

Ephesians 3:14–21

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[0 : 0 0] Ephesians 3, 14 to 21. What is the breadth and length and height and depth?

And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now, to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power 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. You may be seated. Good morning and welcome to Christ Church Chicago.

Special welcome again to Joe and Nico, who is with us today from Jacksonville. We look forward to your permanent arrival. We're praying that God would provide just the perfect home, the perfect friends.

Well, there are no perfect friends, but friends. May that be perfect. Also, a special thanks to a couple of gentlemen this week in the congregation, Robert and Jeremy, who put a couple of long nights in, just laying down more baseboard, pasting vinyl up, and just all the many people that continue to put in the sweat equity to make this our home.

[1 : 5 9] There'll be plenty of opportunities in the coming weeks for each of us to take part in those kinds of things. Well, there are any number of ways to start a sermon.

I could tell a story that would attempt to draw you. I could reveal some unknown tidbit about myself, which would certainly wow you.

I might just lay down a few thoughts to situate you. While I know you would like a story and you would love to know more about me, I'm just going to gather some of our gains as we now hit the midpoint of this letter.

If you're visiting, we decided to look at the book of Ephesians to glean for ourselves a fresh understanding of God's vision for Christ and His church.

We thought that this letter would help us arrive at a more complete and biblical understanding of God's vision for Christ's church.

[3 : 2 4] But we're halfway in. This much I now know. We know our purpose. From chapter 1, Christ's church Chicago exists to praise the everlasting, inexhaustible, boundless, and permanent glories of God's grace that are ours in Christ.

We exist for Him. To the praise of His glorious grace. We now know God's plan. It was announced in chapter 1, verse 9, but unfolded for us throughout chapter 2, namely to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and on earth.

In other words, God's plan for human history is captured under the phrase, a ministry of reconciliation. And that reconciliation was not only vertical by way of dimension, but had horizontal implications.

That reconciled to God in Christ, the wall of hostility between ethnicities is likewise broken down in Him, and therefore drawing us together into one family.

Yes, we know our purpose. We know God's plan. We even know our vision. We saw in the opening verses of chapter 3, how Paul was set apart for a vision that was commensurate with God's plan and our purpose.

[5 : 06] Namely, that vision was a ministry made known to him by revelation, but executed to him through proclamation. Our vision, then, can be nothing less than becoming a local church whose membership is made up of multiple ethnicities of those who presently reside in Woodlawn and the neighboring communities.

If the gospel goes forth from this place, it goes out under the hearing of the multiple ethnicities in our neighborhoods, and therefore we should expect God to draw that community to Himself.

Not only that, we know the pattern that we are to give ourselves to in accomplishing it. It's a ministry of proclamation.

Paul was set apart to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, that God draws a family to Himself through the speech of His people who laid down His word.

That's primary. The primacy of proclamation. And yet, introduction now complete, a few thoughts to situate you as we arrive at the middle of the letter.

[6 : 31] According to our text, it will not be by proclamation alone. We will carry out our vision. Do you see how the text opens?

With Paul bowing on his knees before the Father. Prayer.

Verses 15-19 is a single sentence. Paul accomplished the vision of God for himself and laid down the pattern for the church that God does all He does in Christ through a ministry of proclamation and a ministry of prayer.

It shouldn't be lost on us that when the early church got its grounding, the prayer meeting existed before the proclamation began in Acts 1.

It shouldn't surprise us that when the apostles began to lay down the growth and the birth of the church, they gave themselves to a ministry of proclamation and a ministry of prayer.

[7 : 44] Put simply, the vision that God has for Christ Church Chicago is that we must become a church family that puts prayer in a primary place.

I'm going to talk to you as your pastor now and here's my revelatory moment on the unknown parts of my own soul. On this front, we have a long way to go.

Prayer is a struggle for me, your pastor. In fact, as the prayer was being offered on our behalf today, I was already wandering in their prayer catapulting forward into my own preaching.

