**The Book of Ephesians Series**

**“Paul’s Second Prayer for the Church”**

**Ephesians 3.14-21**

**Introduction**

This morning we continue our series in the book of Ephesians. So far, we have gone through the first two and a half chapters where the Apostle Paul has been describing who we are in Christ. Brothers and sisters, we are chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, sealed with the Holy Spirit, saved from our transgressions and sins, brought together as one body to God through the cross, and called to be stewards of God’s grace. Truly the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. (1.3)

The Apostle Paul closes out this section by offering another prayer for the church in chapter three verse thirteen through twenty-one. Hear now the Word of God:

***13****Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.* ***14****For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,****15****from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,****16****that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,****17****so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being*

*rooted and grounded in love,****18****may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,****19****and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.* ***20****Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,****21****to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.* (3.13-21)

**Paul’s Second Prayer for the Church**

This is the Apostle’s second prayer for the church. Paul’s first prayer was given at the conclusion of chapter one and now the second prayer is given at the conclusion of chapter three. What is interesting is that Paul’s two prayers for the church covers over twenty-five percent of the verses found in the first three chapters of Ephesians. Over one quarter of Paul’s inspired words are issued in prayer to God for His church. I wonder how different our lives would be, how different our church would be, if twenty-five percent of our words were prayers to God. As I mentioned when we looked at Paul’s first prayer in chapter one, the thing that strikes me about Paul’s prayers is how radically different his prayers are from our normal prayers. Our prayers usually focus on the health and the well-being of ourselves and others. And even though I believe God is happy to hear us pray to Him for health, safety, and open doors of opportunity it seems that the Apostle’s prayer focuses on an entirely different set of petitions which we can see in today’s text.

**Paul’s Personal Plea**

After describing how we are stewards of God’s grace in the beginning of chapter three, the Apostle transitions into his prayer by beginning with a personal plea for the church not to lose heart over his tribulations and imprisonment. Paul writes in verse thirteen, “*Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.”* (3.13) As mentioned before, Paul wrote the epistle of Ephesians while he was a prisoner in Rome for preaching the gospel. Paul refers to himself as “the prisoner of Christ” (Eph.3:1) or “the prisoner of the Lord” (4:1), who is an “ambassador in chains” (6:20).

While Paul was a prisoner in Rome, the Apostle was permitted to live in his own rented house, though bound with chains, and in the company of a guard. (Acts 28:16, 30; Eph.6:20) Chains were commonly viewed as an object of shame. (2Tim.1:16) It is obvious that the Apostle’s status as a prisoner bound with chains was a constant reminder of the sacrifices that Paul had made on *behalf* of the Gentiles and the tribulations that he was experiencing for their *glory.*

Even though Paul’s imprisonment restricted him from being with his beloved church at Ephesus, he knew that God would use his imprisonment to increase the faith of Gentile believers. He wrote about his imprisonment to the church of Philippi says, “*Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.* (Phil.1.12-14)

Even though Paul had a gospel centered perspective concerning his imprisonment, he was concerned that his circumstances would cause the church at Ephesus to *lose heart* and become discouraged. Brothers and sisters, the Bible speaks directly about the possibility of “*losing heart*” or becoming discouraged when difficulties arise in our lives. The Bible tells us to “*not lose heart,* about health concerns because even *though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”* (2Cor.4.16) The Bible tells us to “*not lose heart in doing good,* even though people take advantage of our generosity, *for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”* (Gal.6.9) Actually, Jesus told a parable about a widow woman who never lost heart or became discouraged but continually appeared before a Judge for legal protection. Eventually, the Judge granted her request. So, Jesus tells us that we should be like the widow woman by relentlessly pursuing God and never losing heart. (Lk.18.1-8) Brothers and sisters, we need to be a guard for the real possibility of losing heart or becoming discouraged about current circumstances in our lives or in the lives of those we love. We need to seek the Lord’s wisdom and strength to see every situation as a means to bring Him glory. We should be careful not to lose heart or to become discouraged in the situations that confront us but rather trust God that He is working all things out for good. (Rom.8.28)

When we go through tough times, we need to consider how Christ endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that we may not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb.12.3) I know it can sound like a Christian cliché, but we must seek the Lord to give us a gospel perspective about the difficult circumstances in our lives. Even though we might be wavering in our faith, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus and expect Him to perfect faith in us.

