

Saturday Evening- English

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: 17 February 2018

Preacher: Rev David Campbell

[0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and turn back to Ephesians chapter 3, and we will read again verses 14 to 19.

Ephesians chapter 3, reading again verses 14 to 19. 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.

I want to direct your thoughts for a little this evening to what have been called the dimensions of the love of Christ.

Its breadth, its length, its depth, and its height. Paul is evidently eager that we should grasp these dimensions.

And since his eagerness is a reflection of the mind and will of God, it should be our desire to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ.

[2 : 22] Now you will notice that this is with Paul a matter of prayer. He tells us that he is on his knees before the Father.

These are things for which he is asking God, what should we pray for? As we pray for one another, what should we pray for?

As we pray for ourselves, well, here is one massive thing that we can pray for, that we 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 we too may be filled with all the fullness of God.

I think of that sermon that was preached so long ago by that great Baptist missionary, William Carey, in which he encouraged his congregation to ask great things of God.

Well, if ever great things were being asked of God, it is here in this prayer of the Apostle Paul, the dimensions of Christ's love are beyond our grasping, and yet he asks that we might grasp them.

[3 : 57] He declares the love of Christ to be a love that surpasses knowledge, and yet he prays that we might know that love, that we might grasp the ungraspable, that we might know the unknowable, and all with this astonishing end in view, that we might be filled with all the fullness of God.

What is that? It is, says one expositor, a Pauline way of saying to be all that God wants you to be, spiritually mature, filled with all the fullness of God.

And here is how it happens, as we grasp the ungraspable, as we know the unknowable, as our understanding and experience of the love of Christ in all its dimensions deepens.

Now there is, of course, an intellectual side to this knowing, this grasping, this comprehending. God has given us a revelation of Christ's love in Holy Scripture, and if we are to have another greater grasp of that love, then we need to give our minds to its study, which is what we are doing for a little this evening.

But, of course, there is much more to this knowledge of the love of Jesus than what we can grasp with our minds, what we can know simply as points of doctrine.

[5 : 53] You might know this doctrine of the love of Jesus back to front. You might be able to speak about it to others for an hour at a time with great depth and accuracy, but the question is, is it impacting us?

Is it shaping us? Is it transforming us? Is it enthralling us? Is it constraining us? Is it being increasingly reflected in our lives?

That is the kind of knowledge for which the Apostle Paul here is so eager. It is for that kind of knowledge that he is praying for.

It is only as the love of Christ is taking us in its grip and molding us into the Christians that God would have us to be that we are truly grasping it in its length and breadth and height and depth.

which in turn, that's why he prays about it and prays for it and prays as he does that we may have strength to comprehend.

[7 : 13] We need the enablement of God, don't we? First of all, to grasp the truth about this love of Jesus and then for that truth to make the difference to our lives that it ought to make.

And so as we come to this study of Paul's prayer, we make it the prayer of our own lips, of our own hearts, that it may please the Lord so to bless this meditation on the dimensions of the love of Christ that we may not only grasp these things with our minds but that this love would have its impact upon our hearts and lives as it ought to have.

Well, I have four questions to ask and after the first, he will know in advance what the other three are. First of all, what is its breadth?

Paul's prayer is that we might have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth of the love of Christ. So, what is its breadth?

Well, think with me first of all of how this love embraces people of every nation. This is a love that straddles the globe.

[8 : 54] We hear it, for example, in the terms of the Great Commission. Where are we to go in order to make disciples? We're to go to all the nation.

Christ would have us go into all the world in search of disciples. You hear it in his promise of power prior to his ascension into heaven.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

When the Holy Spirit comes down on the day of Pentecost, it is to equip the church for nothing less than global mission.

And I think of that new song that the Apostle John was privileged to hear and which he has recorded for us in the book of Revelation.

[9 : 59] That song in heaven. You were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

The realization of the vision of Psalm 67 that we've just been singing. What is all of this giving to us? It's giving to us a glimpse of the breadth of the love of Jesus.

It straddles the globe. It embraces people of every nation. But in addition to that, think of how it embraces people of every description.

It is a love that straddles the race. No one belongs to an excluded class. Whether they're Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, black or white, slave or free, educated or uneducated, they are welcome to the blessings of this love.

