Ephesians 3:14-21

Praying for the Miracle

Sermon

One of the favorite things for a child to do at the beach is to build a sandcastle. They build the castle and almost always dig a giant moat around the castle, because every castle has to have a moat, and then they find some sticks to create the bridge over the moat. And they decorate the castle structure with shells and make tiny windows for the people who inhabit their make-believe world. But last, they need to fill the moat with water. So they begin to run back and forth running up and down the beach to fill their cups with water…and then they spill the water down into the moat and they sprint back towards the water to get more…and it seems like every time they get back, the water they just filled the moat with has already evaporated, so they run faster and faster, and as they run they're spilling the water all over the place. The father is watching on…and he is laughing thinking, "they're never going to fill that moat with water like that." So the father empties out the large bucket they have with all of the beach toys and says, "here…take this larger bucket and use it to get the water."

The supply of water isn't the problem, there is a vast and deep ocean that has more than enough water to fill their moat. No vessel could ever contain all of it. The problem is they need bigger containers to get the water to the moat.

Prayer is a lot like that. Prayer is like a child running to God's vast resources, seeking to receive all that he can contain so that he might be filled and then spill over onto the world around him. Every day we run back and forth drawing from the ocean of God's endless supply. Often times our vessels leak, we don't run a straight course, people and things get in our way, we get discouraged with the process. All along, God has an endless supply of all that we need.

In Ephesians Paul has given us a massive vision of the church and of the love of God in Christ Jesus that has reconciled the church to God:

The church is a community of people who have been reconciled by the love of God, but we're still learning to be loved by God and to love one another. The more we know the miracle of God's love, the more we become the expression of God's love to the world around us…so Paul prays for the miracle that he has been entrusted with to take root in the hearts and lives of the Ephesians.

Main point: Prayer is the means by which God makes His love known to the church so that the church would make God's love known to the world.

This morning we are going to consider Paul's prayer for the Ephesians by looking at three things: 1) Paul's posture while praying; 2) Paul's request to the Father; 3) Paul's praise to the Father

1. Paul's posture while praying (Eph. 3:14-15)

Paul begins his prayer with a posture of reverence and submission - "for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father" (3:14). Getting low to the ground is fitting for God's creatures. In order to be filled, you and I must first get low before God. A posture of humility. Bowing the knees, bowing the head, bowing the heart, is one of the healthiest, most fitting practices to re-establish God as your King.

Paul is praying to the Father, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:15). The word "family" (πατρια) can speak of human families but also of "divisions". We divide plant life, for example, into "families". So "families in heaven" speaks of the divisions of angelic beings both good and evil. God is the Creator of all creatures and divisions of creatures - and He has "named" them. There was a common practice of "invoking names" in the occult of Asia Minor. They would call upon various names for power and authority. Paul tells us in 1:21 that Jesus is seated "far above every name that is *to be named*" (same verb – to invoke names). Paul is establishing God as the only "name" to which the Ephesians should "bow the knee" and call upon for help.

So this is a posture of reverence, submission, and humility to one who has AUTHORITY. This is the posture of prayer that each of us should always have when praying. When is the last time you prayed on your knees? Do you know kneels before others? Someone who has been conquered. Someone who is in desperation. Someone who is surrendered and humbled. The posture reflects the heart before God.

Paul's prayer is broken up into two major parts – first, he makes a request to God (3:16-19), and then He praises God for His ability to grant the request (3:20-21).

Whenever you come to God with any request, take time to praise God for who He is – He is the God who can do more than all we would ask or think. So often we bring our laundry list of requests to God, but praise to God glorifies Him and situates our minds on who God is and in the light of who God is, our impossible request seems like nothing – praise will cause you to pray with boldness and confidence.

So that's the structure of Paul's prayer, now let's look at Paul's request in vv.16-19

2. Paul's request to the Father (3:16-19)

There are different ways we bring our requests to God. We can bring to Him a list of requests, "this and that and this"…like a grocery list. I need "peanut butter and jelly and eggs…". Or

sometimes we have a big request that is built upon other requests. If I told you that I need to get safely to the store, so that I can purchase groceries, so that I can make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, so that I can be full; what is the ultimate request and goal? Being FULL is really the goal…and everything else builds towards that goal. This is how Paul is praying here. This is actually one long sentence in the Greek…and as you know sentences are made up of building blocks. His requests are given in such a way that the parts build and support one another towards a final climactic request.

