

The Prayer We Need: Ephesians 3:14-21

I want to open today's sermon by asking a question to everyone. Do you believe that God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think? Do you believe and expect God to work above and beyond in your life, your family's life, your children's life, Canterbury church and all its ministry? If you do, praise God. Continue trusting that God is able and will do that. I think sometimes we don't. Sometimes when God does something in our lives and does it far more abundantly than all that we can ask or think. Generally, we are surprised. We say "WOW", I can't believe you did that God. "WOW" I can't believe you transformed my life, and the people around me. Sometimes we are like some of the people in the New Testament where Jesus does a miracle and people respond in astonishment and disbelief. Sometimes we lack faith and don't trust in what God can do, and that might be for a variety of reasons. We might be praying for something for a while and nothing seems to be happening. Maybe it seems like an impossible situation. Months, and years go by and what happens is we start "limiting" God and don't expect and believe that God is able to turn a situation upside down.

When we come to today's text, I think what is foundational to faithful prayer, and rock-solid confidence in God, is knowing and believing that he is able and will do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. Ultimately for his glory. If God is able to do so much more than we can imagine, then as we pray and come before God, we should have confidence and expectation that God will answer our prayers. And it should lead us to worship!

So, I have 3 main points for today:

1. **Pray for and Know** the Spirit's power
2. **Pray for and Know** God's infinite love and his fullness
3. **Know and Believe** that God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask and think

So, let us look at today's text a bit more and I think we will get a deeper appreciation of God's manifold wisdom and infinite love.

Context:

Verse 14-15 sets out the context of our text. If you look at chapter 3 verse 1, you will see similar words to our text. "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of

Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles". (3:1), "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father," (3:14). There is some connection between verse 1 and verse 14. I think Paul did a detour in verse 2-13 which enriches his intercessory prayer. And if you remember from last year, Paul has already told his gentile readers their place in God's people. They were a people who were dead in their sins. A people who were totally depraved. But God in his goodness and grace made them alive in Christ. (2:1-10) God has saved them by grace through faith. And by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ our saviour, he has sovereignly brought lost believing Gentiles and believing Jews into one new humanity, a new community, a new people. Ephesians 2:14 tells us this is accomplished through his Son's reconciling work on the cross which broke down the walls of hostility. And now 2:22, the people of God "are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the spirit".

And this was the reason for what he was going to say. But his detour enriches the reason by telling us how God even used the "very least of all saints" to preach the mystery of gospel (3:8). To preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. And God would be using his Church, his people to play a vital role in God's cosmic plan. Ephesians 3:10 "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places". The Lord has dealt kindly, mercifully and graciously to the church of Ephesus, to Paul and to Gentile believers (that's us). He is given such an amazing role in his purposes.

And so, when get to 3:14-15, this is the reason for his prayer as well. He is so overwhelmed by God's goodness and manifold wisdom. And so, all he can do, is "bow his knees". He is so humbled and amazed. He recognised his position before God. Bowing his knees signified great reverence and submission to the authority of the almighty God. The beauty and amazing truth of God's word and the reality of being part of God's family overwhelms him. That's why he calls him "father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named".

Father gives this idea of intimacy as well as authority. This isn't your earthly father who may be flawed and full of sin. This is the perfect, heavenly father whom we have already established in the previous verses, is powerful and loving. And so what Paul does here is he comes boldly before this heavenly father. Through Christ, believers have complete access "in one spirit to the father" (2:18, 3:12).

We shouldn't be surprised that Paul addresses him as father since in the context He is talking about is how gentile believers are included into the people of God. God is their father as well.

So, **what** is the content of his prayer?

Pray for and Know the Spirit's power: (3:16-17a)

that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith

Now Paul knows that believers already have the Holy Spirit living in them. But he recognises that we aren't perfect. We are still running the Christian race. We need God to daily give us more of him. To continue to sanctify us and make us holy. We need the spirit of God to work in our "inner being". In our hearts. We need God to be working in our hearts more and more of the power of the Spirit that is within in us.

Consider this, someone who is sick or overworked or tired needs strength to push on throughout the day and for the rest of their life to enjoy all that life has to offer them, in the same way, God's people need strength empowered by the Holy Spirit to live this redeemed life for all that God has redeemed them for. And so, Paul prays that Believers may be "strengthened with power through his spirit". The task in which God has called the church may make us feel inadequate and small and that's why Paul prays for this strength. He knows the Christian life is hard.

