

Ephesians 3:14-21

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: 11 October 2026

Preacher: Rev. Jordan Senner

[0:00] Let us pray. Father, thank you for seeking us to worship you in spirit and in spirit.

! Father, thank you for seeking us to worship you in spirit and in spirit. and in spirit and in spirit this morning. We pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you would cause the truth of your Holy Word to sink deep into our hearts and minds and to lead us to you.

And we pray this in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen. You may be seated. Happy Thanksgiving, everybody.

How many of you have eaten turkey already? You poor souls. Turkey is really good, but it's not my favorite, if I'm honest.

But I will say I really look forward to the leftovers afterwards. I have a family that has a bit of British roots, and the British tend to think that everything tastes better in pie form.

[1:09] So after Thanksgiving, you make pies, and it's just so good afterwards. So the best thing is still to come, friends. Best thing is still to come. If you join me in page 977, Ephesians chapter 3, Paul has been spending some time on his knees in a Roman jail, praying for Christians in Ephesus.

And this is the second time in his letter to the Ephesians that he tells them what he has been praying for them while he's on his knees in jail. And he has three prayer requests.

God, strengthen them with your power. That's number one. God, show them your love. That's number two. And God, fill them with your fullness.

That's number three. Power, love, fullness. Now, before we look a little closer at each of these prayer requests, we've got to ask the question, why? Like, why does Paul pray for these things? And you will have probably noticed in the reading, right at the beginning of verse 14, the words, For this reason I bow my knees. For this reason I pray. In other words, Paul is saying, like, what I'm praying here is kind of connected to what's come before in the previous chapters.

[2:25] And you don't have to go too far to discover it. If you just back up a couple verses and go to chapter, go to verse 12 with me. You see Paul saying, reminding them, we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in the Lord Jesus.

And then he says in verse 13, so I ask you not to lose a heart over what I'm suffering for you, which is your glory. So the immediate context of this prayer is actually the fact that Paul is in imprisonment.

And the fact that he's in prison is having the potential effect, having an effect on some of the Christians in Ephesus. It's like what happens to you when you see someone you deeply love and admire suffering greatly and it seems unjustly.

Or you can imagine the Christians in that day and say, if that happened to Paul, could that happen to me? And it can cause you to grow discouraged or faint of heart, or it can weaken your faith and confidence in Christ.

And Paul's saying, I don't want that to happen to you. So he's bowing his knees while he's in prison and he's asking God to strengthen their discouraged hearts. So that's the immediate context of the prayer. But if you back up just a couple more verses, you actually get the context widens a bit.

[3:39] If you look at verse 10, Paul has been unfolding for us God's great plan for the universe. And in verse 10, he tells us that the church has a pretty significant role in it. He says, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God is being made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Verse 11, and this was not a mistake. Sometimes you can look around at the church and go, are you sure, Lord? Choosing us seemed like a mistake if that was your goal, to prove to all the powers of evil that Jesus is Lord.

And yet in verse 11, Paul's like, no, this was according to the eternal purpose that God has been realizing in the Lord Jesus. This isn't a new plan. This is what he's been on for all of history. And so the context here is Paul's saying there's a great plan for the world. God is going to bring everything in the universe, in heaven and on earth, under the gracious lordship of Jesus Christ. And not only is he going to bring it under the lordship of Jesus Christ, he is going to fill all of creation with the fullness of Jesus Christ.

So it dazzles with his beauty and his glory one day in a way that we've never experienced right now. And Paul is saying the church isn't just some spectator on the side watching God do this in the middle of history.

[4:55] The church is right the place in the middle of history where God is starting to do this. So the church in some sense is like this meant to be this little preview of the full movie that is to come for all creation.

Whoa. So Paul prays for the church. They're going to need some help. They're going to need God to strengthen them. And if we back it up even a few more verses, the context widens even more. If we go back all the way to chapter two, Paul has just told us that this church is the new humanity of God. That we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God has united us with Christ. He has raised us to newness of life. He has seated us with Christ at the right hand of God the Father. We are the new humanity. And not only that, Paul tells us that the church is the new temple of God.

That there was a time in which we were without God and without hope in the world. But in Christ, God has brought those who are far away, very near to him. And not only brought them near, he has made them his very dwelling place on earth.

[6:09] If you want to experience God and his presence, you got to be amongst his people. And Paul knows that these truths are too glorious for anybody to have the capacity to receive.

At least not to receive them all at once. It will take a lifetime and all of eternity for us to continue plumbing the depths of this. And so Paul prays in that cell, Lord, help this to sink into them. Help it to settle in their hearts day by day. Do not let your truth be like water off a duck's back. Let it be like an anchor in the ocean of their souls. Lord, let all that you have done in Christ sink deep into them.

So for all these reasons, the discouraging suffering of a friend and pastor, the great role of the church in God's redemptive purposes, and the astonishing depth of God's saving grace.

For all these reasons, Paul is kneeling in his jail cell and he's saying, God, strengthen them with your power. God, show them your love. God, fill them with your fullness.

