

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 who is able to do far more abundantly than all that 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.

Ephesians 3:14-21

The Scottish preacher Sir George Adam Smith tells of the time the he and his guide were climbing in the Swiss Alps on a stormy day. They climbed up on the sheltered side of the peak and as they reached the summit, they were so overcome with exhilaration that Sir George forgot about the fierce winds and leaped up and was nearly blown over the edge of the summit. The guide grabbed hold of him and exclaimed: “On your knees, sir. You are safe here only on your knees!”

This is where we find the apostle Paul as we open our text for this morning: *“I bow my knees before the Father.”* But Paul is not on his knees because it’s a safe place. He is on his knees because he is praying for us, the church of Jesus Christ. This is not Paul’s first prayer in his letter to the church in Ephesus. There was another in Ephesians 1:16-18: *“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”*

These prayers complement each other. The first was a prayer for *enlightenment*; the second is for *enablement*. In the first prayer Paul went through a detailed explanation of the gospel the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the great mysteries of being chosen by God; sharing in all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places; adopted by God in Christ; redeemed and forgiven through the revealed will of God; heirs of God and assured of salvation - sealed and guaranteed by the power of the Holy Spirit until the day we are united together with all things in heaven and things on earth in Christ.

The *“reason”* Paul then prayed was that God’s Spirit would *“enlighten”* the eyes of their hearts to the reality of what Jesus had done for them, so they would fully know the *power* that is available to them in Christ: *“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come”* (Ephesians 1:19-21).

In chapter two Paul again reminds us that God took the divine initiative to save us by His grace from His wrath and restore us back to the relationship with Him we were created for – and that not only did God restore us to Himself but He also restored us to each other, because all who come to the cross are reconciled to God and to one another. In chapter three Paul reminds us once more of the wondrous, breathtakingly magnificent, deeply mysterious, powerful, glorious truths of what God has done for us and has planned for us that he shared with us in the first two chapters of Ephesians - encouraging those of us who are struggling in life that in Christ we have been called to something greater.

Our prayer from this morning picks up at that point, which is also the closing point of the prayer in chapter one. Yes, in Christ we have been created for something greater, and yes in Christ we have been chosen and called and adopted and redeemed and forgiven and have a great and glorious inheritance waiting for us. But now Paul makes it clear that we in the church must not only to have our *eyes opened* to knowledge of what God has done for us and has planned for us, and we must not only fully *know* the power that is available to us in Jesus Christ – we must also *pray* that God would enable us to live out the “*immeasurable greatness of his power*” of the gospel that is available to us in Christ. In our text for this morning we see how Paul prays for the power to fully live out the gospel in his life.

In the text before this Paul first paints a picture of the church of Jesus Christ, then tells us because of sin, the world disintegrated into chaos; there is division everywhere – man against God, man against man, race against race, nation against nation. But then he says it was God’s design and purpose to bring all of those things back together into one through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – and that all those things would happen *through the church*, the living presence of Jesus Christ on earth. The “*reason*” Paul is praying here is that the purpose and plan of God cannot come to fruition unless *the church* becomes impassioned for God and in love with Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul wants the church in Ephesus and the church in Port Alberni to powerfully live out what we have already learned about who God is, what God has done and what God will do for us in Christ.

“*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . .*” Paul pours out his heart and soul in prayer here with intensity and passion and humility that is unusual for him. You can feel that in that the normal posture for prayer among Jews was *standing*, with hands stretched out and palms upwards. But Paul is so overcome, so passionate in his desire to see the power of God’s Holy Spirit take hold of those of us in the church that he prays: “*I bow my knees before the Father.*” This is more than just kneeling; this is an intense attitude and passion of the heart which drove Paul to the ground before God. Paul says “*I bow my knees*” because he knows that the power of God is only released into hearts which are bowed before Him. It is only by that humble, dependent, needy, passionate, gospel power that we can be lifted up to the expectations, to the glorious aspirations of God that He has for us.