But we are not to worry, Paul gives us a clue of his mindset in the beginning of verse 16. We find out the **Source of all this strength**. The source in which believers can draw this strength from is "according to the riches of his glory". And if you remember God is infinitely rich. The vastness of God's glory is so big and great that we can't imagine. And that is the source of the strength. God is able to continuously empower believers. And you don't need to worry whether or not you will be left out of this empowering. You don't need to worry, because believers will be strengthened because of the **Agent** in which God will pour out this strength. The **Agent** is the Spirit of God, which is already living in you. The Third person of the trinity is the one who will be equipping you, working in you, strengthening you to run the race that is in front of you. 2 Corinthians 4:16 speaks of the working of the spirit in light of eternity. "So, we

do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day". We are day by day renewed and empowered for life from God himself, who draws out from the riches of his glory. And although as time goes by, as we grow older, as we get grey hairs and get wrinkles, God is making us stronger and stronger according to the riches of his glory. And the beginning of verse 17 gives us the purpose for that. It is "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith". Romans 8:9-10 tells us that if you have been redeemed, then the spirit of God is living in you, and Christ is in you. I think what Paul is trying out to draw out here is that, as we become strengthened and sanctified by the spirit of God, we become more empowered to live a life which is pleasing and acceptable to him. Romans 12:1 talk about the Redeemed life as being a life where we need to "present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship". He is helping us for the cosmic task that he is ordained the church and his people to accomplish. That is an amazing truth that God is already working in us and he will continue to strengthen us for all that he has for us.

That's why, the first point is, you need to know the Spirit's power that is working in you already and will continue to work in you and you need to pray for more of His strength. **Pray for and Know the Spirit's power**

Pray for and Know God's infinite Love and his fullness: (3:17b-19)

that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul does not just stop at praying for the Spirits power but continues and prays that they may live a life of Christ-like love and be able to comprehend the fullness Christ's love for them.

Recently Garam and I have started a mini-vegetable garden. We bought 3 tomato plants and 2 chili plants. And we've had them for about 3 months now. Now we aren't master gardeners, but I've always thought how hard can farming be. Lo and behold, our plants are now dead and not growing well. We visited a family last week and they too have a garden. And when they showed us their garden, their Tomatoes, chillies, eggplants, zucchinis were so beautiful and amazing. They were organic, pesticide free. And you would pay a premium for his vegetables. And I asked him, why does my garden look so dead. And he

said one of the key things about gardening is to make sure that the soil in which your plants grows in are full of nutrients and properly maintained and make sure that you plant the plants in soil with enough space so that they are able to root and ground themselves. Now I must admit we left our plants in a very small pot with not much room, and we didn't constantly water the plants and look after the soil. But I'm sure if we followed proper farming techniques, our garden would be effective in producing all that they were made for.

You know Paul, in his opening expression in 17b uses this gardening and building language. And you can see where is coming from. What he prays for is that Christians, just in the same way as a plant need to be rooted and grounded in solid soil or when a building needs to be grounded on a solid foundation, they need to be rooted and grounded in love. It is not a love which is superficial. It is not love which changes depending on the mood. But it is love which rooted and grounded on the cross. And their life needs to be rooted and grounded on Christ-like love. They need to live a life which shows the world, that Jesus Christ has died and resurrected from the dead, and he is working by the spirit in their lives. Like plants, our lives are to send down roots deep, and wide into the love of Christ. To push the analogy maybe a little further, It needs to be nurtured and replenished by the Love of Christ. We need a life with a solid foundation of the cross. Without the cross, our lives will be like my dead garden. Ineffective. Useless. Not doing what they were purchased for. Relational love in the Christian life is crucial if the Church is to accomplish the eternal purpose that God has redeemed them for. To be the salt and light in this world. To show the world what God has done in their lives.

This life transformed by the love of Christ, needs to be accompanied by a greater mental comprehension of Christ's love. That's why Paul prays that they "may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge".

Paul knows it is crucial that all the saints need strength and greater understanding of the love of Christ. And he knows that you can never ever not grow in your understanding of God's love. Paul uses "the breadth and length and height and depth" in a very poetic way. He is telling that Christ's love is infinite and incomprehensible. It is boundless. No matter how much you know about the cross and the bible, no matter how much you learn and experience God's love, there will always be more.