Whatever your color, whatever your history, whatever your religion, whatever your social status, whatever your struggles and sins, you may come within the arms of its embrace.

[11 : 25] we may know this love for ourselves. We may know this loving Jesus for ourselves.

And that, for example, is why it is that when our missionaries go out, they're not selective in the people to whom they reach out with the gospel, as if the gospel was only for some and not for all.

It's why we're not selective in our own witness, as if the gospel were only for some and not for all. There is this magnificent breath to the love of Jesus, straddling the globe, straddling the race, reaching out to all the nations and in those nations to people of every description, inviting all, forbidding none, and eventually, when all are gathered in, having in its embrace a multitude that no one can number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, the glorious breath of the love of Jesus.

Think about it. Where would we be if that love had been confined to Israel?

Or if it had refused to cross the sea from mainland Europe? Or if it had only been for the south of England? Or the south of Scotland?

[13 : 14] Or if it had been for people of a particular color of skin? But there is none of that in the love of Jesus.

This is a love that breaks every barrier, that crosses every divide, that acknowledges no borders, that admits no prejudice, prejudice, that denies its blessings to no one.

No one here. The breath of the love of Jesus. Let's ask a second question.

What is its length? Paul's prayer is that we would have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the length of the love of Christ?

So, what is its length? Well, let's begin by looking back and asking ourselves, is the love of Jesus a new thing?

[14 : 24] Here we are in the 21st century, surrounded on every hand by new things, things of which the people a century ago could not have even dreamt of.

Is that how it is with the love of Jesus? Well, it's obvious on the fact that Ephesians was written way back in the first century AD that the love of Jesus goes at least as far back as that.

So, for 2,000 years, to begin with, people have been tasting and experiencing this life-transforming love of the Lord Jesus.

But the love of Jesus doesn't start in Paul's day. The love of Jesus has been a transforming reality from the very time of the fall. Now, people may not have known it specifically as the love of Christ, of God's incarnate Son, or even of the second person of the Trinity.

They may not have known it just as the love of God, but they did know it. All those whom our Savior lovingly drew to himself throughout the whole of the Old Testament era, all whom he saved until the day when he came, and in addition, all those who might have known the blessings of that love but didn't.

[16 : 09] And I have in mind here that fascinating and, I fear, greatly neglected text in Acts 17 where the Apostle Paul speaks about how from one man God made every nation of men and how he determined the time set for them and the exact places where they should live and why he did so, so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.

How many there are who might have known this love and its blessings who would have known had they only sought the God who was so lovingly seeking them?

So we're tracing out the length of the love of Jesus and doing so by looking back and thus far we have got all the way back to the time of the fall but the amazing thing is that the love of Christ was already old at the time of the fall because the love of Jesus is a love that is from eternity.

If you want to see its true length you need to go back in your imagination into the everlasting that predates the dawn of time and there it is simply lost to vision because the love that saves the love that offers to save is a love quite literally from everlasting.

So you see its length by looking back and you see its length by looking forward.

[18 : 07] Let me ask you this and I'm speaking here to those of you who know this love on a personal level because it has saved you.

How long is it going to hold you in its embrace? How long are you going to have the place the special place that tonight you have in the heart of your loving Lord Jesus?

now here's how you can answer that question. Go forward in your imagination to the day of your death and say to yourself with the assurance that comes from the word of God I will know it that long.

And then go forward in your imaginations to the day of Christ's return. and say to yourself whether on earth or in heaven I will know it that long.

And then go forward in your imaginations from that point into eternity and say to yourself until I reach the end of this Christ will hold me in his embrace.

[19 : 44] This is a long love. Literally an everlasting love. A love that is without end.

You come within its embrace as Jesus lovingly welcomes you to do tonight and that love will hold you in its embrace forever and ever and ever.

It's life. Let's ask a third question. what is its height? Paul prays that we might have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the height of this love.

So what is its height? Well one way of answering that question is by considering how it puts us on the heights of blessing.

I'm sure it's not the only way to answer the question but think about it. The heights of blessing to which this love raises us and it opens our eyes and renews us and by the spirit unites us to the one whose love it is.