I don't know where you were. Hopefully you were with them throughout, but it's a struggle. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, things are not well in the Christian church.

What is the matter? In our folly, we've been trying to build and run the Christian church without God. We've forgotten the prayer meeting. Now, I'm not here to lay you down on guilt today.

[8 : 59] I'm here to promote your ability to bring Him glory and you'll see how. But this is the issue at stake for the vision of Christ Church Chicago.

We must become a people of prayer where all that God has for us will languish in weakness.

I'm going to put it this way. We've got to get our mind over our emotions. There was a mid-20th century minister by the name of J. Sidlow Baxter.

He was the pastor at Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh, a place from which I actually was able to preach. In fact, I met Baxter in the early 80s. I know most of you weren't alive, but at any point, I met him when I was 18 and he took me aside.

He was this tall, lean, spindly-fingered kind of man. He took both his hands around my hand when he heard I was going into ministry and he said, I have a word for you while I have you in my clutches.

[10 : 09] You know, and I'm like, my gosh, what is this? Devote yourself to private Bible study and personal prayer and you will be more than a minister.

You'll be God's messenger. Word and prayer. And he released my hands and I waited for that power to retain.

But it's a struggle. I was reading it was a struggle for him too. He said, as never before, quote, my will, that is his will, my will and I stood face to face.

I asked my will the straight question, Will, are you ready for an hour of prayer? Will answered, here I am and I'm quite ready if you are.

So Will and I linked arms and turned to go for our time of prayer. All at once, the emotions began pulling the other way and protesting, we're not coming.

[11 : 12] At one point, when Will and I were in the middle of an earnest intercession, I suddenly found one of those traitorous emotions had snared my imagination and had run off to the golf course.

And it was all I could do to drag the wicked rascal back. That's going to happen for me again on April 10th, final round of the Masters. He goes on, at the end of the hour, if you had asked me, have you had a good time?

I would have had to reply, no. It's been a wearying wrestle with contrary emotions and a truant imagination from beginning to end.

Yet, he says, something was happening. For one thing, Will and I really taught the emotions that we were completely independent of them. Also, one morning, about two weeks after the contest began, just when Will and I were going for another time of prayer, I overheard one of the emotions whisper to the other, come on you guys, it's no use wasting any more time resisting, they're just going to do it the same.

And that morning, he says, for the first time, even though the emotions were suddenly uncooperative, they were at least quiescent, which allowed Will and me to get on with prayer undistractingly.

[12 : 33] It took him some time. It's going to take us some time. I know it's a lengthy quote, but I'm going to go back to Baxter.

He concludes by saying, then another couple of weeks later, what do you think happened? During one of my prayer times, when Will and I were no more thinking of the emotions than the man on the moon, one of the most vigorous of the emotions, unexpectedly sprang up and shouted, Hallelujah!

At which all the other emotions exclaimed, Amen! And for the first time, the whole of my being, intellect, will, and emotions was united in one coordinated prayer operation.

According to our text, verse 14, Paul must have conquered our very ordinary problem.

For this reason, but even notice, back to 3.1, he had began for this reason, been interrupted in his own attempt to go to prayer, but now he's here. For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father.

[13 : 48] this posture of Paul bowing in prayer must be ours. Interestingly, it's not new to the letter.

Take a look back. Pastor Nee preached it for us in chapter 1, verse 15 and following. For this reason, because I've heard of your faith in the Lord, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

And then he goes on to discuss his prayer. So the letter actually opens with Paul praying for the church that she would have what she needs in Christ to fulfill all that Christ has for her.

in fact, the letter is going to shut down on prayer. Chapter 6, verse 18, he's going to tell the church that they should be praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.

To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints and also for me. The letter opens in prayer. The letter shuts down in prayer.

