

Ephesians 3:14-21

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[0:00] our at least first half of the series in the book of Ephesians tonight in chapter 3, the end of chapter 3. That is page 977 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn with me there, and I'd encourage you to do that.

We're going to be walking through this text tonight. Amen. So Ephesians chapter 3, verses 14 through 21, the end of chapter 3.

Let me pray for us before I read this text for us. God, we do thank you for this moment that we get at the beginning of our week.

Lord, as many of us are looking out upon a week of work, and Lord, back to the callings that you've given us in the world. And Lord, we are here before you this evening, and we ask that by your spirit you would help us to attend well to your word.

And God, that you would meet us now, and fill us, and equip us, and speak to us, reveal yourself to us, God, through your word. So that we might go forth into the world as your people, as salt and light, as you call us, as you've made us.

[1:24] We ask this, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. Ephesians 3, verses 14 through 21. Let me read this for us. 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 it was able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Well, I think that one of the great spiritual dangers that we face as Christians is actually the danger of familiarity.

[2:38] That is, we become overly familiar with the things that we believe. I remember when I first moved to New Haven, over a decade ago now, when I first moved to the city, I really fell in love with the look of New Haven.

Some of you might be thinking, that guy's crazy. What is he talking about? But I loved it. I loved the gothic architecture of the colleges and the universities around town. I loved the colonial green with those like quintessential New England churches just sort of sitting there.

I even like the modernness and the contemporary buildings. I thought, and I still think, that this is a beautiful city. And you know, for the first six to twelve months of living here, I was pretty regularly impressed by it.

I thought, wow, I'm pretty thankful to be living in such a cool place. But of course, soon enough, you know what happened. It just became familiar. I got used to it.

And no, I still think it's a beautiful city. It no longer sort of fills me up and excites me like it used to. Every once in a while, I'll still get a little flicker. But not as often as I used to.

[3 : 44] I've grown familiar. You've probably had similar experiences to that. Well, what we have in our passage tonight is a prayer from the Apostle Paul.

It's a prayer that God would shatter our familiarity, our over-familiarity with the thing that's at the center of our faith.

A thing that we've all become too familiar with. And this familiarity is a problem. It's a problem because this over-familiarity with this thing at the center of our faith has left us empty.

Take a look at how the prayer ends in verse 19. Paul prays that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. That's the sort of summary, the climax of what he's praying for.

But I don't know about you. I don't think that's how many of us feel, is it? I think we feel spiritually empty. Dry. Dull. Lifeless.

[4 : 49] And this emptiness has caused a whole host of problems in our lives.

For one, at a very simple level, right? No one likes feeling empty. What a contradiction it is for us to be joyless, empty Christians.

This is just a rotten feeling at a personal level. So that's one problem. Second problem. What's more, this emptiness, it drives us to seek for other things other than God, doesn't it?

When it seems that God in Christ hasn't done the trick, we go searching for something else that will. We've tried Christianity and we're still empty. That's what we think. I wonder how many of us are in a relationship that we know we shouldn't be in.

Or how many of us are tempted to overeat or overdrink. Or how many of us are perhaps even contemplating leaving the church or leaving Christianity altogether?

[6 : 01] Because we're empty. And we don't know what to do about it. Third, this emptiness is a problem. It's because it leaves us ill-equipped to live in the new way that Christ has for us.

In the new year, in early January, we're going to pick up again with our Ephesians series. And we're going to walk through chapters 4 through 6 of this book. And in those chapters, Paul is going to begin to describe for us a whole new way of being human.

He's going to say, this was your old way of being human. But now, through what Christ has done, by the work of his spirit in you, he has opened up a whole new way of being a human.

One full of glory. One full of joy. One characterized ultimately by love.

But you see, we can't walk in that way. In our own strength. In our own wisdom. In our own resources. It's no surprise that this prayer comes right before we're about to launch into that new way of being human.

[7 : 23] Because Paul knows that we need to be filled with the fullness of God if we're going to live in that way. If we're going to live in that way and be the new humanity that we truly are in Christ, we need to be filled with God's fullness.

So what is it? What is it that we've become so overly familiar with? What is it that needs to become fresh again in our hearts so that we might be filled with all the fullness of God?

How do we need to start praying? What do we need to start praying for? Well, let's look at our text again.

And let's make some observations. We're going to build up to an answer to that question. And we're going to just let this text kind of unfold before us. And we're going to let it teach us how we need to be praying in the face of this problem that I think we all face.

