

Prayer for Inner Strength

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: 12 September 2021

Preacher: Paul Woodward

[0:00] Good morning. If you have your pew Bible, would you please turn to page 1160, I believe.

! We're going to be continuing on in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, beginning with verse 14 and following. Let me start this morning by giving a bit of context to what's going on in Ephesus as it directly pertains to Paul's prayer that we will talk about today.

Ephesus is located in Asia Minor. It's the largest city in Asia Minor, or what we today know as Western Turkey, at the time of Paul's writings. It's also the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire at this time.

Ephesus is an important city because of where it's located. It's also a major trade route and a commercial center. Ephesus is also a very important city because of the Temple of Artemis that's located there on a hill.

In fact, Ephesus is considered the guardian city of the goddess Artemis. Artemis was a Greek goddess who had the characteristics of and was portrayed as a mother goddess in the ancient Greek world.

[1:31] She had statues of her throughout the empire, paintings of her where she is nursing children. And it's in these grotesque pictures and images that when we see Paul, when he is living in Ephesus and they've got the riot at the temple, it's this goddess that they are calling great throughout Ephesus.

She's also identified with the goddess Hekate, who's the goddess of witchcraft and the moon and wanders the night and is worshipped in secret.

Artemis demanded human sacrifice and blood sacrifices to her. These were an important component to her ritual worship. So this is the culture and the context where Paul has lived for a while and now he is writing to the church who is centered in this area.

So it's a very dark and very pluralistic society. There are occult practices and mystery religions that are taking place here, much like where we live today.

Now it's important to keep in mind that the Bible is not written to us. It is written for us.

[3:00] What do I mean by that? Paul's original readers are the people in the churches of Ephesus here. He's writing to their specific circumstances, like all the other writers in Scripture.

However, Paul is the human author here, but there's another author in Scripture. And that's the Holy Spirit, the author with the capital A. He's the divine author.

And Scripture supernaturally speaks to two groups of people at a time. The group in the context to which it's written, the original audience here in Ephesus, and to us today.

So we have a situation in what's going on in Ephesus that's much like what goes on in Syracuse, in the state of New York, in the United States, and the world.

Now I'm not saying that we worship Artemis or do human sacrifices here in Syracuse. However, we do have occult practices that go on outside these walls.

[4:06] We do have people who worship other gods, pagan religions. I know people personally who worship the Norse pantheon of gods. And then there's always the context that if you're not worshipping the true God, you're worshipping some god, even if that's yourself.

With this in mind, I want to read again the verses in chapter 3, 14 through 21. This is the word of the Lord.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 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 you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints 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 we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. Verse 14 begins, For this reason. This is a common theme that we've seen already that Paul uses. But for what reason is he talking about here?

[6:04] Paul is referring back to everything that we've talked about up to this point. He began a prayer earlier, and as he was dictating his letter and saying his prayer, he began to kind of go off and talk about being predestined to adoption before the foundation of the earth and the unification between the Jews and the Gentiles in Christ.

Reconciliation between God and humanity. He spoke about God's glorious riches and His immeasurable greatness in power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might.

From chapter 1, verses 19 and 20. Paul spoke about God's grace and our faith, and he proclaimed the gospel to the Ephesian believers again.

He spoke of the mystery that was made known to him by revelation as we begin chapter 3, and about his insight into this mystery of Christ that has now been revealed by the Spirit of God to him. And this mystery, Paul says, is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and members of the same body, partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel.

[7:37] And it was this gospel that Paul was made a minister and a steward according to the gifts of God's grace through power, even though he says he's the very least among the saints.

Paul then talks about this because of this, he is suffering in prison. He's in prison, and he writes this letter, and it's for this reason, he says, that he bows his knees to the Father.

I have to wonder, because Paul is continuing his prayer that he started earlier. Has he been on his knees this whole time as he's dictated this letter to the churches of Ephesus?

Has he suffered in prayer on his knees as he writes this to the Ephesians and for us? It's these believers in Ephesus that he writes to that are in this pagan population amongst these ritual sacrifices, and Paul bows his knees before the Father.

Notice the intimacy that Paul uses here. He says he calls God the creator of heaven and earth, the king of the universe.

[8:56] He says, Father, Jesus, when he taught his disciples to pray, and we pray according to our book of common prayer, the Lord's prayer, we say, our Father.

Amazing that we can go to God because of our reconciliation through Christ and call him Father.

We are his children as believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, he goes on to say in verse 15, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

In the ancient world, specifically in the ancient Near East, a name expressed something about the very essence of that which was being named.

hence, to know the name was to know something about the fundamental traits, nature, or destiny of that to which the name belonged.

[10:07] Adam, the first human being, is given the task in Genesis 2 of naming the animals. He thereby becomes a participant in the creation since names call forth the true nature or essence of that which is named.

