

Praying The Gospel Into Our Hearts

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 May 2011

Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[0 : 00] I'd love to hear the Apostle Paul preach, but I also love to hear the Apostle Paul pray. No one prays as passionately or expansively as does Paul, except, of course, the Lord Jesus, in whose name Paul is praying.

After studying all of Paul's prayers in all of Paul's letters, New Testament scholar David Crump observes in his helpful book, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, that Paul asks for nothing in moderation. Paul asks for nothing in moderation. Says Dr. Crump, Paul's prayers are marked by a blatant extravagance.

Superlatives become the lingua franca of all of Paul's prayers. That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory.

Now unto him who is able to do far more than all we ask or think. I'd love to hear Paul preach the gospel. But I also love to hear Paul pray the gospel.

[1 : 21] And I especially love to hear him pray the prayer in the text before us today, in the third chapter of his letter to the Ephesians. Paul is in prison in Rome, the capital city of the greatest empire on earth.

He is awaiting trial before Caesar, Nero Caesar, the most powerful person on earth. A Roman soldier guards him day and night. He is allowed some contact with his friends, like with the man named Tychicus.

Who at the end of the letter to the Ephesians, Paul calls the beloved brother, the faithful minister in the Lord. Tychicus is serving Paul as a kind of secretary. He's writing down the letter as Paul dictates it.

And by the time Paul and Tychicus get to the text before us today, Paul is on his knees. Praying. On his knees.

Not the normal posture for a Jew to take when praying. Kneeling was the normal posture for Gentiles. But not for Jews.

[2 : 32] Jews stood to pray, lifting their hands high. But not this time. This time Paul gets down on his knees. Partly to identify with Gentiles.

But mostly because kneeling expresses a deeper reverence and a more fervent longing. On his knees. On his knees.

Paul, as it were. Takes the hearts. Of the believers in Ephesus into his hands. And then lifts their hearts to the living God.

Asking the Father. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul loves to call him. Asking the Father. To do in their hearts. What only the Father can do.

In human hearts. Up to this point in his letter. Paul has been opening up the gospel of Jesus Christ. Up to this point in his letter.

[3 : 30] He's been articulating this alternative vision of reality. Shaped by the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Remember the note on which he began?

The note that has been sustained throughout all he writes? Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

Talk about extravagance. And talk about superlatives. Every spiritual blessing. Every blessing the Spirit has to give us in Christ.

He then opens up and identifies some of this every. Chosen before the foundation of the world.

Adopted into the family of God. Redeemed. Forgiven.

Clued in on the mystery of God's working in the world. Given an inheritance in God's future. Sealed with the Holy Spirit. On he goes. I've often wondered how Tychicus could keep up with the dictation.

[4 : 31] Then Paul reports how he had been praying. Asking the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. To open the eyes of our hearts. So that we might know. So that we might know the hope of his calling. We might know the riches of his glory. Of his inheritance in the saints. And that we might know the surpassing greatness of God's power toward us. The power God exercised when he raised Christ from the dead.

And seated him far above all powers. Paul then proclaims the gospel of God's power. That God takes people. Who were dead in their sins.

And who were captive to evil. And makes them. Us. Alive together with Christ. Raising us up with Christ. Seating us with Christ in the heavenly places. And as a result.

God making us into new creation. God's handiwork in the world. Then Paul puts all of that in the context of God's massive building project.

[5 : 30] That God is creating a new human race. Made up of Jews and Gentiles. Who constitute a new human society in the world. Centered in the one who brings peace.

Who then are granted access into the very presence of the Holy God. Who then constitute the new dwelling place of God in the world. Then. Paul seems to begin to pray.

Chapter 3 verse 1. For this reason I. We anticipate him praying. But he stops. To share more personally. To tell us what this grace has been doing in his own life.

About how grace. Through grace. God revealed the mystery to him. How through grace. God called him to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ. And then Paul shares how the tribulations.

The tribulations he is experiencing in doing this gospel ministry. The pressure. The crushing pressure. Is all about bringing the gospel to the Gentiles.

[6 : 30] That last conviction of his. By the way. Gives me great hope. To cope with the crushing pressure. I've been living on. Under this last little while.

Trusting that this pressure. Is part of bringing the kingdom. In our city. Then. At chapter 3 verse 14. Paul gets on his knees.

In the midst of all this pressure. And in light of this gospel. He's been preaching. He prays. In chapter 1. He reports. That he has been praying.

In chapter 3. He actually prays. He prays the gospel. He prays the gospel into our hearts. In chapter 1.

He prayed that we might know the gospel. In chapter 3. He's praying that we might experience the gospel. Not only know the good news. But actually experience the good news.

[7 : 27] More exactly. In chapter 1. He prayed that we might know the God of the gospel. In chapter 3 now. He's praying that we might experience the God of the gospel.