[15 : 06] Chapter 3, verse 1, he's set out to talk to you about prayer. Chapter 3, verse 15, he's back to prayer. Are you taking the full effect of chapter 3 in the letter?

It's not lost on me. The ministry of proclamation and prayer are the two primary means Paul employed to accomplish God's vision.

E.M. Bounds put it this way, the men and women who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. You know, being on your knees wasn't a normal posture for prayer.

They would stand at the wall. They would stand and pray, hands up raised. But even as we sang today, there are created beings in the presence of God bowing before him.

Paul's on his knees in prayer. I confess, I'm rarely on my knees in prayer. Rarely. You're learning more about me than maybe you wanted.

[16 : 16] I pray, but this posture, even the posture is interesting to me. I want us to be a church that prays.

It is true we must train one another how to speak to one another and others about God's gospel, but not without also learning how to speak to God about the state of our own souls and the others who need the gospel.

In fact, we'd probably be better off sometimes, as Coleman once put it, to learn how to speak to God about others before we speak to others about God. There's an interesting thing here.

Prayer then helps us know the condition of our own heart. There's an interesting thing in this verse here that I want you to see.

And unfortunately, in sermons, it's the subtleties of Paul's language that often the preacher feels he has to move on from.

[17 : 33] But I love verse 15. For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

More literally, I bow my knees before the Father from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth actually derives its own name. The fatherhood of our lives derives from the fatherhood of God.

And when you consider what he's just said about the multi-ethnic membership of the family, the subtlety of the verse is clear. The vision for God in the church is an eternal multi-ethnic membership.

One father, by the way, your father, my father, all our different fathers all derive their name from the one father.

We are one I don't care if you don't know your father, the church then is your home where you have a father. What a beautiful thing.

[18 : 38] This reminder that the whole church now is before Paul's mind on his knees in prayer.

You and I, it's just so interesting. multiple ethnicities rarely eat a meal together, let alone enjoy this kind of shared ministry together.

Let me restate what I think God intends from this passage for our church in this morning. To accomplish the vision God has put before us, Christ Church Chicago must become a church family that prays.

And that's going to be tough because I look out over you, I see a people who know how to produce. And if you know how to produce things, don't need to waste much time praying for things.

Why pray about it if I can just get it done? What should we be praying for?

[19 : 57] Notice the sermon is now moving to the content of that prayer. We should be praying for two things, but they fall under one word, strength.

verse 16 through 17a, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

That opening phrase of verse 17, almost mirroring the language of verse 16, that through His Spirit in your inner being, you have Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith.

He's praying that the church would be strengthened by the indwelling Christ according to the power of God's Spirit. He's praying for inner strength.

That's what we need to learn how to pray for. Which is interesting to me, because what do we normally pray for? we pray for the external realities of life.

[21 : 20] And that's not necessarily bad. I mean, the Lord's prayer says, give us this day our daily bread. But, notice the difference. We are often most concerned with the external things, even the fullness of our physical frame, and Paul is praying that they would be strengthened in their inner being with a kind of power.

Notice the word their power. It's going to occur again later in the text. It's a very important phrase in the whole letter to this point. There was a power, according to the Spirit, that raised Jesus from the dead, that was the same power that broke down the wall of hostility between one another, it's now that same power that actually strengthens you in your inner person.

That Christ who dwells in you would be indwelling you. That's what he's praying for. For Paul, the outer man was always wasting away.

But what he's asking for here is that you would be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell. He may really dwell. He may live.

He may take up his abode in you. That he may be all in you. Just last Tuesday night, the elders of this church sat in that corner over there, around two eight-foot tables, Pastor Pace joining us on a Zoom call from Jacksonville, and the list of our entire membership before us, praying, praying, in small groups for the membership of this church, that she would be strengthened name by name by name, child by child by child, strengthened, from A Allison to Z Zulker.

[23 : 38] And if there's an A before Allison, we got them too. I don't think there's anybody after Zulker. Praying for you.

