The Riches Of His Glory

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0:00] Bow our heads and pray as we stand. Father, as we start this year together, our simple prayer is that you would teach us to pray and how to pray.

And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Please sit down. If you would open back at Ephesians chapter 3, on page 977, this passage that Aaron's chosen is a brilliant way to start 2015.
It is a wonderful model of how to pray as the Apostle Paul prays for real inner change. It's a prayer for God's power because, I mean, it's useless, isn't it?
Unless God does something in us. It's all useless, isn't it? Unless God makes some sort of move for inner change in us. And I think it's important because it is possible as a Christian to get stuck.
It's possible to go backwards. It's possible as a Christian to have lots of beliefs but to feel disconnected with them and to begin to fake it.
[1:18] And the only thing that can bring everything together is the power of God. God himself is the only one who can do it. And that's why we need to pray and that's why we need this prayer.

And I want to say, if you take this prayer and prayed it for yourself and for your friends for this year, it would be a great gift to each other. But as it was read, I mean, we need to take a breath, I think, because the prayer itself takes our breath away.
It's just seven little verses. It takes less than 60 seconds to read but it pushes the boundaries of what we know and what we can imagine.
It pushes right up into the dimensions of the love of Jesus Christ and down into the depths of our heart. And Paul's assumption is that our hearts are just not deep enough or strong enough or clean enough to contain the greatness of his love or to retain the greatness of Christ's presence.
And so Paul, he prays this prayer so that God would strengthen the hearts of the Ephesians, that they would have real ongoing transformation.
[2:39] He's not praying more theology or more good feelings or more good decisions into the Ephesians. He's praying that God's power would directly enter into their hearts and strengthen their hearts so that they would know the love of Jesus Christ which surpasses knowledge.

And he's writing to a Christian who's having a rough time. Ephesus was the centre of the occult really pretty much in the Roman Empire. Not, certainly in Asia Minor, not the cute magic of Harry Potter and that kind of stuff.
This is the ugly stuff. Brutal spells, poisons, witchcraft, curses. In fact, when Christianity first went to Ephesus, when the Apostle Paul first preached the Gospel and people were converted and came to Christ in numbers, there was a riot that broke out.
And the Christians together brought all their books of magic, spells and witchery and burned them. And Luke tells us in the book of Acts that it was worth millions of dollars in today's currency.
So there's one way to make yourself unpopular in Ephesus. It's to say, it's to convert to Christianity and be open about it and say, I serve Jesus Christ as the only Lord. And the Apostle's circumstances are not that easy either.
[3:56] Peter, just have a look at the verse before our passage, verse 13, and the verse after, 4.1. He's in prison. He says, I ask you not, 3.13, I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is for your glory.

And then 4.1, I therefore a prisoner of the Lord urge you, etc., etc. Paul's in prison and he's writing to people who are under pressure.
And what does Paul pray for in the face of pressure, suffering, and imprisonment? He basically prays that these Christians will experience the power, they will grasp and realise what Jesus has done for them.

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Now, doesn't that make our prayers look pretty thin? Does mine? You know the sort of prayers, God bless them, stop all the difficulties in the world. It's very interesting though, isn't it?
He doesn't pray for their safety. He doesn't pray the troubles will go away. He doesn't pray for their healing. He doesn't pray they'll escape persecution and get really good jobs. He doesn't even pray that he'll get out of prison.
[5:07] But let me say, there's nothing wrong with praying for those things. What does he pray for? He has three asks, three petitions that he prays for.

The first is for the power of God to strengthen hearts so that Christ might dwell in them. The second is that we would be more strengthened to know and to grasp the love of Christ.
And the third is that we would be filled with all the fullness of God. And there's a sequence. There's an order. One, two, three. A rising order so that it comes up to this third request which is down there in verse 19, the end of verse 19, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
That God would fill your lives up to the measure of God's fullness. Now, you know what it is. We know what it is to be filled with greed, don't we?
Or filled with rage. Or filled with lust. Or filled with envy. Or filled with bitterness. Or filled with self. Or filled with entitlement. I mean, when you're filled with self-pity, there's just not a lot of space for anything else, pushes anything else.
[6:16] And it just, when you're feeling, like, when you're feeling self-pity and someone else has a need, they're a real annoyance, aren't there? There's no room to listen to them. And even when you listen to others, it just feeds your own self-pity.