So let's do that. Let's look again. And probably the most obvious observation that it's a prayer, right? For this reason, Paul's looking back over the whole book up to this point saying, for this reason, I'm praying.

[8:28] And as such, it's a model for our own prayer. And first, we see it's a very reverent prayer, is it not? Paul says, I'm bowing my knees before the Father. Now, that bowing of knees has almost become sort of synonymous with us and praying, right?

But that was not the typical way that you prayed in the first century. You didn't normally pray in Paul's day by bowing your knees. You prayed standing up, probably with your hands about like this. This is how you prayed in the first century.

This was a posture of reverence, of respect. But if you were bowing your knees, that was a sign of deep reverence.

Getting down low before God. Acknowledging him as God. So friends, do you get low before him?

On your knees? What would be an equivalent for us today? On our face? Not just literally, not just physically, but metaphorically. Are we engaged in reverent prayer?

[9:30] Second, notice that this is also a very Trinitarian prayer. Paul prays here to the Father. For the Father's spirit to work. So that Christ may dwell in us.

So there it is. Father, Spirit, Son, the one God. Who exists eternally as three persons. It's the sort of ground. It's the logic. It's the soil of Paul's prayer here.

So Paul in his prayer has God before him. But not just any God. The God of the Bible. God as he reveals himself to be.

Not some idol or figment of our imagination. Paul is praying to the true God. To the God who exists in freedom and power and holiness.

He's praying to the triune God. And friends, when we pray, when you and I pray, is this the God that we pray to? Or are we praying to some other God?

[10:31] As you approach God in prayer, do you pause? And do you consider? Do you sort of arrange your thoughts for a moment that this is the God to whom you must pray? Not some cold, distant deity.

You're not praying to some impersonal force. You're not praying to some cosmic Santa Claus who's just sitting in heaven trying to figure out who's naughty and nice. No.

You are praying to the Lord. The one true living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A Trinitarian prayer.

Third, it's also a very confident prayer, is it not? Verse 15. We're led to pray to the Father, Paul says, from whom every family on heaven and on earth is named.

Now, to sum it up, that is a picture of God the Father's sovereignty. To name in the Bible is to impart a meaning. You know, we use sort of names just to sort of label things, right?

[11:31] But in the biblical sort of picture of things, to name something was to sort of call forth its essence. To name in the Bible was to impart meaning. And that means that what we're being taught here about God the Father is that every family, every category and grouping of people on earth and angels in heaven are named.

That is, they are given their nature and place and meaning and purpose by God the Father. So, we pray to a God who is mighty, the namer of all.

But who, as verse 16 tells us, see there, who is also rich in glory according to the riches of his glory. You see, friends, there is an infinite store in this God.

An infinite treasure house, if you will, of glory. Out of which he can supply your deepest spiritual need.

The God who hears your prayer will never turn to you and say, well, you know, that's a really wonderful request.

[12 : 44] But you see, we're waiting on a shipment. The warehouse is a little low. It's Christmas after all. Lots of people are praying for patients and praying for new family members. Lots of orders are coming in.

You'll have to wait a few more days. By the way, if you tried Amazon, they might have some in stock. You could call them. Friends, that's never how God responds to our prayers.

There is no lack in God. He is rich in glory. But, you know, there's even more to this.

To pray according to the riches of his glory is to pray knowing not just that there are limitless resources available from which God will sort of pool when he answers our prayer.

No, it's not just that there are limitless resources, but this is also the measure whereby he answers us. What I mean by that is that God gives to us not only out of the riches of his glory, but he also gives as lavishly as he can according to the riches of his glory.

[13 : 55] Do you see? It's not just the source. It's the measure by which he gives. Here is a God who has what we need and who gives what we need, you see.

Who is both able and also willing. And so the prayer that we pray is a confident prayer that God is strong and God is rich in glory.

For this is also a prayer for the spirit's power. A prayer for the spirit's power. The first petition there is that we be strengthened with power through his spirit.

I wonder how often do we turn to our own devices or resources or abilities to try to answer our deep existential personal spiritual needs.

How often is our first attempt to turn to something we can do? Or, if not that, we turn to something someone else can do. We expect it from others. You know, I think often time, and I am guilty of this, often time our prayers amount to much, nothing much more than sort of taking our own plans to God and asking that God would then make them his plans.

[15 : 09] Do you know what I mean by that? Something like this. God, I'm really struggling at work. So help me to get a different job. And give me a job that pays a little more money because I've got all these other problems too.