In other words, the namer shows dominion over that which is named. We do the same thing as parents today.

We name our children. It shows our care and our authority for those children. Paul is speaking here about all of creation.

Every family in heaven and on earth. We derive our name or part of our essence from God as his image bearers.

Now, you might think to yourself, it's an odd statement to say every family in heaven and on earth. The earth part we get.

[11:12] We understand that. But the heaven part can be a bit foreign to us. Can it? We heard Father I mention before about the rulers and the authorities, the powers and the dominions.

Last week he talked about these rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. He said that sometimes these can mean demons or it can be angelic beings.

I'll save it for another sermon if I ever get the opportunity, but there's a long history of who these heavenly beings are. we see them in Genesis 1, we see them in Genesis 3, Genesis 6, Genesis chapter 11, Psalm 82, Psalm 89, Deuteronomy 32 and so on.

But suffice it to say that we are talking about supernatural beings in the heavenly realm. Now, I also want us to see here that Paul has in mind and has already alluded to this body of believers, both Jew and Gentile.

He has in mind and keep in mind here that Paul is a first century Jew. He is a Pharisee among Pharisees. He has in his mind a picture of God's temple.

[12 : 33] And the temple is a place where heaven and earth come together. In the beginning, that temple was seen in the Garden of Eden.

This was the place where God and humanity walked together. Heaven and earth were inseparable and there were supernatural beings and earthly beings living together in the same realm.

think about the serpent in Genesis chapter 3. Was this a talking snake? A regular snake who could verbalize his opinion and his mind?

Or was this a fallen and rebellious being speaking through a snake who also wanted humanity to fall and to fail?

Sometimes I think that as modern Christians we might forget that there is a supernatural aspect to being a Christian and walking with God.

[13 : 39] It's easy for us to believe sometimes in things like angels and demons or to at least give them lip service. But we also have to keep in mind that things like angels are but a title or a function.

An angel is a messenger but there are other supernatural beings in scripture. Think for instance of the seraphim or the cherubim. The cherubim are the guardians for instance at the entrance way to the garden of Eden to not let humanity back in.

Or the seraphim are these burning snake and wing like figures that guard the throne of God. Or think about the heavenly host of Job where there is mention of a divine assembly giving counsel to God.

But the point here according to Paul is that everything is under the rule and authority of God the Father even these fallen supernatural rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

And I almost think that Paul through writing to the Ephesians is also kind of taking a jab at these rulers and authority as if to say God is still the king over you.

[15 : 04] It's also the name Jesus that is above every name in creation. In fact the Hebrew form of Jesus is Yeshua which means Yahweh saves.

And Yahweh has saved all who believe in the name of Jesus through the cross. That very place where these rulers and authorities thought that they won that they were victorious over God the creator is the very coronation place of our king Lord Jesus.

Paul goes on then to talk about and says according to the riches of his glory the king's riches here these lavish riches that we have read about throughout Ephesians according to these riches according to all that God has he may grant you to be strengthened.

So let's stop for a second. Why is Paul praying for the church in Ephesus to be strengthened? Strengthened for what purpose?

because the culture in which they live this culture where people are worshipping other gods specifically here in this context Artemis and these mystery religions Paul is saying that the church the body of Jesus God's holy temple needs spiritual strength in order to stay strong in Christ to meet these rulers and authorities and powers head on.

[16 : 49] Brothers and sisters we need that same strength today as well. How often do we pray for this kind of strength?

This is not the strength of body that we so often talk about when we pray. Many of us already know that as we get older our bodies do begin to diminish a bit.

The strength that we had in our youth begins to dwindle away. We all get things illnesses ailments creaky bones COVID cancer our bodies eventually wither away and die.

But Paul here is praying for a spiritual strength and notice what he says here with power a word that he's mentioned a few times before in Ephesians and not just any power but power through God's Holy Spirit.

The only way for the church to do the work that is given us to do by Jesus is to be strengthened with the power of the living God.

[18:08] God. And here Paul prays for the churches and Ephesus to have that very strength through the power of the Holy Spirit.

He then adds so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Now here's that picture again of the temple of God.

I said originally that temple was the Garden of Eden. Then came the fall of Adam and Eve. They were expelled from the Garden.

We know that later God walked amongst his people through the wilderness and there was the tabernacle and this was the dwelling place of God for a time.

Later David planned and Solomon built a temple and this temple was where the presence of God was amongst his people again for a time.

[19:11] That temple was also destroyed and we don't see a temple again until the opening of the New Testament where King Herod has built a temple.

But this temple does not house the presence of God because also as the New Testament opens we see God incarnate walking amongst his people.

Jesus tabernacling with his people is the very presence of God in humanity. God in the flesh walking amongst us.

