

Praying The Gospel Further Into Our Hearts

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[0 : 00] As I said last week, I love to hear the Apostle Paul preach, but I also love to hear the Apostle Paul pray. No one prays as passionately and as expansively as Paul does, except the Lord Jesus, of course, who taught Paul to pray and in whose name Paul prays.

Listen, after studying all of the prayers in all of Paul's letters, New Testament scholar David Crump observes that Paul asks for nothing in moderation.

Says Dr. Crump, Paul's prayers are marked by blatant extravagance, as we saw last Sunday. It says Dr. Crump, superlatives become the lingua franca of all of Paul's praying, according to the riches of his grace, to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowing, filled up to all the fullness of God, unto him who is able to do far more exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine.

I love to hear Paul preach the gospel, but I really love to hear Paul pray the gospel. I especially love to hear him pray the prayers that are recorded in his letter to the Ephesians, and I especially love to hear him pray the prayer in the third chapter of Ephesians.

Listen again. I bow my knees before the Father that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner person, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

[1 : 48] And you, being rooted and grounded in love, be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, and to be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Nothing in moderation. Blatant. Extravagance. Slice. Slice. Up to this point in his letter, Paul has been opening up for us the gospel according to Jesus Christ.

He has been articulating for us an alternative vision. An alternative vision shaped by the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth.

And then he falls to his knees. Not his normal posture for praying. he falls to his knees and on his knees he takes our hearts into his hands lifts them to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and prays the gospel he has been preaching into our hearts in jail he gets down on his knees in jail in prison awaiting trial before Caesar in prison where he no doubt agonized over why he the ambassador of king of kings and lord of lords should be in such crummy circumstances where he no doubt prayed for release from captivity and where he no doubt prayed for wisdom to make his case before the emperor in jail in prison he gets down on his knees takes our hearts into his hands lifts them to the God of the gospel and then prays the gospel into the control center of our being in chapter 1 of his letter he tells us that he has been prayed he gives us a sort of prayer report in chapter 3 he actually prays in chapter 1 he prays that we might know the gospel in chapter 3 he prays that we might experience the gospel in chapter 1 he prays that we might know the God of the gospel in chapter 3 he prays that we might experience the God of the gospel the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit look again at the one to whom Paul prays the father

I bow my knees before the father the father of Jesus who because of Jesus and because of what Jesus has done in obedience to the father is now our father you see Paul is taking seriously seriously here what Jesus taught us Jesus said in his sermon on the mount when you pray say our father it's one of the greatest blessings of the gospel to address the awesome and holy God the living God as father to address the awesome and holy God the way Jesus does the way the only begotten son of the father addresses him you see Paul really believes the gospel that in and because of Jesus Christ we have been adopted by Jesus' father and now we share the same status Jesus has with his father Jesus' father whom Jesus loves and trusts is now our father your father my father who delights in you just as he delights in Jesus who delights in me in the same way that he delights in Jesus

[5 : 26] I bow my knees before the father Paul says in jail and so do I who is able oh massively able Paul expresses it in this doxology from a prison cell every time you read this doxology remember it comes from a prison cell it's not coming from a theological library somewhere it's coming from a prison cell now unto him who is able able to do able to do what we ask able to do what we imagine able to do all that we ask or imagine able to do far more than all that we ask or imagine able to do abundantly far more than all we ask or imagine able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine what are you facing today?

The God before whom Paul kneels is able and acts according to the riches of his glory. According to the riches of his glory.

As I said last week, glory is simply a way of saying all that makes God be God. Riches of his glory. The riches of God's very essence.

Wisdom, power, majesty, love, justice, creativity, unfathomable riches. The Father of the Lord Jesus Christ acts toward us out of the inexhaustible wealth of God's very being.

Last Sunday, we listened to Paul pray the first half of his blatantly extravagant prayer. That he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner person so that Christ may dwell in your hearts.

[7 : 18] Paul takes our hearts into his hands, lifts them to the living God and prays, Father, good and gracious Father of Jesus, you who are able to do way beyond anything we can dream.

Will you, out of the bottomless well of your very being, of what makes you be God, will you invigorate our inner person by the power of your Spirit, by the power that raised Jesus from the dead so that Jesus can freely dwell in every nook and cranny of our existence.

Then, news on. So now let us listen to Paul pray the second half of this prayer. that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

many commentators throughout church history have rightly said that this second half of Paul's prayer is the boldest prayer anyone has ever prayed.

Second only to the bold prayer that Jesus prayed recorded in John 17. The second half of the prayer begins with an exclamation. Paul is dictating his praying to Tychicus, Tychicus writing as fast as he can.

[8 : 49] And then, as is typical of Paul, right in the middle of this exquisitely crafted sentence, Paul breaks out into an exclamation. You are rooted and grounded in love.