And definitely give me a boss who's less of a jerk because my boss is a total jerk. And, well, that's a good plan. Right, God? There it is. Over and out.

Now, of course, there's nothing wrong with praying for a new job, right? There's nothing wrong for praying that God might even give you a new boss. Nothing wrong with that.

But along with that, are we, are you praying for the Spirit's power to strengthen you in the midst of that? Are you acknowledging that you are out of your depth and out of your resources and out of your own plans and you're out of your own strength and you really don't have it figured out?

And your own resources and your own plans and your own strength isn't going to cut it. In other words, are you praying for God to give you the strengthening of his Spirit?

[16 : 14] And not just the strengthening of his Spirit, but the strength of his Spirit in your inner being. This is the fifth thing we see in this prayer. That God may strengthen you according to the power of his Spirit in your inner being.

That's the end of verse 16. So you see, this isn't necessarily praying for our outward circumstances to change, is it? Now, there's nothing wrong with that kind of prayer.

It's okay to pray that things would change around you. But Paul's pushing us a little deeper here. We're praying here with regard to our inner being, our inner person.

Or as he'll say in the next verse, our heart. Which we saw way back in chapter 1, the heart is that center of who we are. That core of our personhood.

That driver's seat of all else that we do. And Paul's saying, don't you see, you need the Spirit's strengthening ministry there. Deep down in the center of who you are.

[17:17] Underneath all the layers that define who you think you are and all your different identities. Deep down, underneath all those things. You need the Spirit, God's Spirit, to give you strength there.

And to grant you power there. Yes, of course, the Spirit can do miraculous works of power in our outward being. We see that throughout the pages of Scripture, healing, signs, wonders, yes.

But we need the Spirit's power perhaps even more in our inner being. We need Him to come and we need Him to do a heart work. Because at that level, friends, even for us who are in Christ, we grow weak.

Have you ever tried starting a fire? Remember, where the house Beth and I moved into a year and a half ago, there's a fireplace. Which, we never had a fireplace.

So, I have no idea how to work a fireplace. I've been learning how to use a fireplace over the last 18 months. Have you ever tried starting a fire? Have you ever tried rekindling a fire? Maybe you're out camping and the fire goes out.

[18:24] And in the morning, you want to start it back up. If you have a couple of small coals sitting there in your fireplace or in your fire pit and they're growing dim and they're losing their light, what do you do?

Imagine you were to take a big sort of stack of wood, a bunch of thick logs, and just sort of pile them right on there. Thinking, well, fire's almost out. It needs some fuel. Well, you know what would happen.

It would just put those coals out, right? What do you need to do instead? Instead, over those barely surviving coals, you need to get down low. And you need to gently begin to blow, don't you?

To let air pass over them. To let some wind and some oxygen come through. And then you need to start gently putting some small pieces there. Some sticks. Some maybe some leaves or something.

And keep blowing until it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. And then you can put a log. And then you can put more wood. And then you can blow a little more until it gets hotter and hotter. And bigger and bigger until it's ablaze. Friends, the Spirit of God is like the breath that comes over the coals of our heart.

[19:36] We can pile up as much wood as we want. As much of our own effort. As much of our own stuff and plans and attempts and whatever.

But nothing is going to catch fire without the wind of the Spirit. Which is why we need to pray.

Pray for the Spirit to come and strengthen our inner being with His mighty wind. I wonder if you're seeking God tonight. And you think, I don't know.

I don't know if God's really there. Have you prayed for His Spirit to come? And to start to move across the coals of your heart. To start to bring you to life spiritually to see Him.

Well, what does the Spirit's strength in our inner being produce? What's the strengthening for? And here at last, we come to the crux of the matter.

[20:40] And this is the center of Paul's prayer. This reverent, Trinitarian, confident prayer for the Spirit's power in our inner being is all for this end. This point. Look again.

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. This is what we need to know and grasp and own and experience.

The love of Christ. We need the Spirit to come, strengthen our hearts in faith so that Christ can dwell in our hearts.

That is, that we would let Him have His place and take up residence there. Not just as a visitor, as a guest, but as the Lord of the house.

[21 : 41] That He would dwell in our hearts. Of course, everyone who turns from sin and puts their trust in Christ, Christ comes and indwells us by His Spirit. What Paul is saying here is that we need to pray that Christ who dwells would really dwell.

And take up seat. And be the Lord of our hearts. And as such, what happens? We become rooted and grounded in His love. Rooted, of course, is an image from the plant world.

It's a botanical image, right? Think of roots that dig down, sinking down into the soil. What are they doing? They're sinking down in there to draw up nutrients, water, and life, and energy.

