour before them, pretended ^{lb}madness in their hands, ^{lc}scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard.

¹⁴ Then Achish said to his servants, “Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me?”

¹⁵ Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this *fellow* to play the madman in my presence? Shall this *fellow* come into my house?”

David’s Four Hundred Men

¹ David therefore departed from there and **escaped to the cave of Adullam**. So when his brothers and all his father’s house heard *it*, they went down there to him.

² And everyone *who was* in distress, everyone *who was* in debt, and everyone *who was* ^{ld}discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.

Footnotes

- a. [1 Samuel 21:12](#) Lit. *in his heart*
- b. [1 Samuel 21:13](#) *insanity*
- c. [1 Samuel 21:13](#) *scribbled*
- d. [1 Samuel 22:2](#) Lit. *bitter of soul*

The situation in which David finds himself explains the *individual lament* of this psalm but as always with David there is confidence and trust in the Lord – to the extent that he speaks (in verse 7) of the effect of the Lord’s goodness to him on ‘the righteous’;(those who have gathered in the cave with him?)

Psalm 142: (NIV)

¹ I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.

² I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.

³ When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way.

In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me.

⁴ Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me.

I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.

⁵ I cry to you, LORD; I say, ‘You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.’

⁶ Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me.

⁷ **Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name.**

Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.

The reading from St. John’s Revelation brings us two of the seven ‘letters to churches’ – one to the church in Ephesus and the other to the church in Smyrna.

In my wife and my early days of taking school parties on Educational Cruises it took two whole days to fly all of the new ‘clientele’ from the UK and those from the previous cruise home again. We had flown on the first day and that evening were sharing a table with party leaders who were flying home the next day. They told us the highlight for their pupils had been the visit to Ephesus – after subsequent ports of call, the phrase “It’s not a patch on Ephesus” was frequently heard! We were to have that experience a few days later as our cruise visited the ancient city.

Dropped ‘at the top’ we made our way down the main street towards the imposing reconstructed façade of the library. Two thirds of the archaeological ruins, we were told, remained buried, waiting to be excavated.

Ephesus was an ancient Greek city on the coast of modern day Turkey. In Biblical times this was a port city but over the years and centuries the harbour gradually silted up and the sea is now a considerable distance from the ruins which include an impressive 25,000 seat(!) amphitheatre. In 129BC it became part of the expanding Roman Empire. It was a major centre of commerce and also of religion, the Temple of Artemis (Diana of the Ephesians) being close by.

We remember the account of Paul arriving in Ephesus (Acts 19):

Paul in Ephesus

¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when ^a you believed?'

They answered, 'No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.'

³ So Paul asked, 'Then what baptism did you receive?'

'John's baptism,' they replied.

⁴ Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.'

⁵ On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.

⁶ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues ^b and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

⁸ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

⁹ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

¹⁰ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

Footnotes

- a. [Acts 19:2](#) Or *after*
- b. [Acts 19:6](#) Or *other languages*

As Acts 19 continues we read of Paul being the channel for extraordinary miracles and the account of the seven sons of Sceva, not part of the Christian fellowship, who were trying to invoke the name of Jesus for their own ends.

We also read in this chapter of a 'Riot in Ephesus':

²³ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.

²⁴ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said:

'You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business.

²⁶ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all.

²⁷ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.'

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' ²

⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theatre together.

³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.

³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theatre.

The 'city clerk' manages to settle the crowd and we read at the beginning of chapter 20:

¹ When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia.

The infant church in Ephesus faced much opposition but remained firm in the faith. The angel (or messenger) in Revelation writes:

² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

As we read these words of commendation to the Ephesus Christians, are **we** challenged as to our hard work and our perseverance? Do we regularly seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in evaluating the message(s) presented to us?

The Ephesians are also complimented for their stand against one of the 'Christian' heresies abounding in those early days.

The angel (messenger) then says **YET**:

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: **you have forsaken the love you had at first.**

⁵ Consider how far you have fallen!

Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Here is something far more important to consider – love is at the centre of our life in Jesus; His words to the disciples at the end of the ‘Last Supper’: (John 13)

³³ ‘My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ ‘**A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**

³⁵ **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’**

We are challenged, on this topic of LOVE, by a passage in the first letter of John: (chapter 3)

Love One Another

¹¹ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love one another.

¹² Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother’s were righteous.

¹³ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters,^[a] if the world hates you.

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

¹⁵ Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

¹⁹ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence:

²⁰ if our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

²¹ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²² and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

²³ **And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.**

²⁴ The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them.

And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Footnotes

- a. ¹ [John 3:13](#) The Greek word for *brothers and sisters* (*adelphoi*) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family; also in verse 16.

These are challenging words indeed; how do we measure up; what would the messenger to the church in Ephesus say to us?

The second letter is to the followers of Jesus in another Greek port city - in Anatolia, modern day Turkey again – the city of Smyrna; modern day Izmir.

Their afflictions and poverty are mentioned by the angel (messenger) as is the slander (presumably against the church) of so called Jews.

There is no criticism in this letter but there is a warning of suffering to come – persecution for some to the point of death. The message is not to be afraid; to be faithful.

The concluding verse in each of the letters commences with the words “*Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*”

Let us pray that we too may have ears open to the Spirit for necessary confirmation of our faith and guidance as to our actions.

In our gospel reading from Luke, Jesus tells the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. I suppose the expectation in Biblical times was, and in many circles today still is, that the rich man would be righteous, the beggar worthless.

We note the emphasis on the Law and the Prophets to convey God’s requirements to His people and see Jesus predicting the peoples’ reaction to Him in the future after His death and resurrection:

³¹ ‘He said to him, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”’

In the story Jesus is clearly making a connection between the wealth of the rich man and his attitude to Lazarus. There is also a connection made between the poverty of Lazarus and his desire to benefit in some way from the rich man, even if it was only to eat the scraps falling from his table.

How does this story echo in our world today – we living in the affluent west; so many others living in deprivation, as refugees, in war torn countries?

Add to that the Covid19 pandemic and the state of “global” vaccination. As I write this, India – certainly not one of the poorest of countries in the world - is recording 200,000 new cases a day, has administered the first dose of vaccine to 8.7% of the population and both doses to a mere 1.3%. Compare those figures with the equivalent (2,600 daily cases; 52% 1st doses and 13.7% fully vaccinated) for our own country.

Once again our faith challenges us to ethical action – as it has done many times in the past, in various aspects of our life as a community.

Is it sufficient to donate to agencies working in impoverished areas or are we called to personal action, even sacrifice?

Graham Kendrick reminds us that our Lord came to serve, not to be served:

From heaven you came'
Helpless babe'
Entered our world,
Your glory veiled;
Not to be served
But to serve,
And give Your life
That we might live.

*This is our God,
The Servant King,
He calls us now
To follow Him,
To bring our lives
As a daily offering
Of worship to
The Servant King.*

There in the garden
Of tears,
My heavy load
He chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow
Was torn,
'Yet not My will
But Yours,' He said.

Come see His hands
And His feet,
The scars that speak
Of sacrifice;
Hands that flung stars
Into space
To cruel nails
Surrendered.

**So let us learn
How to serve,
And in our lives
Enthroned Him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ
We're serving.**

Graham Kendrick

The Saviour's precious blood
Has made all nations one.
United let us praise this deed
The Father's love has done.

In this vast world of men,
A world so full of sin,
No other theme can be our prayer
Than this: Your Kingdom come!

In this sad world of war
Can peace be ever found?
Unless the love of Christ prevail,
True peace will not abound

**The Master's new command
Was: love each other well!
O brothers, let us all unite
To do His Holy Will.**

Tai Jun Park

Tr. William Scott and Yung Oon Kim