The triune God. The Father. Son. And Holy Spirit. This has to be for me. One of the most moving scenes in all of scripture. Paul the prisoner.

In very crummy circumstance. Gets down on his knees. Takes our hearts into his hands. And prays the gospel he preaches into our hearts.

He does not want the gospel to get stuck in our heads. As mere theory. He wants the gospel to be a living reality. So he boldly asks the Father to make it so.

That Paul prays. Is in and of itself. One of the clearest signs. That Paul really believes the gospel. Because of Jesus.

[8 : 30] Death and resurrection. The way into the presence of the living God. The door into the heart of the holy God. Has been opened. As Richard Foster likes to put it in his book on prayer.

The Father's heart is open wide. And you are welcome to come in. Up to this point in his letter. Paul has used the word access twice. Chapter 2 verse 18.

For through Jesus Christ. We both Jews and Gentiles. Have our access in one spirit to the Father. Chapter 3 verse 12. In Christ Jesus our Lord. We have boldness and confident access.

He can say that. Because at the moment Jesus dies on the cross. That huge curtain in the Jerusalem temple. Was torn in two. From top to bottom. It's 60 feet high.

It's 30 feet wide. It's 12 inches thick. It's torn in two. From top to bottom. Clearly an act of God. Signaling. That the way into the holy of holies.

[9 : 30] The way into the very presence. Of the creator and redeemer. Is open wide. And we are welcome to come in. That Paul. Prays so passionately.

And expectantly. Reveals that he believes the gospel. That Paul prays. What he prays. Says that he really believes.

What the gospel declares. About the God of the gospel. I bow my knees. Before the Father. The Father. Paul loves to say this word.

Father. He refers to Father. In the letter to the Ephesians. More than anywhere else. It seems that after decades. Of walking with Jesus Christ. Paul is still stunned.

By the good news. Around this word. Father. The gospel declares. That those who follow Jesus. Those who belong to Jesus. Are brought into the same relationship.

[10:27] With the Father. That Jesus has. Jesus lives for his Father. Jesus loves his Father. Jesus trusts his Father. Jesus basks. In the goodness of his Father.

And Paul delights. To call God Father. Because he realizes. The unspeakable privilege. That we have been granted. The same status. With God.

That Jesus Christ has. We too. Are brought in. On this intimate relationship. With the Father. Jesus experienced. In his earthly ministry.

Jesus Father. Now relates to us. Just as he relates to Jesus. Jesus Father. Now loves us. Just as he loves Jesus. I bow my knees. Before the Father. Can you hear the wonder.

In his words. From whom. Every family on earth. Derives its name. It is not clear. What Paul is referring to here. I do not think.

[11:24] He is saying here. That God the Father. Is the model. Of fatherhood. In the world. That is true. God the Father. Is a good model. For fatherhood. But that is not what Paul. Is emphasizing here.

This term. Family. As in every family. Refers to a group of people. Related to a common. Ancestor. Or a leader. So it can refer to a family. A clan. A movement.

Or a nation. I think Paul is saying. That any group of people. In heaven. And on earth. Finds its true life. In the Father. Of Jesus Christ. Any nuclear family.

And the family of God. The church. All find true life. In the Father. Through the Spirit. In the Son. I bow my knees. Before the Father.

The Father. Who because of Jesus Christ. Is our Father. Your Father. My Father. Who delights. In the brothers. And sisters. Of his beloved Son. And says Paul.

[12:22] Who is able. Who is able. To do something. About. What we come. Into God's presence. To ask him. To do. You see. If the Father.

Is not able. We're going to have. A very nice conversation. But there's no hope. That anything is going to happen. As a result of praying. Paul knows. The God of the gospel. Now unto him.

Who is able. Notice how Paul's confidence. Builds. This God is able. This God is able. To do what we ask. This God is able. To do what we ask.

Or think. This God is able. To do all. That we ask. Or think. This God is able. To do beyond. All that we ask. Or think. This God is able. To do abundantly. Beyond all that we ask.

Or think. This God is able. To do exceedingly. Abundantly. Beyond all that we ask. Or think. I bow my knees. Before the Father. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who is able. Who.

[13:17] Says Paul. Acts. According to the riches. Of his glory. Mark that phrase. I pray. That he grants you. According to the riches. Of his glory.

Glory. This word glory. Refers to all that makes God be God. Riches of his glory. God's glory is inexhaustible. The well of God's essence.

Is bottomless. The well of all that makes God be God. Is bottomless. And so. Annie Johnson Flint. Can sing in her song. He giveth more grace.

Grace. He giveth more grace. When the burdens. Grow greater. He sendeth more strength. When the labors increase. To added affliction. He added his mercy.