[21 : 18] Think about how it puts us in God's favor. Now there's a great thing. The love of Jesus is a reconciling love.

A love that ends the separation, the alienation between God and man that we date back to that dreadful fall in the garden of Eden.

It is a love that takes the righteous enmity out of the heart of God. A love that takes the utterly unrighteous enmity out of our hearts, brings us into the favor of God, blesses us with the friendship of God, enriches us fabulously with a relationship of mutual love, God and man, when we might only have known his anger.

And what is more, where it puts us, there it keeps us, the height to which it has raised us, putting us in the favor of God.

Think again of how it puts us in God's family. God has a special family, special human family, made up of men and women, boys and girls, whom he has adopted.

[22 : 50] So what do we trace? Well, certainly we trace it to the love of God, the Father. And you remember how explicitly the Apostle John makes that point at the beginning of the third chapter of his first letter, when he invites us to behold, to look, to see how great is the love that the Father has bestowed on us, in making us his children.

But it's not just to the love of the Father that we trace our sonship this evening, it is to the love of the Son as well. It's why he came into the world.

Galatians 4, it is why he was born of a woman, born under laws, why he suffered and died on the cross of Calvary, so that the blessing of being God's children might be ours, so that God might have the likes of us as his beloved sons and daughters.

Again, think how this love puts us on Christ's throne. Now here is something very mysterious and very wonderful.

2 Timothy, if we endure, if we persevere to the end, we will also reign with him, we will share in the government of the world that is to come.

[24 : 24] In Revelation 3, we hear it from his own lips. The one who conquers or overcomes, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne.

Now I cannot begin to tell you what that reigning with Christ will involve. But it's a marvel, isn't it?

when you think of where the love of Jesus found us in such rebellion against God that had that love not been accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, we would have resisted it forever.

That is where the love of Jesus found us. And here is where ultimately it will take us. It will put us beside him in the government of the world to come, reigning with Christ.

And then one last example, think of how it puts us in Christ's future world, which is of course the very place we've just been.

[25 : 55] What will we assist him in ruling the world that is to come? And what a world that will be. Don't our hearts long for it?

Every death, every disaster, every sickness, every sorrow, fitted to make us think and long for the world that is to be.

Because it will be so very different from this one. All things made new. No more death or sorrow or crying or pain.

The old order of things has forever passed away and there we will live forever. Now you take that on its own and add to it all the rest.

You see the height of blessing to which Christ's love has elevated us and shall elevate us.

[27 : 06] You come at the bidding of that love. You come in all your sin and confess it to the Lord.

You come and receive from him the salvation that he lovingly presses on you tonight. And that love will put you in God's favor.

And it will put you in God's family. And one day it will put you on Christ's throne. One day it will put you in his wonderful new world.

heart that shall not pass away. The height. The height. And one last question. What is its depth?

Paul's prayer is that we would have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the depth of this love. So, what is its depth?

[28 : 12] Well, I think to begin with, of the depth of sin from which this love raises us. Some of you may remember it's one of the most thrilling stories of the past decade.

The rescue back in 2010 of 33 Chilean miners. years. They had been trapped underground at great depth and their rescue seemed impossible and yet it was done.

Their rescuers found a way. Down and down and down and down they bored through 2,300 feet of rock and after 69 days every one of those Chilean miners brought up to safety.

Now, you think about the love of Christ. To what depths does it go in order to raise sinners?

And the answer is right down to the very deepest depths in which our sin has plunged us. It's the wonderful thing about the love of Jesus.

[29 : 46] It comes to us in the depths of our guilt, of our wretchedness, of our ruin and disgrace, depths of our self loathing and it offers us to lift us up.

The hand of Christ, the heart of Christ lovingly reaching down to us to the very worst of sinners and so too to the worst of saints and the most backslidden, tragically fallen of believers.

same loving hand, same loving heart extending its reach to lift you in the depths of your sin as a believer and grant you forgiveness and healing and a restored relationship and restored usefulness.

yes, it offers these things but not only offers it but in a multitude of cases goes beyond the offer taking hold of us and actually drawing us from the depths to the heights.

perhaps you've known that as a sinner whom the Lord drew up out of the depths to himself.

