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PRAYER TO POWER

TEXT: Ephesians 3:14-21

INTRODUCTION:

What are the most pressing issues in your life? What are the things for which you pray? When you really get down to business with God, what are the things which rise to the surface as you petition Him to meet your needs? These are the things that are important to us.

If we could have the apostle Paul stand among us today and share with us those things which he would think are vital for us to pray to have, he might very well pray the same prayer he prayed in this evening's text.

What we see here is a prayer which comes from Paul's heart. It is a prayer for believers. It is a prayer that touches on things essential for the Christian life.

This is the second of two prayers in the first three chapters of Ephesians.

The first is found in Ephesians 1:15-23. In that first prayer, Paul prays that we might come to *know* God's power.

In this second prayer, Paul prays that we might *use* that power.

As believers, we not only need to know God's power, we need to put it into practice.

Analogy: It is possible to know a great deal about automobiles—

to know how all the mechanical parts interact,
to know about the electrical system,
to know about the transmission, engine, suspension, and the like,

and never use the automobile to go anywhere.

On the other hand, it is entirely possible to know almost nothing about how an automobile is engineered, and to use it every day to travel thousands of miles. We must use what we know, or what we know is of no benefit.

The same is true spiritually. It is possible to know a great deal about the truths of God contained in the Bible, and yet never live by those truths. So the focus of this second prayer is on how to know and live by the power of God.

This is the challenge for us as believers. If the need of knowing what we need to know and living by what we know is met, then we will be able to experience a sense of the power and presence of God.

Let's look at three petitions for us and the power within us.

I. THE PETITIONS FOR US.

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:14-19)

Christians should not have to be reminded of the power of prayer. By prayer we touch the throne of God. God has ordained that through prayer we should set His hand in motion. He has chosen to respond to our prayers by unleashing His divine activity in our midst. The believer has no higher calling than to pray. Indeed, we never stand so tall as when we bow in prayer.

Prayer is powerful. Paul knew that. That is why he prayed. Multitudes have come to understand the power of prayer through the centuries.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the church, had a good friend and assistant, Friedrich Myconius. In 1540, Myconius became sick and was expected to die shortly. On his deathbed he wrote a farewell letter to Luther in tender terms. Luther read the message and immediately sent a reply:

"I command you in the name of God to live because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church. . . . the Lord will never let me hear that you are dead, but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying, this is my will, and may my will be done, because I seek only to glorify the name of God."

While those words may seem a little brash. Myconius, who had already lost the ability to speak when Luther's reply came, soon recovered. Myconius lived six more years and finally died two months after Luther. (John MacArthur, *Ephesians*, pp. 103-04).

As we look at Paul's prayer for us, we notice that there are really four petitions to it.

A. The First Petition (v. 16).

. . . is found in verse 16 where Paul prays to God *"that He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man."* Here Paul is praying that we might have strength.

This petition, like all the others, is preceded by a qualification. Paul desires that God would answer “*according to the riches of His glory.*” Paul does not want the answer to come “*out of*” God’s riches, but “*according to*” God’s riches. In other words, Paul does not want us to experience something of God, but to experience the limitless supply of God Himself.

The provision for which Paul prays is strength. He prays that we might *be strengthened*. The place where we are to receive this provision is *in the inner man*. The *power* by which we receive this provision is given *through* a Person—the *Spirit* of God

We all need strength. And the place that we need this strength is in *the inner man*. That is the seat of influence and also the seat of feebleness in our lives. But we need strength beyond our own. We need to *be strengthened with power* beyond human power.

Word Study: The word translated *power* is the Greek word *dunamei*. From *dunamei* we derive our words dynamic and dynamite. Both of these describe the power of God which we so desperately need. This is not a human power, but a divine power imparted to us *through His Spirit*. It is only because the Holy Spirit is welcomed and received in our lives that we will receive this power. This calls for an openness, a humility, and a receptivity on our part. God wants us strong.

B. The Second Petition (v. 17).

In verse 17 Paul prays *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*. Here Paul prays for our fellowship with Christ. God wants us more than merely saved. This prayer is *that Christ may dwell in your hearts*. In other words, Christ desires to settle down and be at home in our hearts.

Word Study: In fact the word translated *dwell* is a compound form of two Greek words, *kata* (*down*) and (*oikos*) (*house*). Christ wants to settle down in our house. He wants to *dwell in our hearts through faith*.

Application: Robert Munger wrote a booklet entitled “*My Heart Christ’s Home.*” He pictures the Christian life as a house. Jesus enters the house and goes from room to room where He is surprised to find many things with which He is uncomfortable.