To multiplied trial. His multiplied peace. His love has no limit. His grace has no measure. His power has no boundary. No one to men. For out of his infinite riches.

[14:12] In Jesus. He giveth. And giveth. And giveth again. And then this line. When we have exhausted. Our store of endurance. When our strength has failed.

Ere the day is half done. When we reach the end. Of our hoarded resources. Our father's forgiving. Is only begun. Paul bows his knees. Before the father of Jesus.

Who is able to do more. Than any of us can imagine. And who gives. Out of the treasures. Of his inexhaustible glory. And remember. Paul is saying all of this.

In a prison cell. Good news. This gospel works in prison cells. And on his knees. Paul takes our hearts. Into his hands.

Lifts them to the God of the gospel. And prays the gospel. Into our hearts. Father grant them. To be strengthened. With power.

[15:10] Through your spirit. In the inner person. The verb strengthen. Can be rendered. Fortify. Or invigorate. Oh father. Fortify them with power.

Invigorate them. With power. We know from his prayer. In chapter one. Of his letter. That the power. Paul has in mind. Is the power.

That raised Jesus. From the dead. And seated him. Above all powers. Oh father. Invigorate them. With resurrection power. You are able. Please. Father.

Fortify them. With your life giving power. In the inner person. In the deepest. Recesses. Of our being.

In his second letter. To the Corinthians. Paul speaks of the outer person. And the inner person. The outer person. Is decaying. Says Paul. Like tell me about it dude.

[16:06] But says Paul. The inner person. Is being renewed. Day by day. Father. Strengthen.

Their inner person. With the power. You exercised. When you relays. Your beloved son. From the grave. Through his spirit.

I pray that he would grant you. According to the riches. Of his glory. To be strengthened. With power. Through his spirit. In the inner person. Spirit. Person. Like the father.

And like Jesus the son. Spirit. God. Like the father. And like Jesus the son. The third person. Of the holy trinity. Who in the beginning. Hovered over the dark nothingness.

And brought the universe. Into being. Who in the middle of history. Hovered over the emptiness. Of the virgin's womb. And brought the god man. Into being. The spirit.

[17:00] Who in this moment. Of history. Hovers over our lives. Bringing resurrection life. To our inner persons. Even as the outer person. Decays.

Gordon V. Puts it this way. The living God. Is a God of power. And by the holy spirit. The power of the living God. Is present. With and for us. And in us.

And so J.B. Phillips. Paraphrases Paul's prayer for us. That out of the glorious riches. Of his resources. The father. The father will enable you. To know. The strength.

Of the spirit. The spirit. The spirit. The spirit. Inner. Reinforcement. So that. Paul prays.

For the power. Of the holy spirit. So that. So that. Christ. Might dwell. In your hearts. Christ. Now Paul is not here.

[17:58] Asking. That Christ. Come to dwell. In our hearts. Christ. Has already done that. He's already come. To believers. And begun to live. In and with us.

It's what makes us Christians. Christ. In ones. The risen Jesus. Has come to dwell. With us. And in us. It's what Jesus promised. Just before going to the cross.

Abide in me. And I in you. Live in me. And I in you. So Paul is not praying. That Christ. Now come. Come to believers. To begin. To dwell in them. In chapter 2.

Verse 22. He says. Of believers. That we are being built together. Into a dwelling place. Of God. In the spirit. The indwelling. Has already begun. Paul has taken.

Our hearts. Into his hands. And is praying. That we be strengthened. By the power. Of the holy spirit. So that. This indwelling.

[18:53] Might be. All that Christ. Christ. Wants it. To be. Paul is praying. That Christ. Might completely. Dwell. In our hearts.

Now hearts. And inner person. Are related. Yet heart. Goes a little deeper. If inner person. Means the center. Of personhood. Then heart.

Refers. To the control center. Of our personhood. Paul is praying. That Christ. Dwell. At the control. Center.

Of our inner. Person. Now. Here. I simply. Have to share. A little bit. Of a linguistic. Study. I know. That not everyone. Appreciates this.

When I do this. In a sermon. But what I want you. To see. Will help you. Better understand. What Paul is praying for. So just a little. Linguistic study. For just a few minutes.

[19:48] The basic. Greek word. For dwell. Is oikeo. O-I-K-E-O. If you're writing. Oikeo. It's related. To the noun.

Oikos. Which means. Home. Oikeo. To dwell. In a home. Now. In the Greek language. One can add. Different prepositions.

To the same. Verb. Creating. Another word. With different meanings. So. For example. One can add. To oikeo. The preposition. Para.

Meaning. Beside. Or alongside. The resulting word. Par oikeo. Would then mean. Dwell beside. Dwell alongside.