Many of us are married, and when you first see your other half, you might've fallen head over heels. You might love how the other person jokes around, how they laugh, look, sing. You might love how they love others and are kind. How they love Jesus. And you might say, you are "completely in love", there is nothing more I could love. But I am sure as the time goes by, you realise that as you spend more time with the other half, as you get to know the other half, you grow in your love for them. Unlike earthly relationships, which are finite and imperfect, Christ's love is infinite and perfect. How much more can you grow in your love for Jesus and understanding of his love if in an earthly relationship you can grow overtime. And although it is impossible to fully comprehend Christ's love, Paul prays for comprehension. He prays for believers to seize and take hold of Christ's infinite love. And so, it will be a life long prayer and journey. It is a prayer that all of us need to be praying until we meet Him in Heaven. And it is not a solo journey. It is "with all the saints". It is a church task. We need each other. And so, pray for each other that we may grow as a church in our love for Jesus Christ. Pray that every single person would grow in their knowledge of his incomprehensible love. We need to daily contemplate, think about the incarnation of Jesus, the journey to the cross, the betrayal and death on the cross, and resurrection of the cross. If we are to grow in our comprehension of the love of God, then sound preaching, and daily devotion is so vital in the Christian life. Because that is our foundation.

Paul ends this section of the prayer with the purpose of knowing and experiencing the infinite love of God. And it shouldn't come to us as a surprise. The purpose is so "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God". Now that is a weighty statement. How incredible is it to imagine that you can be filled with "all the fullness of the infinite, almighty, all-powerful, eternal God" But that is what Paul prays for. We have access to this fullness of God. Colossians 1:19 talks about Jesus saying that "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell", and later in the letter of Colossians, in 2:9-10 it says, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority." Therefore, we need to **Pray for and Know God's infinite Love and his fullness.**

Know and Believe that God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask and think: (3:20-21)

Now I began today's sermon with a question. Do you believe that God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think? The reason why is because I think the reason why Paul is able to pray with confidence all these things is because he does. He believes that God is able to do all these things

and even more. More than you can ask. More than you can imagine. And that's why when we come to the doxology he says,

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The doxology tells us that he believes that God is able to do the unimaginable. He is confident that God is able and will transform the lives of believers. He knows that he already has done great things for sinful man. He knows that believers have received all the spiritual blessings that there are in Christ. And he knows that there is more. And God is able to do more and more and more. And that is where his confidence lies. He trusts in the almighty God who will do things which we could never imagine. And that is exactly what we must believe. We need prayer which truly believes that God will do so much more than just the small things. We need prayer which trusts that God can and will do the impossible. The unthinkable. We need to stop limiting God and expect him to do more. Why stop at just praying that God would bring 1 or 2 more people into our church. Why not pray that God would bring more? Why not pray that God would raise up members of our church to be missionaries and pastors all around the world? Why don't we pray that God would be working in the families of our church and raise up families who will go out into their work place, to their neighbours, to their schools and bring people to faith. Imagine if every single one of the members of Canterbury became missionaries and church planted all across Melbourne. God could do that. He already has done it. God has already done more than we can imagine here in this church. Look around. We have people from all around the world. We have a Korean and Japanese congregation. He has already done it and he can do more. We need the confidence that Paul has. A confidence which you will be able to bet your life on.

Many would think that it would be unwise to appoint a young minister to a church. There was a minister in the 19th century named Charles Spurgeon. He was appointed to the largest Baptist Congregation in London at the age of 19. By the time was 22 he was preaching to a congregation of 10,000. 10,000... 22. Younger than me. I couldn't imagine my self-standing in front of 10,000. But God called and used and equipped and worked in ways which you could never imagine. Charles Spurgeon talked about prayer as being the engine room of the church. He once said "If the engine room is out of action then the whole mill will grind to a halt. We cannot expect blessing if we do not ask." I think

Charles Spurgeon has similar convictions as Paul. He knew that God could do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.

We need to pray with such a confidence like Paul. We need to know and believe that God can and will. We do ask for more and more not because we want to build our kingdom here. We don't ask for 10,000 because we want to Canterbury to be the largest biggest church. For our own glory. No, if you look at verse 21. "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever". It for God's glory. The church is for God's Glory. All that he does is for his Glory. And when God answers our prayer, the only thing we can do is worship him. The only appropriate response to answered prayer is worship.

Know and Believe that God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask and think. Therefore, Pray for and know the Spirits power, and pray for and know the infinite love of God and his fullness. That is the prayer we need. That is the conviction we need today and for the rest of our lives. Amen

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.