How can we pray for the “*immeasurable greatness of His power*” that will empower us to powerfully live out what we have already learned about who God is, what God has done and what God will do for us in Christ? Well, Paul prays that the we, as individuals and as a church, will know that power of God when we pray that God would powerfully *transform our hearts*: “*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.*” It’s significant that the very first thing Paul says after “*for this reason*” is that he is going to pray. He understood what prayer is, what prayer does and how prayer works. Paul knew that prayer is essential to finding the solution to all of our desperate needs and difficult problems. We can only really know God’s power when we pray.

“*That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.*” Here we read the purpose and the process and answers to prayer should always glorify God – by reflecting and revealing God in all His holiness, sovereignty, goodness, righteousness, and glory. He also prays that that the Holy Spirit would “*strengthen*” our “*inner being.*” In Paul’s day the term “*inner being*” was understood to be our reason, our conscience, and our will. Because all three of these elements of our “*inner being*” were radically infected by our fall into sin, Paul prays the Holy Spirit would powerfully work to overcome our fallen sinful nature for a glorious purpose. And the power of that glorious purpose is “*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*”

In these words Paul prays that we would be strengthened by the power of God's Spirit so that Jesus would literally "make his home" in our hearts. "Dwell" is a strong foundational word that means taking up permanent residence, to really settle down. The strengthening of our "inner being" by the Holy Spirit results in our sensing of Jesus' personal presence in our hearts. This is what biblical "faith" really is. Faith is not just believing Jesus died for our sins, rather faith is believing Jesus died for our sins and also intimately knowing and inviting him to live in your heart. If Christ powerfully lives in our "inner being" he is at the very center of our core "being" which then means our "inner being" is being constantly changed and transformed. When Jesus dwells within you, you will *never, ever* be the same.

Note Paul uses the words "power" and "dwell" together here. "Power" is the English translation of the Greek word *dynamis* from which we get our word *dynamite*. That's the kind of life we are to be living for Jesus—dynamic, strong, mighty, potent, bold, explosive. If the risen Christ lives and dwells within our hearts, our faith will be explosive! Brothers and sisters, when the Savior dwells in our hearts, we will have more power inside of us than any problem, pain or predicament we will ever face in this world. The power of the risen Jesus Christ lives within us! This is the breathtaking, magnificent, deeply mysterious, awesomely beautiful, glorious truth of what God has planned for our lives. May we today begin living with that "immeasurable greatness of his power!" Paul prayed that God would empower us through His Spirit so we would be changed when Jesus lives within our hearts.

"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." Here Paul tells us the *means* by which our hearts are transformed when we pray is - *the love of Jesus!* Paul prays God will give us the power of the deep, overflowing love of Jesus – which comes as a result of being deeply rooted and grounded in the love of Jesus, by embracing the unlimited love of Jesus, and by intimately knowing the overflowing love of Jesus.

"That you, being rooted and grounded in love." One of the main themes of Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus is unity. In chapter two we read of God's call for unity through Jesus Christ among the Gentiles and the Jews who have come to faith, that they might bury their differences and tear down the walls and barriers of their prejudice. This was the "mystery" of Christ's work among them. In next week's text we will see that "bearing with one another in love" makes us "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:2-3). God's call for unity among those of different races and backgrounds has specific application to us in the church today. We are to put aside our personal opinions and differences for the purposes of God within our own church family. In Christ we are all the same. We all stand before God's throne with the same need of mercy, grace and forgiveness. Just as God so loved the world He gave His only son, we are to be rooted and grounded in that same love. When the dynamic power of the indwelling Christ lives within us, we will love God and each other.

"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." In being "rooted and grounded" in the love of Jesus, Paul prays we would "have strength to comprehend with all the saints" the love of Jesus. The word "comprehend" here means more than understand. Rather it means "to lay hold of, to seize, to take possession of." Paul has already prayed that we would understand; now he prays we would lay hold of, seize the love of Jesus and take possession of it for ourselves. Paul's prayer here is that the church may somehow come to grasp the extent of the breadth and length and height and depth of the love that Jesus Christ had for them.