It's getting all that it needs out of the soil. It's rooted there. And then this word grounded, well, that's an architectural image. That's a construction metaphor. It's like a well-dug, well-placed foundation.

You're grounded there. And that provides stability and permanence for the rest of the house. And what's being said here is that Christ's love, Christ dwelling in our hearts is just that for us.

[22 : 46] It's what our spiritual roots need to sink down into so that we can be nourished and fed. It's what our soul's foundation needs to be laid upon so that we can be stable and permanent and not blown and tossed.

But then do you notice from the root, from the foundation, from the ground in verse 17, our eyes are then lifted up in verse 18 to behold all the dimensions, how wide and how long and how high and how deep is the love of Christ.

You see, friends, the love of Christ isn't just our beginning, our root, our ground. But it's our end, too. It's our goal.

That no matter how far you travel in any direction, you can't exhaust its perfection. This love of Christ. But oh, how we've become so familiar with that phrase, haven't we?

The love of Christ. And that's one reason why we need the Spirit's strength to grasp it. That's why we need the Father to grant the Spirit to come and ravish us with the love of Christ once again.

[24 : 16] Because we're so familiar with it. Now, there are other reasons, too, right? We need the Spirit to come and overcome our doubts. Our doubts which say, can you really love me?

We need the Spirit to come and we need Him to overcome our distraction. Our distraction that says, oh, there's just too much going on. Too much taking up my mental energy. I don't have time to focus on these things. And we need the Spirit to overcome our pride.

Our pride that says, of course, Christ loves me. I'm me, after all. All these things steal that thrilling, world-shattering reality of Christ's love for us.

But we need the Spirit to overcome our familiarity, I think, most of all. We've heard these words so many times. The love of Christ that we've stopped realizing.

They've stopped becoming the wonder that they are. So we need the Spirit to comprehend the breadth of Christ's love, don't we?

[25 : 26] How wide it is. Have you thought about how wide the love of Christ is for you? Paul's been telling the Ephesians over and over again in this letter that the love of God in Christ is not just for Jews.

It's for the Gentiles. It's not just for the religious and the moral, at least the people who look like that on the outside and do a good job hiding all their junk, which is everybody. It's not just for those kind of people, but it's for the people who are irreligious and immoral and can't hold it all together.

It's for the insiders. It's for the insiders and it's for the outsiders. It's for people of every class and race and background. Christ's love extends to all of us without discrimination.

Friend, I wonder, what do you think disqualifies you? What quality about you? What part of your history or your background or whatever?

What makes you feel unwanted or unwelcomed? Do you see how broad and how wide the love of Christ is embracing us all?

[26 : 31] But we need the spirit strength to comprehend the length of Christ's love, don't we? How long it is. Again, this book has been showing us that the love of Christ for you began not just when you came to faith.

Christ's love for you doesn't start when you turn from living life your own way to trusting in him. No, no, no. Long before that, Christ has loved you.

Remember chapter two? When you were dead in sins, when you were far off from God, even then God loved you. In fact, because he loved you, because of the richness of his mercy, he came out and made you alive in Christ.

But, you know, it's not just our sort of personal story that shows us how long the love of Christ is. Long before that, for generations, God had been preparing and working out his love. Think about the whole story of the Bible through the long history of Israel from Exodus to exile to return to the climax in Christ's life and death and resurrection and ascension.

And then through the power of the spirit poured out at Pentecost down through the church age over 2,000 years, the love of Christ barreling through the ages. Through this long story that God has been telling.

[27 : 52] Coming down from age to age to age over land, over seas, right down here to you and me in New Haven, Connecticut. How long is the love of Christ?

But, you know, it's even more than that. The length of Christ's love stretched the length of our lifetime, the length of human history. But, friends, have we not been learning from this book?

But the love of Christ stretches the length of eternity. Before the foundation of the world, Ephesians chapter 1 told us.

Before the foundation of the world, in Christ, you have been loved. From eternity past. And on into eternity to come.

Remember? Chapter 2, verse 7. In the coming ages, that is in eternity to come. He will show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

[29 : 00] That as far back as you can go. And as far forward as you can go. And in a sense, those terms don't even make sense when we're thinking about God's limitless eternity.

But there it is. The love of Christ for you. You see how long he set his affection on you. Brother, sister. Through your whole life.

Through all of eternity. Through all of human history. And don't we too need the spirit strength to comprehend the height of Christ's love? How high it is. How high it is again and again.

