Ephesians 3:14-19

May 22, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Just like the ‘Nothing will ever separate us from God’s love’ passage at the end of Romans 8, the passage of Scripture that we’re going to look at today is one of the foundational passages in my life and faith. I remember the first time reading it in my little Living Bible – Ephesians 3:17-19 - Paul prays –

*And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love, and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God’s children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is.*

I don’t know if it was the roots and soil talk that resonated with me as a farm boy or the incredible vision of God’s boundless love for us, but this prayer made me want to grow deeper in relationship the God who would love me like that.

So I’m excited to be able to look at this prayer with you this morning, because it invites us to see just how marvelous and far-reaching God’s love really is and even more, to *experience* that love for ourselves.

So join me in Ephesians 3 – Ephesians 3, 14-19 – and we’ll look at this great prayer that Paul prayed.

Here it is in the NIV –

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God (Eph 3:14-19 NIV).

That’s a great prayer and one that we can learn a lot from, so let’s go back and unpack it one piece at a time.

Verse 14 –

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

If you slide your finger up just a few verses before this prayer, you’ll see that Paul has just been talking about God’s great plan for salvation. Verse 6, verse 8 - It’s not just the Jewish people who are heirs to God’s riches; Gentile people too have been welcomed into the family of God – and so ‘for this reason,’ Paul falls on His knees to pray to the Father.

And I think that Paul has chosen that word – ‘Father’ – very intentionally. He’s not just praying to God, but He’s praying to God as the Father of all nations, from whom all families have their existence, ‘our FATHER’ in Heaven. And so very fittingly, Paul falls before ‘the Father’ to pray. And here’s what He prays:

16 I pray that ‘out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being…

Have you ever seen the show ‘Ducktales’? It’s about Scrooge McDuck, the richest duck in Duckburg, and his three nephews, Hughie, Dewey and Louie, who go on all sorts of wild adventures looking for treasures. And one of the iconic images in the show is that Scrooge McDuck has a giant vault filled with treasure that he can dive from a diving board into and swim around in. Scrooge McDuck has ‘glorious riches;’ God’s riches are even greater. Everything that exists, in heaven and earth. Things seen and unseen. Material things and spiritual realities. These are God’s riches.

Scrooge is notoriously stingy when it comes to sharing money; God though is notoriously generous, and Paul prays that out of God’s incredible wealth of riches, God would spare no expense in strengthening us, from the inside out, by the power of His Holy Spirit in us. He will answer that prayer. Out of His glorious riches, in line with the immensity of His riches, He will strengthen us by His Spirit from the inside out.

What for? Well, that’s the next verse. Paul prays that ‘out of his glorious riches he may strengthen us with power through his Spirit in our inner being… 17 so that (verse 17) Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.’

The prayer for strength that Paul prays is not so much for ‘perseverance’ or ‘power’ as it is for ‘enabling.’ Paul prays that we would have power to welcome Christ into our hearts through faith. That we would have power to see Christ as He truly is, to turn daily from our sins and to welcome Him into our hearts more and more every day.

I think that the Living Bible is onto something when it says - And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him.

There’s a sense in which we open our hearts to the Lord; we consciously choose to invite Him into our hearts, but there’s a sense in which this is God’s work too. We need the Spirit’s help to lower our defenses and embrace the changes that Jesus makes in our hearts and priorities as we invite Him to live in our hearts. Let’s be honest, when Jesus first comes in, our hearts are fixer-uppers and we need God’s help to embrace the renovations that Christ is doing in there. And so Paul prays to the Father that the Spirit would enable us to make the Son more and more at home in our hearts.

And notice, this is a very Trinitarian perspective - Paul prays to the Father, that He would give His Spirit to enable His Son to dwell in our hearts. God is one but God is three and each person of the Trinity, Father Son and Spirit, has a job to do. And Paul prays that the Triune God would enable us to welcome Him into our hearts through faith.

Now, that in and of itself is a real meaningful prayer. I can tell you from experience that even though I knew about the saving riches of God’s salvation, I was still too proud to embrace them, too full of myself to accept that I needed to be filled with Christ; but I’ll bet that there were people praying for me, that God would give me the strength to believe, that Christ would dwell in my heart through faith. And God answered that prayer. That night after church when I went out and prayed ‘God, I don’t have this all figured out, but I know enough to realize that I’ve wandered from You and I don’t want to anymore; I want to follow You’ – that was the Father granting me to Spirit to enable me to welcome Jesus into my heart through faith.

So, by all means, pray that as a prayer in and of itself. But as far as Paul is concerned, this is just step one of the prayer. Paul prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith so that *something else* can happen.

Paul prays that the triune God would enable us to welcome Christ into our hearts through faith – *so that* – verse 17 again - being rooted and established in love,

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ

19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now the NIV breaks these verses into two sentences just for clarity of thought, but in Paul’s mind, this is all just one big, long sentence, one big, long prayer. And so when Paul prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith, it’s so that we will be able to grasp from the inside out, just how high and wide and long and deep is Christ’s love for us. Paul prays that God would give us the power to understand just how limitless God’s love is and that we would have the power to experience it for ourselves.