It's God's desire for his church and for every individual believer as a Christian. And I think it's your deepest desire, it's certainly my deepest desire as well, to be filled with the measure of God's fullness.
Imagine that. That God himself would become the inner atmosphere and motivation that we'd be filled with him. It's the only thing that can overwhelm our own pride and our own self-preoccupation and our fears.
It's the only thing that can do that. And the only thing that can limit God's fullness in us is our own unwillingness to ask him.
None of us has less of Jesus than we really want. So Paul's prayer, which I think ought to be our prayer, is that God would pervade and permeate our lives, which is why it has to be a prayer.
[7:44] Christian life begins with prayer, continues with prayer, ends with prayer. Can't be a Christian unless you pray. And the reason is it's God's work. Can't do this in ourselves.

There's no secret, there's no method, there's no technique. If this is going to happen or it's going to begin to happen in us, it's going to be 100% dependent on God. You have to ask him to come and fill you.
I have to ask him. And I want to say this before we dive into the other two steps. It's very important to know it doesn't happen all at once. It's a lifelong process.
It doesn't matter whether you became a Christian at lunchtime today or you've grown up in a Christian family and you never know when you became a Christian in the first place. This is a process of being filled increasingly until the day when we see Jesus face to face.
That means if you've been a Christian for more than a year you ought to be able to look back and see changes in your own life or at least those around you ought to be able to see some changes. You should ask them.
[8:50] For Christmas I received a very generous gift. It's a plastic cover for a smartphone. And the instructions on the plastic case are full of lies.

Full of lies. Outrageous. Overblown claims. Let me read to you from the packaging. It says you've purchased a case that is second to none and most importantly you've joined a community of people who live their lives to the fullest.
I can share my case with you after. It says let this case be a symbol of the freedom you have to go more places and do more things.
It's ridiculous. But it's advertising. Yeah? But what the Apostle Paul says here to be filled with the fullness of God is not advertising.
And the reason is in verse 20. God is so much more able to do this and willing to do it than we are to ask. Just look at verse 20. Think about this.

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[9:57] Now to him that's to God who is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think according to the power at work within us. You see those six steps? God is able to do what we ask.

God is able to do what we ask or what we think. Imagine. God is able to do all that we ask or think. God is able to do more than all than all we think.
God is able to do abundantly more than all we ask or think. God is able to do far more abundantly than all. You get the picture? Where does God do it?
He doesn't just do it out there somewhere floating around. He does it by the power at work within us. This is the third step. This is the third request we ought to be praying for each other. That God would fill us with all his fullness.
So what are the other two? Let's look at the sequence. I just want to look at the first one and the second one and then we'll conclude and pray together. So what's the first request?
[11:02] It's that our hearts are strengthened by the power of God so that Christ can dwell in us. Just well let me read from the start. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.

Verse 14 from whom every family in heaven and earth is named which means that fatherhood comes from God. He is good and he is powerful. It's not that we project up onto God and make him a father.
But according to the riches of his glory here it comes he may grant you to be strengthened with power. This is the first petition. Strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
Now what's the obvious question? He's writing to Christians right? The obvious question is why does he why does he pray for something that Christians already have? I mean if you're a Christian doesn't Christ dwell in your heart by faith?
Isn't that the basic thing of what it means to be a Christian? Don't you know the love of Christ already? Hasn't God already filled you? Why pray for things that God's already given us?
[12:14] And the answer I think has to do with a difference of degree. Let me explain. You see you can have something without really experiencing it.

You can know something's true you can believe it's true and not really experience it in your inner heart. Okay? When we first came to Canada I was taken to a Canucks game.
When you go to an ice hockey game you're surrounded by experts who have all sorts of very strong opinions on what the players should do and the thing is they're not shy about sharing them are they?
Well I don't think anybody sitting around me had a clue of what it was to face the New York whatever they called the Rangers. They knew it but they didn't know it.
Well take the most delicious spread in the world Vegemite. You can know that it's full of vitamins and minerals and all sorts of good things.
[13:14] You can have all the facts at your disposal but it's until you taste it. You know what I'm saying. Every now and again you read a story in the newspaper about someone who's fabulously wealthy but lives as though they're poor living in squalor.