He goes into the library of the mind and begins to clean up the trash found there. He replaces it with His Word.

He enters the dining room of the appetite and finds many sinful desires listed on a worldly menu. He replaces things like materialism, envy, pride, and lust with humility, love, meekness, and the like.

He enters the living room of fellowship and there finds worldly companions and activities. In the workshop, only toys are being made.

In the closet, many hidden sins are kept. Christ could only feel comfortable after He cleaned every room. Only then could He settle down and be at home.

But in order for Christ to dwell in our hearts, our hearts must dwell on Him. Our *faith* must cause us to be faithful to Him.

Illustration: I heard of a young man named Ray Hoo, who had just graduated from Iowa State University. He returned to his native Jamaica where he tried to find a job. His brother arranged for him to have an interview with the chairman of the Jamaican banana industry. Things went well during the interview and the chairman decided to make an opening for Hoo, even though there wasn't one.

Then the chairman asked Hoo how he would like to spend his spare time. Ray said that he liked reading and sports, particularly soccer and basketball, and added, "*I also spend a lot of time in Christian activities because I hope to someday give my life to Christian missions.*" Upon hearing that, the chairman decided that he could not spend money to train a new man only to have him leave for the mission field. He said, "*Young man, your ambitions are noble; but we want men who will give their lives to bananas.*"

Whatever you give your life to is what your heart dwells on. Is your goal to give your life to bananas? All around you, people dedicate themselves to bananas, or oil, or technology, or whatever you do. Life is too short to give your life to bananas. You need to give it to Christ.

C. **The Third Petition (v. 17).**

The third petition continues in verse 17, where Paul prays, "*That you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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.*"

Here Paul prays that we might comprehend and know the love of Christ.

Word Study: The word for "love" here is agape. This is God's love. We are to be *rooted and grounded in love*. God desires that our roots run deep. He desires that our foundation be strong. We are planted in love. And from that perspective we can *comprehend* and *know the love of Christ*.

When he prays that we might comprehend this love, he is praying that we might understand it by experience. He prays that this comprehension might bring us to a place of understanding by experience *the breath and length and height and depth* of this love. The only way we can begin to understand this is to experience it for ourselves.

Let's think about God's love for a moment.

- (1) The ***breadth*** of God's love is immense. It reaches to all men, nations, sins, needs, cares, situations.
- (2) The ***length*** of God's love is eternal. It existed before time, it is never ending, it is unconditional, and it is boundless.
- (3) The ***depth*** of God's is unfathomable. It caused God to stoop as low as a man is. He reached down to us.
- (4) The ***height*** of God's love is infinite. In His love we ascend with Christ in victory, joy, truth, character, and love.

Measuring God's love is impossible. We are attempting to measure the immeasurable.

Paul also prays that we know the unknowable. He prays for us ***to know the love of God which surpasses knowledge***. Once we have encountered this love, we will be forever amazed by it. It is literally indescribable. One is reminded of the words of that saint of old who penned the following lines on the walls of his cell regarding the love of God:

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above,
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

D. The Final Petition (v. 19b).

The final petition is found in the later part of verse 19, where Paul prays ***“that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”*** Paul is praying that we might be filled with God. He is really praying that we contain the uncontainable.

This is the high and glorious privilege of the believer. We have been created to be containers of God. He desires to pour His life into us and fill us to the full. This is the mystery of the gospel. This is the mystery of Christ. Christ dwells in human beings. Christ dwells in us. And the greatest need for the Christian is to be filled with Christ. We are to be filled with His nature and character. We are to be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. We are to be filled with Jesus.

II. THE POWER WITHIN US.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (3:20-21).

The four petitions for which Paul has prayed can very easily seem beyond our reach. Indeed, they are. Unless God intervenes to enable us to reach these goals, we will fail. And so Paul closes with a benediction which reveals the power available to us through an able Savior, Jesus Christ. It is a glorious doxology of praise to the only One who can accomplish these things.

Here he describes God as *able*. His ability works *according to the power that works within us*. The power within us is Christ. But look at how God's ability is described. He is described as . . .

Able

Able to do

*Able to do **beyond** that we ask.*

*Able to do beyond that we **think**.*

*Able to do beyond **all** that we ask or think.*

*Able to do **abundantly** beyond all that we ask or think.*

*Able to do **exceeding** abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.*

It is only through an able Savior that we are going to experience what we really need. And we serve a God who is more than able. What is your heart's prayer? Through Christ, God can do more than you can ask or think.