He's not praying that we become rooted and grounded in love. That is already the case even if we do not yet experience it. Because of all that God has done for the world in Jesus Christ and because Jesus Christ has come to dwell in our hearts, Paul can exclaim, you are rooted and grounded in love.

Whether you and I feel it, it is true. You are rooted and grounded in love. As is typical of Paul, he mixes metaphors.

rooted, it is an agricultural metaphor. Grounded or founded, it is an architectural metaphor. He does this earlier in his letter, in the second chapter, where he speaks of us being a building that is growing.

Buildings don't grow. in whom the whole building is being fitted together, growing into a holy temple. He does this into the letter to the Corinthians, where he speaks of the disciples of Jesus as both God's building and God's field.

[10 : 07] He does this in the letter to the Colossians, saying that we are rooted and grounded in the faith. We are rooted and grounded in Christ. You are rooted and grounded in love. Love is the soil in which you are growing.

Love is the foundation on which you are standing. You are rooted and grounded in love. And then Paul gets on to praying again. That you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.

May be able. It's better translated as may be strong enough. May be strong enough. Paul recognizes that we are facing a challenge.

And he's asking the Father to make us strong enough to press through this challenge. What is the challenge? To comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth.

Comprehend. Katalambano. I love that verb. It means to catch, to grasp, to seize, to lay hold of. It's the same verb that Paul uses in his letter to the Philippians where he says, I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me.

[11 : 35] I press on to catch that by which Christ caught me. I want to grasp that for which Christ grasped me. I want to seize that for which Christ seized me.

It's the same verb the Apostle John uses in his prologue to his gospel. John 1, 5. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.

The light shines in the darkness, praise God, but the light did not catch it. The light did not grasp it. The light did not seize it. The light did not lay hold of the light.

Indeed, the light laid hold of the darkness. Paul takes our hearts into his hands, asks the Father to make us strong enough to catch, grasp, seize, lay hold of the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth.

Now, to what do these terms refer? Breath, length, height, depth. What does Paul have in his mind here? Throughout church history, different opinions have been advanced.

[12 : 40] The oldest known view is that the terms refer to the four points of the cross. Breadth and length, height and depth.

Some pretty heavyweight theologians of the early church taught this. People like Origen and Irenaeus of the second century and Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine of the fourth century.

Later in the fourth century, the prevailing view was that the four terms referred to the dimension of a perfect sphere, which in turn stood for the perfection of the God, Paul prays, we know.

In the 18th and 19th century, some leading commentators believed that the terms referred to the dimensions of the new temple made up of believers, which Paul speaks about in the second chapter of his letter.

In the 20th century, a number of scholars suggested that the terms refer to the dimensions of the inheritance we believers enjoy in the future, of which Paul speaks in the first chapter of his letter.

[13 : 41] A view that many have leaned toward throughout church history is that breadth and length and height and depth refers to wisdom, to the wisdom of God.

In Ephesians chapter 1, verse 8, Paul says that in all wisdom God has made known his plan to the world. In chapter 1, verse 17, Paul prays that we might have a spirit of wisdom.

And then in chapter 3, verse 10, Paul says that through the church the manifold wisdom of God is being proclaimed to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. So many people argue that Paul is praying that we be strong enough to comprehend God's wisdom, its breadth and length and height and depth.

Now, there's some biblical precedence for taking this time. In the book of Job, for instance, one of Job's friends, Zophar, says to Job, would that God might speak and open his lips against you and show you the secrets of wisdom.

And then Zophar asked Job, can you discover the depth of God? Can you discover the limits of the Almighty? They are high as the heavens. Can you do that? Deeper than a shell, what can you know?

[14 : 57] Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea. In his letter to the Romans, Paul cries out, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments, unfathomable his ways. So, it is possible that here in Ephesians 3, Paul is asking the Father to help us comprehend, to help us lay hold of the vast wisdom of God.

Oh, please, Father, would you do that? But it seems to me that the many believers throughout church history, John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, John Calvin, are right to argue that the terms breadth, height, length, and depth refer to love.

Before he used those terms, he speaks of being rooted and grounded in love. And after he uses those terms, he speaks of knowing the love of Christ that surpasses knowing. In prison, Paul asks the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ to make us by the Holy Spirit strong enough to catch, grasp, seize, lay hold of the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Notice he prays, may be strong enough. Why? Why pray this way? Why pray be strong enough? Because Paul knows us.

[16 : 33] He knows our heart. He knows that we all have external circumstances or internal dynamics that keep us from laying hold of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

Some of us experience things in childhood that keep haunting us and preventing us from experiencing the love of God. love. Some of us have those tapes whirling in our minds that we are unworthy of anyone's love, let alone the love of God.

Some of us have done things in our past that we simply cannot forget that keep us from experiencing the love of God. Some of us are facing circumstances that seem to call the love of God into question.

many of us look out at the misery in the world today and we ask where is the love of God? Some of us are disappointed with God. Some of us feel that God has let us down and we're not sure we can trust this claim that he loves us.