And this is where he begins in verse 16. Paul prays that God would give us this power according to his riches in glory.
When you read Paul's letters those little words the preposition is very important according to not out of his riches in glory. Let's say you're a student at university your father is worth a billion dollars and you ask him to help you on a monthly basis and he gives you ten dollars per month that would be out of his riches.
But if he gave you according to his riches it would be very different. And God is not misly he's not stingy he doesn't hold back blessing he doesn't hold back his power until we get our act together he's utterly generous I mean he gave his son for us.
But it is possible as a Christian to have all the riches of God at our disposal but not to realize or grasp it you can study theology you can read all the books you can be a leader you can be ordained you can have a lot of moving experience but not experience it in your inner being we need God's power to strengthen us inside to receive and experience and draw on the riches of his glory.
[14:55] Look at verse 16 again please that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

This is very familiar in the Bible you have an outward life it's what people see we also have an inner life and this inner being and this heart is not our emotions it's deeper than emotions it's not mind it's

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deeper than mind it's like the control center it's the core of who you are it drives your thinking and it drives your feeling and it drives your will in deciding see you can be utterly convinced of something intellectually you can even be mentally excited about it but it won't you know if it doesn't move you or if it doesn't change you it hasn't reached the bottom it hasn't reached the heart you can have you can exercise your will make all sorts of good decisions you can be a very disciplined person but without it really touching your heart and you can be moved and emotionally lifted without it changing the way you act and the way you live because it hasn't reached your heart because the problem is that our hearts are leaky vessels they're hard and unresponsive and rock like and the presence of Jesus Christ the presence of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming and so good and so glorious that our hearts need to be strengthened before we can really receive it they need to be strengthened with the very power of God not just at the beginning of the Christian life but every day so that we can receive more of him here are three little pictures our hearts are like sieves you know metal colanders with holes in them and God pours his blessing into our hearts and they don't stick it just flows through and you feel your heart dry you feel your heart empty we need the power of the Holy Spirit to heal us and to fill those gaps so that he would stay and fill us that he might dwell in us by faith or think of this our hearts are like fragile glass containers with all sorts of cracks thin glass containers and if you put something living and active and moving into that container it's going to break it we need the power of God to make our hearts soft and responsive so that they have elastic walls as you will so that they can respond and move as the dwelling of Christ and the fullness of Christ comes into our hearts and expands well here's the third picture which you're probably more familiar with our hearts are like houses and when we when we come to Christ we welcome God into our hearts and then we say to him

Lord look you can't go in there and there's a couple of rooms out the back are off limits and the basement is definitely somewhere you're not allowed to go but it doesn't work that way with God I mean if you're keeping some area back from God you know something sinful or something that's on your conscience that you're not going to give up some resentment some secret you can't ask him to fill you in the front half of the house and not the back half that back half you can't keep a corner and say look this is mine all the rest you can have you do that with a pet you don't do that with God right we need the power of God to flood us and fill us so that Jesus will increasingly dwell in us by his love I think that's partly why he doesn't pray about circumstances in this prayer not that it's wrong to we ought to bring everything to God in prayer but you see unless the power of God is strengthening us with the presence of Christ our outward circumstances are just going to blow us around aren't they?

we're not going to have any ballast or stability or the power to choose rightly but you see if the power of Christ and the fullness of Christ is entering into our hearts consistently and constantly it doesn't matter what your circumstances are really you'll be able to face it if you're having daily communion is the communion with Christ in your inner being you'll be able to deal with the most excruciating circumstances there are people in the room tonight who are again this is for you if you are a Christian without prayer without the power of the Holy Spirit strengthening your heart you are going to be a victim to your circumstances you're going to be easily controlled by your circumstances your happiness and your peace will become dependent on outward things your success or your failure or how you look to others but if Christ is dwelling and that word is permanent if Christ is dwelling in your hearts he becomes more real to you than other people his opinion what he thinks what he likes what he values it's one thing to say yes Jesus dwells in my heart and I know his love but how do you react when something is taken away from you when you lose something or if you fail or someone deeply hurts you if you're not drawing on the love of Christ you're going to be absolutely devastated so here is the thing we have to pray for this is the first in the chain please pray this for yourself pray it for your friends pray it for me that God would strengthen our hearts by his spirit by his power so that Christ would dwell in our hearts what's the second petition number two verses 18 and 19 it's strength again to grasp the love of Christ verse 18 now this is a bit strange but let me start at the end of verse 17 that you being rooted and grounded in love and here comes the prayer actually in verse 18 that you may have that you may have strength to comprehend 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 this is a great word comprehend it comes from wrestling comes from seizing grabbing hold of something when this happens to you it takes your breath away and there's an intensity to it but you see because it is the love of Christ that we are trying to grasp there is some wrestling going on here because the love of Christ is more it's more wonderful than