First, what is the climactic request? Look at 3:19 at the end of the verse: "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God". God's desire for the church is that we would be filled with Him so that we can spill out onto the world around us.

So we're going to unpack this prayer block by block because every part matters and every part tells us something glorious about the miracle that Paul is praying for.

Thinking caps on…let's focus in church

Building block #1 – "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being," (3:16)

Notice his prayer is for God to **"grant"** something – so we have a request.

He asks the Father that the Ephesians would be **"strengthened with power".** Now there are several words used for power in Greek and two are used here. Imagine a 69 Chevy Chevelle…huge 350 engine…it has what you might call "potential power" just sitting in the garage. But when you turn the key and the engine roars, the Chevelle is being "strengthened with power". You are hearing the "display" of that power. Back in Paul's first prayer in 1:19 Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know the "immeasurable greatness of His power" – he uses the word that speaks of God's potential power. Here Paul is asking for God to take that power and turn on the ignition to that we would be strengthened within.

Notice there is an ***cause*** of this roaring power – "through His Spirit" - and there is a ***location*** where His power roars – in the "inner being" (or inner man). There is also a ***source*** of power – His power is "according to the riches of His glory". The Holy Spirt is like the gasoline that hits the spark and ignites the engine under the hood, the inner man, and it roars. But it's the Fathers' "riches" or "wealth" that power is drawn from – like the gas station that is an unending source of fuel. Like a vast ocean of water. If you've ever seen the Hobbit, Bilbo enters the enormous halls of the dwarf king where there is an endless treasure that goes on and on…all he has are his pockets to put a few coins in! Paul is praying for the Father to grant power through His Holy Spirit from His endless and inexhaustible storehouse.

Now before we go on, what are some hindrances to God answering our prayers? If God's power to answer our prayers happens through the power of the Holy Spirit, we should know that we can "grieve" and "quench" the Holy Spirit. God is a loving Father, and loving Father's are grieved and sometimes the requests given by their children are hindered because the child is misbehaving. So God will often refrain from granting our requests because there is blatant or habitual sin in our lives. This doesn't mean God doesn't love us…in fact, I don't think we could say God loves us if He were to just give us whatever we asked for without addressing the sins in our life. Good fathers discipline their children and God is a good father. But His discipline is not condemnation towards His children, it's always to restore! So there are things that hinder prayer:

Hindrances to prayer:

- **Unconfessed sin will hinder prayer** (1 John 1:9 tells us that we can confess our sins and He is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us).
- **Making requests that are not according to God's will hinders prayer** (1 John 5:14-15 tells us that if we ask anything according to His will, we know that He hears us and that we have the requests we ask). Pray what is in Scripture and you will pray His will.
- **Marital strife hinders prayer** (1 Peter 3:7 – husband's dwell with understanding towards your wives, show honor towards them, so that your prayers are not hindered).
- **Grieving or quenching the Holy Spirit hinders prayer** (Eph. 4:30 says do not grieve the Holy Spirit).

When we come to God with requests, always come with confession of your own sin and commit to God that you will repent and turn away from that sin…then you will find the hindrances to prayer removed. Repentance is crucial to a healthy prayer life.

Now the prayer builds…

Building block 2 – "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (3:17)

The result of God's potential power that is drawn from His eternal storehouse is that the Ephesians would be strengthened, or better yet, "enabled" for Christ to dwell within them. Now…what does Paul mean for "Christ to dwell in them". He isn't speaking here of new birth, or conversion. That has already happened…they are already born again, and Christ already dwells in them, and yet Paul prays for Christ to dwell in them. How do we make sense of this?

When an orphan is adopted and brought home, it takes a while before they can trust their parents and "make themselves at home". This is why Paul says, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts THROUGH FAITH". Christ lives within you, but you have to trust His love in order to feel

at home in Him. That's the idea here. Paul prays that they would be enabled by the Holy Spirit to be so "rooted and grounded" in the love of Christ, that God's love for them would be trusted and experienced. Also, the parents of the adopted child begin to rub off on the child…and the child becomes an expression of the love in their home to the world around them – that's the idea here, that the church would be so rooted and grounded that they would trust God's love and express God's love to the world.