In these words it's almost as if the apostle Paul is inviting us to look up and out at the universe – the unending skies above, the limitless horizons on every side, to the depth of the seas below – and then he says: "The love that God has for you is even bigger than that. So, you should love others with the same never-ending boundaries." We are to seize God's love for ourselves and since it is immeasurable and ever abundantly overwhelming - we are to share it and pour it out on others.

"And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." The word "know" here is not in having knowledge or in learning or understanding. Paul prays we would "know" the love of Jesus in a way that "surpasses knowledge." "Know" here is "know" in the biblical sense of "knowing" – which is like "knowing" someone you have an intimate relationship with. In Jeremiah 1:5 God told Jeremiah: *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."* To "know" someone is to have such a single-hearted passion for them that your greatest heart desire is to bless them with all you are and all that you have. In marriage while we "know" our spouse loves us – we still want to "know" that intimately by experience.

God "knows" you and I that way through the love that Jesus Christ has for us. He relentlessly pursues us so that He can love us. His passion is for our hearts. His desire is to bless us abundantly. His love for us "surpasses knowledge" – it is beyond our understanding or explanation. The problem is, we usually don't "know" Him the same way. We have other loves, other desires, other passions which draw us away from "knowing" God the same way He "knows" us. But we can. We can "know" God at this level when the power of His Spirit is dynamically working through us by the indwelling of Christ as we seize that power by being rooted and grounded in His love. Jesus loves us wildly and unashamedly; in some ways His love is unknowable as His riches are unsearchable. But in reality we rarely desire the same intimacy of Christ's love that He desires for and with us.

In his book, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes: "In the last analysis what matters supremely is not the fact that I know God, but the larger fact that underlies it – *is that He knows me*. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All of my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me, and He continues to know me. He knows me as one who loves me and there is no moment when His eye is off of me. His attention is never distracted away from me and no moment does His care for me falter. . . . There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me. . . . And there is no way I can quench His determination to bless me with His love."

The *means* by which the indwelling Christ powerfully changes our hearts is the deep, unlimited, overflowing love of Jesus. Paul says: "Pray for that" so, *"you may be filled with all the fullness of God."* What does it mean to *"be filled with all the fullness of God"*? When the Christian French philosopher Blaise Pascal died, they found sewed into the lining of his coat - a diary entry of an experience that he had for two hours one night in 1654. He wrote that he experienced God's love as a fire, and he never forgot it. He sewed the record of that event in the lining of his coat so it would always be near his heart. The great evangelist George Whitefield often found that when he prayed at night, he began to experience God's love so powerfully that he couldn't get to sleep, so much so that he often would ask God to stop because he had to get some rest. Jonathan Edwards wrote that as he meditated on a Scripture, he was overcome with the love of Christ that "a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before" filled his heart. The great evangelist D.L. Moody was walking along the streets of New York City in the late 1850s and while praying for more of God, he said, "Suddenly God came down in a way I've never forgotten, and I experienced so much love poured out in my heart that I had to ask him to stop."

To be *"filled with all the fullness of God"* is to be filled with all the fullness of God's deep, unlimited, overflowing love through Jesus Christ - which is God's ultimate purpose for each one of us. The apostle John wrote: *"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."* (John 1:14, 16). In Colossians 2:9-10 Paul himself said: *"For in him (in Christ) the whole fullness of deity (of God) dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him (filled with God through Christ), who is the head of all rule and authority."* And this is not only God's ultimate purpose for each one of us, it is also that of the church: *"the fullness of him who fills all in all"* (Ephesians 1:23).