But then after the death of Jesus the Holy Spirit now has power to come upon believers. This is where the presence of God dwells.

In Acts chapter 19 when Paul first comes into Ephesus and he asks believers there to what baptism have you been baptized and they replied to John's baptism.

[20:10] This was a baptism of repentance. But then Paul lays his hands on them and baptizes them with the Holy Spirit. In essence now God dwells in us.

The Spirit of Christ dwells in us and we are as believers as the church of Ephesus was little temples. Paul is praying that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

This is a continual indwelling as we are that temple. Jesus takes up residence within us through faith grounded in love.

Remember the letter to the Corinthians where Paul says now these three things remain. Faith, hope, and love and the greatest of these is love.

We are to display to those around us God's love. The indwelling of Jesus in our hearts through faith our faith in him and his faithfulness to us produces a love which we are to display to the world and show them who God truly is.

[21:34] Now, that doesn't make us gods like some might believe. It only makes us the temple to be used by God so that his presence can be known in the world.

His glory can be shown to the world. His love is freely given to those in the world through us. This is what Paul is talking about to the Ephesians, the original audience, but he also tells us that we are to be strengthened with power through God's spirit in our inner being.

Our inner being is who we truly are. not what's on the outside, not what's left when our bodies dwindled away. It is us, our essence, our very nature.

When the body deteriorates and finally goes away, it's that inner being that remains. Paul prays for us to be strengthened with power through his spirit in our inner being so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith that we being rooted and grounded in love may have strength.

And this strength is a strength to comprehend with all the saints. And I like the word, the word holy ones here. I prefer that term because it reminds us of how we are to be.

[23:11] And we are to comprehend with all of the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth. A strength to comprehend how vast, how immeasurable, how wonderful, how amazing, how great, how awesome is the love of God.

Paul here refers back to a passage in Job chapter 11 where Zophar is speaking to Job about God forgetting about his guilt and how unknowable God's ways are.

Yet as Christians, we have access to God's wisdom and forgiveness through Jesus. so he says to comprehend with all the saints, all the holy ones, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

To know a love, to know, to know a love that surpasses knowledge. that doesn't make sense in my head sometimes.

That's so paradoxical to know something that is unknowable. But Paul prays for us to have the strength of God to know and to understand.

[illegible]

[26:42] We, the Ephesian church then and we now, believers in Jesus, had the indwelling spirit of almighty God.

That was a temple with a false God, a temple that was empty and useless. But the real temple is the individual believer and the corporate believers in Jesus Christ.

God's holy people to show the love of God despite what goes on in the world. Despite the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

Paul prays for Christians to be strengthened both in Ephesus and today. And we should pray this same prayer. So that we are strengthened in this world that is so lost and so dark.

And being filled and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. We can show this very same love to those who do not know Jesus. So Paul concludes his prayer with a doxology in verse 20.

[28:55] That is God. Then all that we can ask or think. Despite our seemingly great imaginations. Despite our creativity.

This great God. Who has this infinite power and authority. The creator of the universe. The king of kings and lord of lords.

And in Christ Jesus throughout all generations. Even our generation today. Forever and ever.

[29:53] In Christ. Or in Christ Jesus. Or in him. It's one of the most common expressions that Paul uses in his writings.

We are free from the law of sin and death in Christ. In 1 Corinthians. He says we are sanctified in Christ. And then again in Romans. It's from God's love in Christ.

It's Paul's way of describing the salvation that we have received through our relationship with Jesus. Just as all people died spiritually in Adam.

And his victorious resurrection. He allows us to enter into the kingdom of God. Through his salvific work. We now experience the new creation by identifying with him in faith.

Downloaded from <https://vetanothersermon.host>

Are we praying for the other churches in our area here in Syracuse? For the churches in America? Are we praying for our brothers and sisters in Christ all over the world to have this strength to stand up to the rulers and authorities, the powers and dominions in the heavenly places?

Every day we see the horrors and the evils of the world. Are we praying for Christians to have strength to understand the love of God that surpasses all knowledge?

[32:21] Is this our prayer? Are we praying like Paul? With power? And do we have this strength with power through God's spirit in Christ with faith and grounded in love?

And if we do, are we praising God and his glory? Are we as the temple of God, the church of Christ, showing the world around us this dark, lost world, the light and the love of God?

The height and the depth and the width of the love of Jesus Christ? Let this be our prayer.

Let us pray. Father, we pray for strength. For strength to stand up in a lost and dark world.

Lord, we pray, Lord, that through the power of the Holy Spirit, that you would give us this strength, this strength to understand the love that you have for your creation, the love that you have for your church, so that we can go out and show this love to our neighbor.

[33:39] Father, we pray that you would continually dwell in our hearts and that you would give us this strength to stand up to these rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Father, we thank you. We love you. In Jesus' most precious name. Amen. Amen.