Praying that you would be strengthened by the power of the Spirit that Christ would truly dwell in you.

Not only strengthened is the prayer request for the indwelling of Christ within the church, but notice verses 17b through 19, strengthened to also know the love of Christ.

that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what's the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know that love.

And it is a love that surpasses knowledge, so that you would be filled in all the fullness of God. We ought to be praying, not only for a strengthening for the indwelling of Christ in our church, but that we would be strengthened to know the love, of Christ for our church.

[24 : 56] And notice all the superlatives of Paul. I mean, look at the way he puts it. He wants you to know what the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of that love.

He wants you to know that it's a love that surpasses any knowledge of that love. He wants you to know that it's a love that will fill you with all the fullness of God kind of love. You need to know Jesus loves you.

That's what he's praying. And you need to know how big that love is, how strong that love is, how wide that love is, how deep that love is.

East to west, from the heavens above to the depths of where they just found Shackleton's ship that's been there 3,000 meters below the surface of the earth since, or the waters of the Antarctic since 19, whatever it was, when it went down.

Four miles off where they had it charted. Perhaps you've seen it. You need to know that God's love for you in Christ goes from the deepest part of the ocean floor to the furthest galaxies yet to be discovered.

[26 : 17] It's that high. Jesus loves you. He loves me. Yeah, let me tell you, he loves you. He loves you beyond any ability for me to measure you on the door frame of our home.

His love for you is from east to west, from the heavens to the floor. Jesus' love for you cannot be measured is what he's trying to say.

His love for you cannot be weighed is what he wants you to know. His love cannot be counted. His love cannot be contained. His love is boundless, limitless.

It's all in all. His love for you is complete. Do you know how much you are loved? I know sometimes you don't believe it.

Me? Yeah, Jesus loves me. This I know, for the Bible tells me so.

[27 : 28] little ones to him belong. They are weak, you are weak, but he is strong. Yes, why do you think that little song has to repeat it?

Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so. And my pastor did this morning as well.

Isn't this beautiful? Because you know who you are. and yet Jesus loves you. I mean, that ought to just make you giddy. That ought to make you smile.

I mean, that ought to make you get the joke. It's unbelievable. He loves me. He doesn't just love me a little bit. He loves me a whole lot of it.

You can't measure out his love for me. You can't stand underneath the rod of his love on me. You can't dive down into the ocean and get deep enough of how he loves me.

[28 : 31] Jesus. The sweetest name I know. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. The sweetest name I know.

That's what he's praying. He's praying that the church would be strengthened for the indwelling of Christ. He's praying that the church would be strengthened to know the love of Christ.

This strengthening is what's needed in the church if we are to accomplish the vision for Christ. Let me put it to you this way. Prayer is the most underdeveloped muscle in our body.

prayer. We are weakened because we have not yet come to grips with our prayerlessness.

Our our my your our prayerlessness is an indication of an atrophied muscle that keeps us from walking as we should.

[29 : 52] Maybe that's why that posture is good. You know on the knees. You know you get down on his knees man I got a hamstring after 20 minutes. I didn't know I had a muscle down there.

We have to develop a prayer muscle. We have a prayer he goes on and says and so that you would be filled with all the fullness of God.

I mean what is that? How can you be filled with all the fullness of God? That's impossible. But if you and I stood on the ocean sands and if Christ Jesus and his boundless limitless love his person and his work were as vast as let's say the ocean waters and you were like a child's beach bucket on the sand water water water water water and you certainly can't attain to all the fullness of Christ in God but if your bucket is plunged into that ocean you are filled with all the fullness of that which is in Christ in other words you can get all you need you can get everything in