Tony Merida quotes Don Carson when he says – “It is not a mere intellectual appreciation of the love of Christ that Paul is after. Carson says, Paul is not asking that his readers might become more able to articulate the greatness of God’s love in Christ Jesus or to grasp with the intellect alone how significant God’s love is in the plan of redemption. He is asking God that they might have the power to grasp the dimensions of that love in their experience.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

I think that for a lot of people, there are a couple questions that you can have when it comes to God’s love for us. The first is to ask ‘Does God really love us?’ Is His favour really based on His love or is it based on our good behaviour? We’re so used to having to earn people’s love and approval in our world and we’re so used to this Catholic idea of needing to do good works to get God to love us that we find it hard to believe just how much and how freely God loves us.

Look at this verse though – Paul says – ‘May God enable you to grasp just how high and wide and deep and long Jesus’ love is, a love if you sat and tried to quantify for a thousand years, you could still never get to the end of it. It surpasses knowledge!’ So to anyone who wonders ‘Does God really love us?’ I would point to this verse and say look ‘God loves us infinitely.’

Now the other difficulty is this – ‘Does God really love ME?’ Right, we get the idea of ‘God’s love for His people’ or ‘God’s love for us,’ but when it comes to ourselves, we say ‘Does God really love ME? Surely God knows all the things that I’ve done and I know my weakness and foibles; does God really love ME in spite of them?

Again, look at this verse and what it says. Paul prays that we would each know this love for ourselves. And not just know it, but know it personally. That we would experience it for ourselves. Does God love YOU? YES, He does, infinitely! And it’s God’s will and Paul’s prayer and MY prayer, that you would be able to grasp the incredible dimensions of His love for you.

Now admittedly, there’s a bit of a logical paradox in verse 19 – Paul prays that we would know the unknowable dimensions of God’s love; how do you ‘know’ a love that surpasses ‘being known?’ That’s why we need Christ living in our hearts through faith – it’s His work in our inner being that allows us to experience the love of God that goes beyond mere knowledge – through His Word, through inner peace, through the love and care of other Christians and others in general. God’s love may surpass knowledge, but God’s Son enables us to experience it for ourselves.

So Paul prays that Christ would be more and more at home in our hearts, so that we might experience the love of God more and more, but there’s one more step. Paul prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith, so that we might know the fullness of His love for us – so that ‘we would be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God,’ ie., that we would be filled up with the fullness of God’s nature, that we would become more and more like Him in all that we do, ie., that we would become spiritually mature. That we would be so rooted in the love of God that we draw nourishment from it and strength from it and bear fruit in keep with the love that fuels us.

I think there’s an OREO situation going on here – in this prayer, Paul prays that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith – so that we might know His love for ourselves – so that we would become more Christ-like in all that we do. Jesus’ presence in us enables us to experience His love for ourselves, which motivates us to love others with the love of God we’ve experienced ourselves.

I keep seeing my kids’ friends’ mannerisms poking through in my kids’ actions and behaviours; it’s natural, isn’t it, that we become more and more like the people we love. I think that Paul is ultimately praying that we would know Jesus better, that we would know His love for us better, that we would be more like Him in all that we do.

That’s a great prayer – and a great prayer to pray for ourselves and for others.

Let’s just take a moment now to pull it all together.

May Christ dwell in your heart through faith. May the Father in Heaven enable you by His Spirit to receive Jesus into your heart through faith. If you’ve been on the fence about whether this Jesus is worth following, I pray that the Spirit would give you the desire and the boldness to open the door and let Him in. If your heart’s been home to Jesus for years upon years, I pray that He would become more and more at home in your heart.

And welcoming Jesus into your life, may you know the fullness of Christ’s love for you. The Bible says a lot about God’s love for His people, but have you experienced it for yourself? Do you have any idea just how much God loves you? He loves you higher than the clouds, deeper than the oceans, wider than the Equator. He loved you to the Cross and back. Galatians 2:20 – the Son of God loved YOU and gave Himself for YOU. Tune your heart to the Lord, spend time with His people and with His Word so that you will experience this far-reaching love for yourself. It may be in a still, quiet moment; it may be in the way another person treats you; may you know the love of God for yourself.

And as you do that, may you grow more and more in your relationship with Jesus, becoming more and more like Him in all that you do. We love because He first loved us.

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith, that you may experience His love, that you may become like Him in all that you do. Let’s pray.

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. NIV

When I think of the wisdom and scope of his plan, I fall down on my knees and pray to the Father of all the great family of God—some of them already in heaven and some down here on earth—  that out of his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you the mighty inner strengthening of his Holy Spirit.  And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love;  and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God’s children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high his love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God himself. LB

BENEDICTION

20 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,

21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

(Eph 3:14-1 NIV).

1. D. A. Carson, *Spiritual Reformation*, quoted in Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Christ-Centred Exposition Commentary), 87. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)