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we can imagine you know the love of Jesus is always greater than our experience of it and you can experience some things without grasping it this comprehend word it's not really a mental word grasping it
I mean you can ski whistle a mountain but you don't grasp the mountain you can know something of the love of God but only when God gives it in an increasing and expanding way and we have an increasing and expanding grasp of it that's when we begin to feel sorry for ourselves and begin to be useful and start helping others it's only the love of Jesus Christ that can draw us out of our own jealousy and self-pity and preoccupation we have to pray that God would give us strength to grasp the love of Christ which is ungraspable two weeks ago I was sitting in my car waiting in line to pay a ticket in a parking lot and is it me or have drivers in Vancouver got worse well the driver we'd be waiting in a long line the driver in front of me was taking ages and first they pretended they didn't have any money searching around in the car and because I was parked at 45 degrees [23:00] I could hear the conversation then they started to bargain with the attendant about the ticket it was $2.50 and there was a great line backed up behind me and it was getting on for 8 minutes I was in a hurry and I was full of anger I was doing all I could not to roll down my window and yell something and I'm not going to tell you what I was thinking I did now you'll be grateful it's the rector of St. John's I did restrain myself but I drove up I was full of rage absolutely stupid and as I began preparing this passage I began reflecting on the love of Jesus Christ and it was very obvious to me thank you Lord but what I should have done what I'll do next time is just get out of the car I'll go and pay the $2.50 isn't that an easy thing to do but you see I was so focused on myself at that time I wasn't even thinking about the love of

Christ so what Paul does is he meditates on the dimensions of Christ's love so that we can grasp something of its surpassing knowableness and you know here we are tonight beginning of 2015 we're going to be exploring this for all eternity we never come to the place of exhausting this and Paul just throws this out he speaks about the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of his love how broad is how wide is the love of God how broad is it well it's wide enough for you it's wide enough for every kind of person it doesn't matter who you are what you've done where you've come from what your pedigree is or isn't cuts across every prejudice and every arrogance and every judgment and also it's so wide it means we shouldn't give up on anyone if you're someone who gives up on people as a Christian you haven't grasped the breadth of his love how long is it well already in the book of Ephesians
Paul has said that before the world was created before clocks were in before time began Christ loved us and he promises Jesus promises I will never leave you I will never forsake you there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus nothing life death things present things to come angels powers height depth his love is eternal what's the height of his love the height the highest place is at the father's throne and if you trust in Jesus Christ you've been raised with him and you are seated there at his throne as John as Jesus said in the prayer in John 17 father I want to come back to my position of glory with you and I want to bring all those people with me and what's the depth of his love well of course he came from heaven above he entered our world to pluck us almost out of hell and on the cross he was plunged into the deepest depths of the bottomless pit for us he took our own darkness and depravity into himself he was utterly drowned in the depths of hell to raise us up there's dimensions we could talk about this all night but you see when we don't see the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the love of God in Christ what happens
Christian life becomes a bit of a grind Bible's dull church is a bit of a duty prayer becomes less frequent a bit of a chore and Jesus becomes less real and other people become more real and you quickly become overwhelmed by outside things people become more annoying very quickly it's harder to give it's harder to take joy in things you begin to feel like a fake it's why it's so helpful this prayer the apostle gives us he lays it down and I think you know I know we've been you've had a bit of a holiday and we're getting back into things but if you're feeling lethargic in your Christian life and half committed or if you're feeling you're blown around by external circumstances or if you're unsure of the love of Christ and the presence of Christ pray that God would strengthen you that you may grasp the love of Christ through its dimensions think through its dimensions it'll melt your heart you do it in the presence of God he will make your heart receptive and responsive and sensitive to his goodness

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I think that's why the apostle puts this little line in there with all the saints because it's not something we can do on our own prayer is hard he says in verse 18 that you may have the strength to comprehend the love of Christ with all the saints saints are not stained glass Christians saints is just an ordinary Christian we need each other for this and one of the ways that you know that God is filling you with his fullness is that you set your heart on the importance of the Christian community you see if your roots go down into the love of Jesus Christ you see the church not just from a human point of view you know we're an odd bunch and full of weakness and at best irrelevant to most people in the culture God's point of view is very different we sang tonight about God filling the world with the knowledge of him do you know how he's going to do that
[28:51] Ephesians tells us it's as he fills each one of us and as he fills his church that he'll fill the world with Christ Jesus the way Jesus extends the glory and love of God is by filling the church with himself and then filling the world with his church so I want to challenge you to pray this way pray it for yourself pray these three things for yourself pray these three things for your friends pray them for me one God would give us power by his Holy Spirit to strengthen our hearts that Christ would dwell in our hearts by faith two that we might be able to grasp somehow the dimensions of God's love ongoing three that we'd be filled with all the fullness of God and the answer won't come every day the answer may not come even once this year but it will come surely and deeply to him be the glory in the church and in

Christ Jesus in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever so let's kneel shall we and pray these things you

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