[31 : 35] Perhaps you've known it as a fallen Christian and the Lord reaching down and drawing you up again and setting your feet on solid rock and putting a new song in your mouth.

You will know it. if you will reach out to it. If you will reach out to him even this very night. So we estimate the depth of the love of Christ by the depth to which it goes into our sin in order to draw us up.

But there's another way of estimating the depth of this love and that is the depth of suffering the depth of suffering to which it took him which brings us of course to the cross which stands at the heart of this love love in all its dimensions.

You think of the breadth of Christ's love straddling the globe straddling the race. What kind of love is that Calvary love purchasing men for God from every tribe and nation and people and tongue?

When you think of it in its length what is this everlasting love that has taken us in its embrace if we are Christians and will hold us in its embrace for all eternity.

[33 : 27] A love that in order to secure its goal took our Saviour to the cross. I think of it in its height the blessing to which it raises us.

How can it do that when we deserve only to be cast into the depths of hell? The answer is the cross of Calvary.

Without a single stain being made upon the righteousness of God, he can now take the worst of sinners and make them the most beautiful of saints and at the heart of it all, the atoning work of Calvary.

Or think of it in its depth. How can God reach down and take us in all our foulness and make us clean in all our brokenness and make us whole in all our misery and give us joy in all our undeservingness and give us heaven Calvary see how it stands at the heart of the love of Jesus how in a sense the love of Jesus extends outward from the cross in all these different directions to the right and to the left up and down we especially link it however with the depth of his love how do you establish that

Jesus love is very wonderful sometimes our children sing that Jesus love is very wonderful how do you establish that us certainly by the things that it does for us the height of blessing to which it raises us and certainly from the people to whom it does that even the very worst of sinners but supremely supremely when you think of what it was willing to endure in order to bless us with eternal life the depth of suffering to which it took our beloved master these blessings might be freely ours what is this love in its breadth and length and height and depth a love which for the attainment of its goals took him to the cross and I appeal to those of you who are believers this evening not to doubt it not to question it but to believe it to rest in it and to come with confidence to the table of remembrance tomorrow the visible signs of his love and there receive it afresh and renew your commitment to giving back to this loving saviour the life so dearly bought and oh if you have yet to do so take the blessings of this love don't go away from this building this evening without the blessings of

[37 : 39] Jesus love the forgiveness of sins the favour of God the privilege of adoption promise of eternal life this love of Jesus freely offers these blessings to you come there is the voice of the loving master don't turn a deaf ear to it but listen and look and live and may God help you to do so let's pray almighty God we praise you for the love of Jesus what a wonderful thing it is we would bathe in it tonight we would be overwhelmed with it lost in wonder love and praise what an amazing thing that such love should have been set upon the likes of us and should have gone to such extraordinary lengths in order to accomplish its goal we would humble ourselves before you and we would thank you and we would rest in that love and we would take all of the difficult and dark providences of life and we would look at them in the light of that love and we would be comforted and where there are any true believers tonight still struggling with assurance of that love and so reluctant to come to the table we pray that even now the spirit would bear witness with their spirits that they are the children of God and give them courage to profess that and come and enjoy along with the rest of the saints these symbols of his love and the bread and the wine that we will feast on tomorrow and we pray that any here still with hearts fast closed against that love may be so moved by this love that their hearts will be opened and that

Jesus will no longer stand at a distance from them held at arms length pushed away but welcomed as the loving saviour that he is hear us oh God we pray for your son's sake amen amen we sing in closing the Scottish Psalter version of Psalm 130 you'll find this on page 421 Psalm 130 in the Scottish Psalter Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord shouldst mark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be

Psalm 130 Lord from the depths to thee I cried Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice soar to thou hear up to my supplications voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand with thou O Lord should mark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness that fear thou mayest be

I wait for God my soul doth wait my hope is in his word more than day that for morning watch my soul waits for the Lord I sing more than day that to watch the morning night to see let his trial open the Lord for within mercy be mercy be and plenty of redemption is ever found within and from all his iniquities he

Israel shall redeem and all his iniquities he Israel shall redeem and all his iniquities he shall redeem and his son and holy spirit rest upon and abide with us all both now and forever more amen