Some of us have been trying to be good Christians all our life. Some of us have been trying to keep the rules so to speak and God is not acting in ways we think we deserve God to act and we're very angry with God and that anger keeps us from experiencing anyone's love let alone the love of God.

[17 : 59] And there's the enemy of Jesus the enemy of our souls who does not want any human being to know God and his love. He keeps fueling our sense of unworthiness.

He keeps pointing to our sins and telling us our sins make us unworthy of the love of God. Oh Father make them strong enough to overcome all the obstacles.

Make them strong enough to overcome any and all the lies and confusion. Make them strong enough oh God to lay hold of the breadth and length and height and depth of your love for the world in Jesus Christ.

Father help us seize the breadth of your love broad enough to include millions and millions of people from every nation and every clan. Father help us seize the length of your love long enough that it keeps going on to all eternity.

Long enough that it reaches out to the farthest places. No one is beyond the reach of this love.

Father help us seize the height of your love the height that takes us into heaven.

[19 : 10] The height that lifts us up in Christ and seats us on the heavenly places. Father help us seize the depth of your love. This love that goes down, way down in Jesus all the way into the depth of our sin and sickness, all the way into the depth of our darkness and death.

You came all the way down and you laid hold of us. Father empower us to lay hold of your love so we can sing how old the deep deep love of Jesus, how vast, unmeasured, boundless, free.

And then if that were not enough. And then Paul prays the prayer that blows the circuit board.

I pray that out of the riches of his glory you might be filled up to all the fullness of God.

that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God. Be filled.

[20 : 22] Notice it's passive meaning we do not do this filling although we try in many ways.

Passive. It's the so-called divine passive because only God can do it.

Only God can fill us. Fill them Father. This verb is better translated as completely filled.

Completely filled them Father. Fill them up to full capacity. Fill them up to the brim. Yes please. And what is the measure of this filling?

To all the fullness of God. Paul takes our hearts into his hand lifts them up to the living God and asks that they be so completely filled that the filling can only be measured by the fullness of God.

Can you handle this? What is this fullness of God? One scholar gets about as close as we possibly can when he writes the fullness of God is the sum total of the divine attributes.

[21 : 39] The fullness of God is the sum total of God's wisdom and power and holiness and mercy and on and on the list goes. The fullness of God like the glory of God is all that makes God be God.

Oh my goodness. Down on his knees in prison of all places Paul prays that we broken imperfect empty human beings be filled up to the degree to the extent to the level that can only be measured by the sum total of all the divine attributes.

Can you handle this? the question is with what does God fill us? With what does God fill us so that the filling is measured by the fullness of God?

With what does God fill us? Ready? The fullness of God. God fills us with the fullness of God so that the filling can only be measured by the fullness of God.

In his letter to the Colossians which is a sister letter to the Ephesians Paul says that the fullness of God dwells in Christ. Colossians 1:19 It was the Father's good pleasure that all the fullness should dwell in him.

[23 : 04] And then Colossians 2:10 Paul says that in Christ we have been made complete. We have Jesus Christ we participate in all that is in Jesus Christ.

In Christ we are in his fullness and his fullness is the fullness of God. See why the church has called this the boldest prayer ever prayed.

Paul is asking the Father of Jesus to fill the disciples of Jesus with and to the measure of all that makes the living God be the living God.

Can you handle this? Of course not. It overwhelms us. Rightly so. You see Paul is not praying for a little spiritual pick me up.

Paul is not praying that somehow our perspective gets changed and we are able to cope with the stresses in our life. Paul is not praying for a little shot in the arm to help us go on living our self directed and self empowered lives.

[24 : 15] Paul is praying that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ fill us up with himself. That the living God fill us so full that the filling can only be measured by the fullness of God himself.

God can can you handle that? No but God can. It is his good pleasure. Because the prayer is so bold it's important to point out that Paul does not go on to suggest that as a result of this filling we become God or gods.

The filling does make us godly thank god but it doesn't make us god. When you fill a glass with water the glass does not become water. When you fill a balloon with helium the balloon does not become helium.

When you fill a human being with the filling of god the human being does not become god. Quite the contrary. To be filled up with god finally makes us truly human.

We finally become all that we were meant to be. It was when god breathed his breath into the humanoid that adam became a living being and so too with all of adam's descendants when the triune god fills us when the triune god fills us with all that makes the triune god be god we are finally all we were meant to be.

[25 : 58] Do you see what great compliment is being paid to us in this text Paul's prayer says we were made in such a way that the only thing that finally fills us is god father son and holy spirit nothing else can finally satisfy our hearts and souls because we were made by god and for god the only thing that finally fills us is god oh i love to hear paul preach but i really love to hear him pray nothing in moderation blatant extravagance oh god make them strong enough to lay hold of the boundless love of god and fill them up to all of your fullness do to just come to them the next time or say put