[7:17] It's an astonishing prayer. So let's begin with the first request for God's strengthening power. Pick up with me in verse 14. Let's just start from the top.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven, and I think that's all angelic beings, and every family on earth, I think that's all human beings, is named, that according, and here's the first request, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power.

Do you notice there that the power that Paul wants us to experience comes straight out of the glory of God? It says in verse 16, according to the riches of his glory.

And God's glory is the weightiness of who he is. It is the brilliance of his character. There is something so beautiful and magnificent and deep and rich about God's life that it shines forth into the world.

And we discovered in the Old Testament that God said to Moses, my glory is so deep and rich that you cannot see my glory and live. And now Paul is praying that God, according to the riches of his glory, out of all the riches of who he is, would pour it into our hearts so that it would become the daily strength by which we live.

[8:44] The daily strength by which we live in this life. Now, how does God strengthen us, according to Paul, from his glory? And this is where Paul gives us two parallel statements that describe how God's power comes into our lives.

The first is in verse 16. The second half, he says, through the work of the Holy Spirit in your inner being. And then the parallel statement in verse 17, this means that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

So, it's interesting here. Paul is saying, God's power is not some like random impersonal force that you can reach and tap into by meditation. And he's not saying that God's power is some sort of force that you can manipulate by magical incantation.

He is saying, God's power is attached to God's presence. It is his personal presence actively involved and at work in our lives that has an strengthening effect in us.

So, it's as the Holy Spirit dwells in our inner humanity that the presence of Christ comes to dwell in our hearts. That the power of God comes to work in our lives and strengthen us.

[9:58] And so, Paul is praying, in other words, for like this Trinitarian work of inner spiritual fortification. It's a marvelous little prayer. Now, a question I've been wondering about is like, why do we need this strengthening?

Why do you and I need this strengthening? I think it's a pretty simple answer, actually. I think it's because we're weak. We're vulnerable. We're needy.

So, our bodies slow down and they break down and our hearts struggle to endure it with hope, don't they? Sometimes we've been hurt so badly in relationships that we don't know how we'll ever be able to forgive someday.

Where's the strength to forgive going to come from? Some of us are probably so lonely in this season of life that it feels almost impossible to resist certain temptations and addictions that fill that space of loneliness.

Where's that strength going to come from? Some of us know that we've been called to something by the Lord and yet we lack the courage and boldness to do it. And there are others of us who we know the Lord has asked us to wait and be patient and yet we lack the power to be patient.

[11:15] We are weak and we need the Lord strengthening and possibly one of the greatest weaknesses of all is when you think that you are not weak. You have this illusion that you are strong in yourself and that you don't actually need the Lord's strengthening.

It's the greatest weakness of all because it's the one weakness that we cannot see. And what Paul is saying is it is of paramount importance that we learn to depend on the power of God at work in us and not on our own sense of strength and internal capability.

And friends, I know this is a hard thing to do. I am preaching to the choir right now big time. I mean, if you've been raised in the rugged individualism of the West or I would like to think of the refined individualism of the Pacific Northwest, our temptation is always to think that we can do life on our own strength.

Our temptation is always to think even in the Christian life that what we really need is just a little bit more discipline and determination and then things would be the way they're supposed to be. Our temptation is even in the church to think that the church will grow by our own cleverness.

What we really need is better plans and cooler programs and more people in the pews. And this isn't just like a Western thing. This is also something that I think is hard for those of us who have been raised in honor-shame cultures in the East.

[12:43] I mean, to admit that you are weak is like social suicide. To show weakness is shame.

And yet, Paul is in a prison cell, one of the most shameful and weak of situations, bending his knee before Almighty God in a position of other dependence on the Lord, saying, Lord, strengthen them with your power.

that's the first petition. Lord, strengthen them. And the second is this. Show them, then, Lord, your love.

Show them your love. This second prayer request launches in the middle of verse 19. You can pick up with me. Paul prays that being rooted and grounded in love, you 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.

Not only is God immensely powerful, but he is altogether loving. And he wants us to grow in our capacity to know, experience, and receive his love on a day-to-day basis.

Now, it's hard for us to comprehend God's perfect love, I think in part because we live in a world where we never experience perfect love. Am I right?

[14:16] I mean, who among us has experienced love in a relationship that has not involved some element of pain or love been distorted into selfishness or manipulation or love that has been broken and short-lived?

And the instability of the love of other people, whether it's a child or a parent or a spouse or a friend, that instability of the experience of love in this world often leads to a deep insecurity in our lives where we're never fully secure in who we are because we've never fully experienced what it's like to be fully loved.

And in verse 18, Paul asks, he prays, he begs God in his prison cell and he says, God, show them all the dimensions of your love.

Let them see it, Lord. Let them know how tall it is, how deep it is, how wide it is, how long it is. And the interesting thing about the Bible is that God's love is never just his warm, fuzzy feelings for us. Although, there is this sense in the Bible of these images often of God being like a mother who affectionately gathers his children in or the tender love, the compassionate love of a father who receives a wayward child.

[15:31] That is there. But love in the scriptures is so often the way in which God puts action to his words. He says, I promise to do this and then he says, I am doing it.