**Prelude to Prayer**

After Paul’s personal plea for the Ephesians not to lose heart he issues a prelude of prayer in verses fourteen and fifteen. Paul writes, “*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”* (3.14-15)

This short prelude gives us tremendous insights into the apostle’s attitude as he approached the throne of grace. (Heb.4.16) Paul knew that he had bold and confident access to God through faith in Christ (Eph.3.12), but instead of this confidence causing him to become haughty we see that his bold access to the throne room of grace caused Paul to have a genuine humility.

Paul begins by saying, “*For this reason I bow my knees.”* Basically, Paul is saying, “because I realize that God is using my tribulations as a means to glorify Him, I bow my knees.” The word “humble” means to be subdued, to be brought down, to be brought low, to be brought into subjection. The posture of humility is often seen in bowing our knees. Why is that?  When someone is on their knees, they are in a position where they cannot defend themself. ‬Therefore, bowing the knee symbolizes entire submission.

Paul continues, *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.* Again, I want to emphasize that God’s name is Father. The Creator and Sustainer of the Universe is our Father. The Ruler of the nations is our Father. The Sovereign Judge is our Father. And when we bow our knees to the Great Superior, we are bowing our knees to our Father. *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.* The Bible teaches that God *made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth.* (Acts 17.26a)This statement in verse fifteen “*from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name* refers to the fact that God is the Father of all humanity whether they acknowledge Him as Father or not. But to those who do acknowledge God as Father He has brought us into a family relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ. We are *are of God’s household.* (2.19) And as members of God’s family we are all fellow heirs and fellow partakers of the promises in Christ. (3.6)

So, in Paul’s prelude to prayer he bows his knees to our gracious heavenly Father and acknowledges our family relationship as God’s children. Paul has a great expectation that his petitions will be granted. Paul expects that the Father *would grant* his requests *according to the riches of His glory.* (3.16) Our spiritual forefathers taught us the prayer is an offering up of our desires to God for things agreeable to His will and the Apostle Paul knew that the petitions he was offering up to God were definitely agreeable to God’s will. Paul is about to pray that we would be strengthen with power in the inner person, that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith, that we would be rooted and grounded in love, that we would comprehend the love of Christ, and that we would be filled up with the fulness of God. I think it is safe to say that each of these petitions are completely God’s will for us.

**Particular Petitions**

So, let’s briefly consider each of these five particular petitions that Paul makes for the church in verses 16b-19. Paul’s first petition is that we would be *strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.* (16b) As I mentioned before, many of our prayers focus on health concerns and you have probably heard the saying, “If you have good health – you have anything.” But the truth is that if you have spiritual health, you have everything. Physical health is profitable but spiritual health is most profitable because it holds the promise for the present life and also for the life to come. (ITim.4.8) Therefore, spending time strengthening your inner man is essential to spiritual health. All of us need to spend time daily in the “gospel gym.” Taking time to read and study Scripture. Taking time for personal prayer and private worship. These are the daily spiritual exercises that will strengthen our inner man. But notice Paul desire that this strengthening would happen *with power through His Spirit in the inner man.* The strengthening that Paul was praying for was more than just growing in biblical knowledge. The strengthening that Paul was praying for was more than just going through a set of religious acts of worship. Paul’s prayer was that we would experience power through the Spirit. Paul’s prayer is that we would be strengthen with power by the Spirit so that we would be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil and resist the temptation of this evil day. (6.11-13)

After praying that we would be strengthen with power from the Spirit, Paul then petitions *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.* (17a)The Bible identifies the heart is the center of life. We are called to *watch over* our *heart with all diligence,* *for from it flow the springs of life.* (Pv.4.23)The fact is that we can allow fleshy behaviors and attitudes to dwell in our hearts, or we can experience Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith. (Mt.15.19)Jesus told us, “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.* (Jn.15.4) Paul knew that as Christ dwelt in our hearts through faith that we most certainly would bear much fruit so he prays that only Christ would dwell in our hearts.