Here we read in Ephesians that Christ raised us up with him. And seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That's chapter 2, verse 6. When Christ brings us to him, his love doesn't just take us sort of like, sort of in the door.

Okay, you're sort of in the family now. But you need to sit kind of out in the corner. No, it's raised us up to the heavenly places. It's seated us with Christ Jesus. The church, we're told, you and I in Christ, in chapter 3, verse 10, we are the supreme display of God's manifold wisdom.

[30:07] How high his love has taken us. We are the fullness of him who fills all in all. Chapter 1, verse 23. Could you think of any higher place that his love has taken us?

But we also need the spirit strength to comprehend the depth of Christ's love. How deep it is. And here, friends, we step into the heart of the good news. And what this Advent season is all about, isn't it?

Down. The depth of Christ's love. Down. The love of Christ took him. For you. Down from heaven Christ came.

Down from the praise of heavenly hosts. Down from the presence of his Father. Down into our fallen human world. Down into our own human corrupt flesh. Down into our hunger and thirst.

Down into our sorrow and loss. Down. Could he go further down? We think as we read the gospel accounts. And then strangely, mysteriously, he does.

[31:20] Down into the place where our own sin and our own rebellion from God. Into the darkness of alienation from the God who made us.

There Christ goes. Down into the darkness of all that our rejection of God deserves.

Down he goes. Bearing the weight of our death and our shame and our guilt. Going down in there.

Why? He goes down. He goes down. So that we can come up. He goes down in our place. As our substitute.

Bearing our penalty. Taking our wrath. So that we can come out. So that we can come out. And enjoy his favor and his acceptance and his peace. Down he goes so we can be reconciled to God.

[32:20] Paul calls that in another letter. The foolishness of God. You see why we need the spirit strength to comprehend the depth of Christ's love for us.

One of the ancient church fathers to Tertullian said. Yes Christianity is absurd. But I believe. Because it is absurd. Could any human mind have created this?

Do you see why Paul says that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge? For all eternity we will not get to the bottom of it. And it will never bore us.

And it will never lose its beauty. So friend here is the big idea of our text tonight. As we kind of wrap up. Do you see how great the love of Christ is for you?

And here is the application. Do you pray. To the father. That he would grant you to be strengthened in your inner being by his own spirit. So that Christ would do this. Dwell in your heart.

[33:28] So that you would have strength. Because you need strength to comprehend. His love. That is so incomprehensible. This is the path to spiritual fullness.

The fullness of God that verse 19 speaks of. The reality is you can't get it any other way. Than the spirit. Strengthening your inner being. Giving you faith as verse 17 says.

So that you can grasp Christ's love. In all its limitless dimensions. There is no other path. And there is no other door. And there is no other fountain. Than this one.

But here is the good news friends. This path. This door. This fountain. Is open for everyone who wants it. It is open. It is open for all to come. No.

You cannot find it anywhere else. If you are looking for fullness with God. You are not going to find it anywhere else. You might find a counterfeit. You might find a parody. But you will not find the authentic real thing.

[34:31] You will not find it anywhere else. But here it is. For all to receive. For all to come and take it. So pray.

Brothers and sisters. Pray. Pray for yourself. Pray for your friends here. That are a part of this family. Pray for other churches.

Pray for the church. That is being persecuted. Pray for the church. That is being bored. Pray. Ask God for it. Ask God.

The living. True. Only. Triune God. Ask with reverence. Ask with confidence. But trust when you ask. That just as this passage ends.

He is able to do far more abundantly. Than all we ask or think. According to the spirit's power. At work within us. Let's pray. God we confess before you.

[35:31] That we have often sought. In our own resources. And in our own strength. And in our own cleverness. We have often sought. In our own means. To draw near to you.

To be filled up. Spiritually. God how often. I have seen this in my own life. In my own heart. And yet Lord. What good news it is. That we can come to you.

And ask. Ask for your spirit. Your own self. To come and move. And enliven our hearts. To see how deeply you love us.

Lord Jesus. Come and make it real and fresh. And Jesus. As we gather around your table tonight. As we take communion. This institution.

This act that you've given us. To remind us of just that. How much you love us. And all that you've done for us. Oh I pray. Jesus. That as you're present here. At your table. You by your spirit.

[36:31] Would come. And bring your wind. Over the coals of our hearts. And bring us to life again. Feed us we pray. Fill us we pray. Father we ask this in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Well friends. We are going to do just that. We are going to. Take up the Lord's Supper together. If you are.