Christ in fact that's what he wants that's what he wants he wants you to be filled with all the fullness of God and this all comes about through prayer notice Paul Paul is actually dependent on God's spirit to accomplish this for God's people you're not going to know what you're supposed to do in life if you don't pray we're not going to go where we need to go in life if we don't pray we're not going to be the kind of family we're supposed to be if we don't pray in fact when we first started our monthly prayer gathering it was a consequence of being at Joe Pace's church down in Florida and you remember we heard that preacher I'm going to talk tonight about provocative prayer provocative prayer and I met with the preacher afterwards and I said I've always been frightened to institute a prayer meme because

I'm afraid nobody's going to come he's like you don't need to worry it might only be two people you're a lighthouse all right I'll get out of the accent he's from the Caribbean I can't do it one time I tried to impersonate Alistair Begg who's Scottish and since when is Alistair Begg Indian so I acknowledge that I'm getting lost in regard to what my point is here he said the prayer meeting is the lighthouse you only need one person in the lighthouse to keep all the other ships off the reefs he said don't free yourself free yourself of wondering how many are coming just keep doing it because the ones that are praying are actually the ones that are protecting all the others that are not here but out on the waters of life and we came back and we instituted a monthly prayer gathering and it is the prayer gathering that also reminds me of how far we have to go to become a congregation of prayer we need prayer led by congregants in the congregational prayer and the service we need prayer in community groups more than an afterthought we need prayer when we rise in the morning

[34 : 01] I myself might do well to get on my knees and pray before crawling into bed at night we need a membership that says unless the Lord detains me when our family gathers for prayer I'm here because prayer is the means by which God accomplishes his work in us and through us in fact we got a couple of ideas already we're kicking around the three of us as well as all the staff I mean why not make our Sunday monthly prayer gathering a little earlier and why not call it prayer and praise praise is prayer and why not follow it with a soup supper on a Sunday but get it early enough in the day where you're like I'm not going out on Sunday at 730 well we'll keep working on it but we are committed to becoming a congregation of prayer for without it there is no way to accomplish our vision let me shut this down let me move!

that's what you pray! you're to pray you know what to pray for what can you expect prayer to result in look at verses 20 and 21 prayer results in praise now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen!

prayer praise is what follows prayer after a bowing on the knees there is a rising in benediction it is a song that comes on the season of intercession this is why in normal church services after the preaching of the word there's a there's a singing of a hymn this is why in the african-american church they don't even wait to announce the number for you to turn to the preacher moves from the preaching to the singing because praise is a consequence of prayer and praise notice what it does it actually is what is then fulfilling the very purposes for which you were made notice verse 20 now to him again in verse 21 to him to him what to him who can do more than you think about but also verse 21 to him be glory in the church that goes all the way back to chapter one the purpose for which we were created we were created to praise the inexhaustible!

permanent glories of God in Christ and prayer brings you to praise prayer is the means by which you fulfill the purpose for which you were made and it isn't by what you do when you get out of the prayer meeting it's the glory you gave God in the midst of the prayer!

me you are who you're supposed to be when you're in prayer! Christ church we exist to praise the everlasting inexhaustible boundless permanent glories of God's grace that are ours in Christ Christ church God's plan for his son is to unite all things in him Christ church that ministry of reconciliation both vertical and horizontal and it now rests with us Christ church you fulfill it by proclaiming the gospel and by praying yourself strong and Christ church when you do that you end up saying together amen which is so be it let it be that simple word is a prayer unto itself it's your it's your it's your voice saying may this be so

[38 : 29] God all that I've heard today amen amen develop this muscle in me make this true of us give me this experience help my mind over my emotion this church is built to be a home for the proclamation of God's word this church is built to become a house of prayer and in doing so we fulfill our purpose our heavenly father here we are quickly and almost flippantly in prayer so let me say our heavenly father our one father our father from whom all the diversity of the ethnicities and their understandings of fatherhood have come our heavenly father make us strong in our inner being by the power that raised Jesus from the dead make us strong in our knowledge of how much you love us and to this prayer may we attach our benediction of praise and thereby fulfill the purposes for which we were born in Jesus name amen