It came to mean. Dwell as a visitor. Dwell as a guest. Dwell as a sojourner. Par oikeo. Comes into the English language. In the word. Perish. As church.

[20 : 45] Perish. The apostle Peter. Uses this word. In reference. To the church. The church. Is the parish. Because the church. Dwells in the world. As a visitor. As a guest.

As a sojourner. We never fully settle down. Because this is not yet our home. Now. Here is what I want you to see. About what Paul prays. One can also add.

To this word. Oikeo. Dwell. The preposition. Kata. Meaning. Down. Down. The resulting word. Kata. Oikeo. Would then mean.

Dwell down. Settle down. Move in. As a permanent residence. Now. This is the word. Paul uses. In his prayer.

Father. Invigorate them. Invigorate. Their inner persons. With the power. Of your spirit. So that Christ. May.

[21 : 41] Kata. Oikeo. In their hearts. And not just. Par. Oikeo. Father. Invigorate. The inner persons. Of their being. With the power. Of your holy spirit.

So that Christ. Will dwell. In their hearts. Not as a visitor. But as permanent resident. Not as a guest. But as master. In the so called.

Evangelical. World. We speak of. Receiving Christ. Christ. We invite people. To receive. Christ. Into their hearts.

And if you have never done that. I encourage you to do it today. Receive. Christ. Into your hearts. But we need to understand. This word. In its middle eastern context. In the context.

In which Jesus first used it. In the middle east. To receive someone. Into your home. Is yes. To receive. Receive the person. As a guest.

[22 : 37] But it is also. And primarily. To then treat. The guest. As master. Of the home. It's an amazing thing.

To visit. A middle eastern home. Everything in the home. Now revolves around. This guest. Who is treated. As the master. Everything in the home.

Now happens. At the most. Subtle bidding. Of the guest. Who is being treated. As master. I had the opportunity. Of spending some days.

In Beirut. Lebanon. My host. Was a professor. At Arab theological. Arab Baptist. Theological seminary. I had gone there. With my father-in-law. And another man.

My father-in-law. And another man. Had gone off. And done something. This day. So my host. Took me. To this most. Exquisite restaurant. High on the hills. Above this. Mediterranean sea. One of the most.

[23 : 30] Beautiful scenes. I've ever seen. In the world. Oh and the food. Was exquisite. We went home. And then my father-in-law. Joined us at the home. And I made the mistake. I said.

In the presence of the host. To my father-in-law. You should have seen. Where he took me. For lunch today. And that. Professor. On a limited budget.

Then. Took my father-in-law. And me. That night. To that restaurant. I was a guest. But I was treated. As master. My slightest whim. Was now his.

Order. Do you now see. Why Paul. Praised for power. It takes power. To alter.

Everything. In your home. Around a new person. Who has moved in. It takes power. To change the routines. Power to change. The attitudes.

[24 : 25] Power to switch. From living. Our lives. As our own. Master. To living. At the beckon. And call. Of the new master. Who has moved in. And it takes power.

To remodel the house. Christ. Is taking up residence. This is now. Going to become. His place. He's making it. His own. Home. If you have never read.

I commend you. The little booklet. I carry in my pocket. My heart. Christ home. By Robert Boyd. Munger. This man took me under wing. When I was a young seminary student.

Forty years ago. Dr. Munger. In this little book. My heart. Christ home. Works with the imagery. Inherent. In. Kat. Oikeo. Settle down. He encouraged us.

To think of our lives. As this house. And then he encourages us. To think through all the rooms. That are in the house. And then. He encourages us. One by one. To welcome Christ. Into each of those.

[25 : 21] Rooms. Munger encourages us. As Paul would. To let Christ. Go beyond the living room. Where many of us. Make him stay. To invite Christ.

To go into the kitchen. And dining room. And have our. Eating habits. Transformed. To go into the living room. And transform our relationships. To go into the recreation room.

And transform the way we use our free time. To go into the study. And the library. And to transform what we allow ourselves to read. And go into our minds. To go into the bedroom.

And to transform this most intimate place. And then to go into all the secret closets. And bring his healing. And his cleansing. And his liberating.

In prison. The apostle Paul. Gets down on his knees. Takes our hearts. Into his hands. And prays the gospel.

[26 : 20] Into them. Father. Good and gracious. Father of Jesus. You who are able. To do way beyond. What any of us.

Can ask. Or think. Will you. Will you. Out of your. Inexhaustible. Riches. Of your essence.

Strengthen. Our inner. Persons. By the power.

Of your Holy Spirit. So that Christ. May freely. Live. In us. In all his fullness. In us. Well that's half.

Of the prayer. Next week. We will. Pray. Paul's. Other extravagant. Expectations. I love to hear.

Paul preach. But I especially. Love to hear him pray. Amen.