He fulfills his words. And isn't that where love so often breaks down in this world is that our words and our promises are not fulfilled. But that's never the case with God. He always fulfills what he says he would do because Ephesians tells us that before the foundation of the world he chose us to be his children in love.

Ephesians tells us that he sent his son into the world to redeem us in love. And Ephesians tells us that in order to redeem us he sacrificed himself for us in love.

And he sacrificed himself for us in love so that he can purify us from all the impurities of our lives. And he purifies us in love so that we can be near to him in love.

And when we are near to him in love we realize that he is only preparing us for an eternity of love with him. And so broad and so long and so high and so deep is this love that Paul says to us we need to understand it with the whole church.

[16:42] Did you see that part? Where is it? I think it's in verse 18 that you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints. Did you see that little thing? Kind of wonder what's this all about?

By the way saints is not like superhuman Christians or something superheroes it's just like everybody that believes in Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit and is being made holy in Christ. And the interesting thing here is Paul is saying that the love of God is so capacious and so broad and so multidimensional that you by yourself can barely scratch the surface of it.

you need to be situated in a community with a whole bunch of other people in order to understand its depth. You need other people who are going to see aspects of the love that you don't see and are going to help you to see it.

You're going to need people who are going to respond to your mess with love and model to you the sort of love that God shows us so that you can experience it.

And you're going to need other people to see the way in which the love of God is at work in your life. They're going to be able to see it in ways that you can't see it and you're going to need that. And so Paul is saying this is something that is so great that we need the whole church in order for God to show it to us and even if the whole church were involved in this busy process of discovering all the depths of God's love we would never plumb the depths of it because we're told in verse 19 it surpasses knowledge.

[18:05] It's a bit like exploring the ocean. Humans know a lot about the ocean don't we? It's ecosystems it's habitats it's animals I read a scientific article this last week that said humans have only explored .001% of the deep ocean floor and the deep ocean floor accounts for 90% of the ocean.

In other words we've only explored .001% of 90% of the ocean and the same scientists in the same article suspect that there might be upwards of a million different species of organisms or animals in the ocean and we have only gotten to 15-20% of it so far.

There are depths in the ocean that we will never plumb probably and yet it's a great joy to discover isn't it? See God's love is vast it's vaster than the ocean so Paul prays Lord show them your love and when this happens when God does this in us it roots and grounds our lives in a way that nothing else in this world can so that's why in verse 17 Paul says that you being rooted and grounded in love it's an agricultural image of deep roots and it's an architectural image of firm foundations it's saying everything else in this life will leave you feeling rootless everything else in this world will change and it will not be a firm foundation for your life but if God shows you the love of Christ it will give you roots that you do not have and it will give you a foundation that will never be

shaken so Paul prays Lord strengthen them with your power and show them your love and the third and final thing that Paul prays is in the bottom half of verse 19 fill them with your fullness verse 19 Paul bows his knee and he prays that you may be filled with all the fullness of God now that's a doozy isn't it do any of you know what this means this is the climax of maybe all of the first three chapters God's presence is not only our strength it is our prize and it is our goal it's interesting here that Paul doesn't end by praying that people would be fixed he ends by praying that they would be filled he later will command the church saying be filled with the Holy Spirit and so we get this understanding that the Christian life is meant to be a full life yes fraught with difficulty and temptation and weakness and attack yet full now this word with is not intended to mean we're like this vessel being filled with the fullness of

God although that's true we get that all over the place in the New Testament we're being filled with God's presence this word with is actually meant more of the image of like a child that is growing up into fullness of stature and size and maturity an image that we'll get in chapter 4 later and so it's this image of not so much God pouring his fullness into us as us growing up to be like the fullness of God that's a bit that's a bit mind-blowing God's if you think about that for a second Paul is basically praying that we would become as much like God as we are able to become as human beings without ceasing to be human beings it's an astonishing thing I think C.S.

[22:02] Lewis in his book *The Weight of Glory* kind of captured an element of what this is like he says it is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses he says to remember that even the dullest most uninteresting person you talk to one day is a creature that if you saw what they were going to be in glory you would be tempted to worship them now so full of God are they going to be so like him are they going to be so Paul prays God fill them with your fullness fill them with yourself so that they will become more like you and it is an audacious prayer and it's something that I would say we should never pray unless scripture told us to pray and I think one author was right when he said there has never been a prayer written that has a bolder request so Paul pens from prison quite possibly the boldest prayer ever written three requests

God strengthen them with your power God show them your love God fill them with your fullness and yet even after all of this boldness Paul recognizes that his boldest prayers and his greatest thoughts fall far short of the reality of what God wants to do in us and that's verse 20 now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think or imagine according to the power at work within us to him be the glory I want to end with a prayer it's a prayer for the 12th Sunday after Trinity and it's not the 12th Sunday after Trinity but this is a prayer worth praying almighty and everlasting God you are always more ready to hear than we to pray and always more ready to give than we either desire or deserve pour upon us all the abundance of your mercy forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid and giving us those good things for which we are not worthy to ask except through the merits and mediation of Jesus

Christ our Savior who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever Amen
may