"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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." About forty years ago two boxers meet in a boxing ring to fight for the world light-weight boxing championship. One boxer was a thirty-one-year-old Scotsman and the other boxer was a 25 years old man from the United States - six years younger than the Scotsman. The Scot was the reigning light-weight champion, and the 15 round fight was being fought before a crowd of twenty thousand in his hometown of Glasgow, Scotland. The champion had said before the match that he would rather die than be beaten before his own people – in spite of the fact that the younger contender from the U.S. had never been beaten in the boxing ring. Soon after the bout began it was clear that the battle would be hard fought and too close to call. But as the rounds went by, something happened unlike anything that has ever happened before in a championship boxing fight. While faint at first, it wasn't long before *singing* could be heard. Gradually, it became louder, until hundreds and hundreds, and then thousands of male voices could be heard singing a strange Scottish melody - *singing encouragement* for their hometown champion, as he fought for his crown.

Just as those in Glasgow, Scotland sang encouragement to hometown boxer who was fighting for his crown – so Paul is singing encouragement to us in the church as we fight for our crown in Christ: *"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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."* What I see in these words is that God is saying to us as a church: "I can do more at Arrowsmith than you have ever asked or thought." And so I imagine if we asked God for the power to do more than we could ever ask or think, and then He does things far beyond what we've asked or thought – we would then humbly and gratefully look up to Him, and He would say: "I can do more!" And we would ask again for even more power to do even more than we've ever asked or thought, and we would look up to God again, and God would say: "I can do more!" And each time we stretch our faith in Him beyond what we thought possible our church, God would always say: "I can do more!"

God is at work in many of the hearts and lives of those within our church family – but I pray we would want more. I pray we would want more of the power of the Holy Spirit *changing our hearts* by the indwelling Jesus. More rooted and grounded in the *deep love* of Christ. More intimate "knowing" of the *overflowing love* of Jesus. More being filled with all *the fullness of God's love* through the love of Jesus. More and *"far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."* The apostle Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would fill us with the love of Jesus Christ so that we would be empowered to live out our lives for the glory of the riches of God's sovereign grace.

I pray we would shake off the worldly addictions and futile dissatisfaction of this life for the ever deep and richer aspirations of God. I pray we would yield our hearts and lives to the voice of Holy Spirit's call to step up to the home plate of life and swing for the fence, knowing that God only hits home runs. I pray we would *"know"* the love of Jesus with such power that others would come to powerfully *"know"* the love of Jesus. I pray we would want more of a greater story than our own.

The greater story is that crucifixion and resurrection of Christ was not planned and purposed by God to get us into heaven. Jesus died and rose from the dead so that we would *live out heaven here on earth*. Paul did not pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon us with the love of Jesus so that we would *know salvation*. Paul prayed for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon us with the love of Jesus so that we would *live out our salvation*. We are not called by God to defend the gates of heaven; we are called by God to storm the gates of hell with the love of Jesus for the glory of God. And as we fight for the crown of glory in this life and the life to come, hear Paul and the holy host of heaven as they sing to us a glorious song of encouragement: *“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, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

Heavenly Father, how good it is to be among those whom you have called to glorify Your holy Name. How blessed we are to have been called out of spiritual darkness and eternal death, and brought into the light of the glorious gospel of grace, and receive the new life in Jesus Christ.

Sovereign God, we are grateful to be members of part of the Body of Christ, and that in the ages to come you will demonstrate Your goodness and grace in us to all generations forever and ever.

Oh Lord, we come before you today in the midst of trial and trouble – as the landscape of our world and our lives is being consumed with wave after wave of violence and division and suffering and death. And we know O Lord - that we all, in different ways, are part of that – we are also, called by you to be the solution to these things.

Father - in your Word, you have told us: “If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.”

Almighty God, we have heard you today. We ask that you would pour yourself into us so we might pray that the Holy Spirit would fill us to overflowing with the love of Jesus Christ, so that we would be empowered to live out our lives that shine with riches of the glory of Your grace, so the world might come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In His name we pray. Amen

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