Paul continues his prayer by petitioning *that you, being rooted and grounded in love.* (17b) The Bible tells us that if we speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love we have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, we have nothing. If we give all our possessions to feed the poor, and surrender our bodies to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing. (ICor.13.1-30) Therefore, it is easy to see why the Apostle prays that we would be rooted and grounded in love. Love for God, love for others, and even having love for our enemies. Faith, hope and love abide but the greatest of these is love. (ICor.13.13)

Paul then prays that we *may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.* (18-19a)The basic petition is that we would *know the love of Christ.* Paul is praying that we would seek to the know how much Jesus loves us. What is interesting is that on the one hand the Apostle prays that we “*may be able to comprehend”* the love of Christ but on the other hand the Apostle admits that the love of Christ “*surpasses knowledge.”* Our lack of compacity to truly know the extent of Christ’s love should not detour us from seeking to comprehend it.

The Apostle prays that we would examine the scale of Christ’s love for us (its *breadth*). He prays that we would seek to discover the distance that Christ has gone to love us (its *length*). He prays that we would ascertain its altitude of Christ’s love (its *height*). And he prays that we would seek to determine how far down Christ would go to show us His love (its *depth*). All the while the Apostle knows that the love of Christ is so wide, so far reaching, so lofty, and so deep that it surpasses our ability to completely comprehend. If we really want to be spiritually blown away, we should seek to know the love of Christ!

And lastly Paul prays *that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God*. (19b) This is a wonderful blessing that our God desires that we would experience His fullness. Even with our limited capacity God desires that we would be filled up with His wisdom, filled up with His goodness, filled up with His mercy, filled up with His love, that we would be filled up with the fullness of God. When I was a kid growing up in church, I used to love singing this old hymn entitled “Fill My Cup Lord.”

The chorus went like this:

Fill my cup, Lord;

I lift it up Lord;

Come and quench the thirsting of my soul;

Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more;

Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole

What a blessing that we can make such a request to God!

**Closing Thought**

Brothers and sisters, whatever tribulations you are experiencing today or whatever tribulations you will experience in the future I pray that you will not lose heart. We must not allow our circumstances to shackle our emotions or hold us as prisoners but rather we must seek the Lord’s wisdom and strength to see every situation as a means to bring Him glory. We must continually bow our knees to our gracious heavenly Father, acknowledge our family relationship as God’s children, and expect *that He would grant* our requests*, according to the riches of His glory.* (3.16) We must seek to experience the fullness of God that is found in the love of Christ.

**Congregational Prayer**

As we did with Paul’s first prayer in chapter one, I would like for us to concluded today’s sermon by praying Paul’s second prayer as a congregation.

“In all humility we bow our knees to You, our heavenly Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. We pray that You would grant to us the riches of Your glory. We pray that we would be strengthen with power through Your Spirit in our inner person. We pray that Jesus would dwell in our hearts through faith. We pray that we would be rooted and grounded in love so that we could being comprehend with all the saints what is the width, the length, the height, and the depth of Christ’s love for us. Lord, we boldly pray that we would be filled up with Your fullness. Now to You who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all we ask or think, according to Your power that works within us, we pray that all glory would be Yours in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen”

**Call to Prayer**

*With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit* (Eph.6.18a)

**Benediction**

*Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.* (Eph.3.20-21)