Do you struggle with trusting that God truly and deeply loves you? Have you ever prayed for God to strengthen your faith in His love? You know what breaks the heart of any parent? When their children don't trust that they love them. When their children are not being an example of the love that they are taught in their homes. God does not delight in His children frantically doubting His love for them…nor does He delight in His children being a poor example of His love to others. God is honored when we trust in His love and express His love to others.

God's love is *un-conditional*. And when you begin to trust in the unconditional love of God, you will begin to love others without conditions as well. Now I have to say this love is for His children, God loves everyone but God doesn't love everyone the same. We are talking about God's love for His covenant, family. It's a unique love. If you have surrendered to Jesus, you are a part of God's family. God doesn't love you because you are worthy, God loves you because He is good and He has made you worthy in Christ! Our love is so fickle, moody, circumstantial, conditional…often it's all about what we can get or what we are not getting. God's love is selfless and giving, and it's essential to who God is. He has chosen to freely pour His love out for those who put their faith in His Son Jesus.

Building block #3 - 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 (Eph. 3:18-19a)

Paul isn't praying for God's love to grow for the Ephesians, rather He is praying that the Ephesians would "know" and "comprehend" the vast, perfect, unconditional, unwavering love of God. A child at the ocean doesn't need a bigger ocean to fill the moat of his sandcastle, he needs a bigger vessel. Paul is praying for God's power and Spirit to STRETCH and ENLARGE the Ephesians hearts so that they will be able to "know" and "comprehend" that which surpasses knowledge and is too great to measure. How can you "know" something that "surpasses knowledge"? You pray!

He uses four terms of measurement to describe God's love - breadth, length, height, width - to say, "God's love is beyond measurement…you can't measure it!"…and yet he is praying for them to know and comprehend it. How can you know the breadth and depth of the ocean? How can you comprehend the length and height of the universe? Who knows what is the

biggest library in the world? Library of Congress in Washington D.C. – over 139 million books – think of all the knowledge contained in that single library. Can you imagine knowing/comprehending every word on every page? How much greater is God's love that existed before He created the universe and the ocean and all the libraries of the world containing all the knowledge in every book!

Now for the climax of Paul's prayer

Building block #4 - "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (3:19b)

Now we come full circle to God's vision for the church. Paul has been talking about this for 3 chapters. That the church would be filled so that the church can then go and spill out onto the world around us.

Some of you may remember our first series, I said over and over – "We receive, and enjoy, and supply the love of God in Christ unto the glory of God." Paul is literally praying for that here in this prayer. That the filled church would become a vehicle to display the fullness of God everywhere. Look at thein 1:23**:**

> **which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph. 1:23)**

You might remember I gave the picture of the bucket at the kids waterpark that keeps getting filled more and more until finally it dumps out onto everyone underneath. So God wants for us know His love more and more and more so that we would be filled so that we would spill out onto everyone. This is the climax of Paul's prayer and Paul closes this first section of Ephesians with this reminder that we, the church, are to first be filled with God's love so that we might supply God's love to the world around us.

3. Paul's praise to the Father (Eph. 3:20-21)

> **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. (Eph. 3:20-21)**

Paul knows what he is "thinking" of and "asking" for is HUGE so he praises the Father "who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think". This is really the heart of praise and worship and the end for which we are all created – we praise the Giver who gives so freely. We glorify the Giver because He is so good.

Paul closes this section of Ephesians by praising God for the two displays of God's reconciling love. In Christ the love of God is given, and in and through the church the love of God is spread. This is God's vision to reconcile all things in heaven and things on earth.

Communion: communion is an opportunity to put into practice what Paul has been praying. Communion is a celebration and remembrance of God's love that is perfectly displayed at the cross. Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

Connection Group Questions:

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

1. **Why is our posture before God so important when praying?**
2. **Why is it important to not only bring requests to God but also to praise God for who He is?**
3. **Does Paul give a list of requests to God or does he pray in a different way?**
4. **What is Paul's ultimate prayer in 3:16-19?**
5. **What are some things that can hinder our prayer?**
6. **Why is it so difficult for us to trust in the love of God?**
7. **Read Romans 8:31-39 – how does Paul argue logically that God's love will never cease?**
8. **Is God's love the same for believers as it is for non-believers? How is it different?**