

# A Prayer for Power

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Date: 15 February 2015

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn to our Bible readings now, and as we were reading this morning, so also this evening, we're going to read in Ephesians chapter 3, and we're carrying on where we left off this morning.

If you have one of our church Bibles, it'll be page 977. And once again, we're going to read the whole of Ephesians chapter 3, but this evening concentrating on the second part from verse 14 onwards, where Paul takes up again after his death is a long aside that we dealt with this morning, but a very important one at that.

And we'll read the whole chapter again. For this reason, Paul says, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles, and then he breaks off, assuming that you've heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I've written briefly.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

[ 1 : 24 ] Of this gospel, I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me by the working of his power. To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory. 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 we ask or think, according to the power of Christ that we are at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Ephesians chapter 3, which you will find in page 977 of the Pew Bible, Ephesians chapter 3.

[ 3 : 58 ] And as you do so, a brief prayer. Father, we thank you for your word, the Bible. And Father, we gather this evening with the deep conviction that when your word is truly preached, your voice is truly heard.

So Father, we would ask that you would speak to us this evening. And in so doing, what we have not, you would give us. What we know not, you would teach us.

And what we are not, you would make us. For Christ's sake, amen. I'm sure most of us here will remember the famous catchphrase Magnus Magnusson used when he hosted the quiz show, Mastermind.

If the buzzer interrupted a question he began asking, he would say the words, I've started, so I'll finish. I've started, so I'll finish.

In a sense, this is what the apostle Paul does in the passage we're looking at this evening of Ephesians 3, verse 14 to 21. Look with me at the first three words of verse 14.

[ 5 : 19 ] First three words of verse 14. For this reason. These three words are a continuation where he left off in chapter 3, verse 1.

If you look back to chapter 3, verse 1, you will see that Paul writes, For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.

But then he digresses and goes off on a bit of a tangent in verse 2 about the stewardship of God's grace given to him for the Ephesians and all the Gentiles, those that are non-Jews.

Our Bibles let us see that verse 2 doesn't quite fit together with verse 1, which is why there is a hyphen-like dash after verse 1. As we saw this morning, the reason this is so is because for a brief moment, Paul gets sidetracked from what it was he originally intended to write.

And we saw this morning, the thing that sidetracked him are the words in verse 1. Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of or for the sake of you Gentiles.

[ 6 : 35 ] These words are like a lightning bolt to Paul's head as they remind him of the change Jesus has brought to his life. He's reminded that he has gone from being Saul, the persecutor of Christ, to Paul, the prisoner for Christ.

He's gone from being Saul who hated Gentiles, who hated non-Jews, to being Paul, prisoner for Christ on behalf of or for the sake of the Gentiles.

And as he thinks about all this, as the transforming work of Christ dawns on him, he's distracted from what he was going to say. And it wasn't a bad distraction though, was it?

My mind wanders all the time when I pray, but I never have a wonder like Paul's. Maybe just once my mind could wander like Paul's. Paul was distracted from what he was going to say.

However, in this evening's passage, in a manner that Magnus Magnusson himself would have been proud of, Paul wants to say, I've started, so I'll finish.

[ 7 : 50 ] He's determined to finish what he began saying in chapter 3, verse 1, before he got sidetracked. And what he began telling the Ephesians in chapter 3, verse 1, was that he was praying something.

He was praying something specific on their behalf. In this letter that Paul writes to the Ephesians, there are two significant prayers that Paul makes.

Paul Brennan looked at the first of these a couple of months ago in chapter 1, verse 15, to verse 23, where Paul thanks God because he'd heard about the Ephesians, their faith in Christ, and their love for all the saints, verse 15.

Then in the verses that follows, Paul prays three requests on the Ephesians' behalf. And I think the NIV translation words this better. Firstly, in verse 17, that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they might know him better.

Then in verse 18, that the eyes of their heart would be enlightened so that they would know better the hope to which they've been called. Then in verse 19, that they may know better the incomparably great power God gives to all who believe.

[ 9 : 09 ] That's prayer number one. In prayer number two, which we're looking at this evening, Paul again petitions God on behalf of the Ephesian church.

And it is a prayer for power. A prayer for power. And if you were looking for a title this evening, then that would be it. A prayer for power. But I am sure, just like the Ephesians, we will be very surprised as to what Paul wants this power to achieve in the life of the Ephesians.

And subsequently, in our lives also. Before looking at the actual substance of Paul's prayer in verses 16 to 19, let's look firstly to verses 14 to 15, the style of Paul's prayer.

The style of Paul's prayer. And we're told two details here. Firstly, verse 14 says, I, Paul, bow my knees to pray.

Which must have been quite an experience for the Roman soldier who was chained to Paul. But Paul, I bow my knees to pray. Which is unusual because the normal Jewish posture for prayer was to stand.

[ 10 : 26 ] The Bible nowhere commands any special posture for prayer. Abraham stood before the Lord when he prayed for Sodom, Genesis chapter 18.

Solomon stood to pray at the dedication of the temple, 1 Kings chapter 8. David sat before the Lord when he prayed about the future of his kingdom, 1 Chronicles chapter 17.

And in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus fell on his face to pray. Remember too the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that Jesus told.

They both stood to pray because the normal Jewish posture for prayer was to stand. And we sometimes see that on our televisions today. Maybe if we see the wailing wall in Israel on our TV screens, we see Jewish people standing, praying before the wailing wall.

For a duty kneeling prayer, they had to be caught up in a moment of great emotion or they had to be responding to something extraordinary God had done.

[ 11 : 39 ] Paul kneels to pray in verse 14 because he's caught up in a moment of great emotion as he thinks about the extraordinary grace and mercy of God he's been speaking about in the verses before.

He's told us how God has taken those who at one time deserved nothing but his wrath, chapter 2, verse 3, who were without hope and without God in this world, chapter 2, verse 12.

people like these God had brought them near through the blood of Christ, chapter 2, verse 13. These people who had no connection to God but now they had access to the Father through the Spirit, verse 18, and were no longer strangers and aliens, verse 19, but fellow citizens with the saints, God's people, and members of God's household, God's family.

He has transformed them from being foreigners to being family. And as Paul thinks about this, all he can do is to fall to his knees in adoration of the God whose salvation extends to all people everywhere.

The second thing to note about the style of Paul's prayer is who he prays to in verses 14 and 15. he bows his knees before the Father through every family in heaven and on earth is named.

[ 13 : 14 ] In the Bible, prayer is usually addressed to the Father through the Son and the power of the Spirit. This is the usual pattern. Although some prayers are addressed to the Son, like in 1 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 12 and 13, but the normal pattern is to pray to the Father.

By mentioning that all fatherhood is dependent upon the fatherhood of God, Paul reminds the Ephesians that the God that they have now got access to, who, verse 12 of chapter 3 says, they could approach with boldness, confidence, and freedom.

This God has all authority and power, and all family groupings, whether powers and authorities in heavenly realms, or family groupings on earth, are under his rule.

Every fatherhood in heaven and in earth gets its origin and its name from the Father. He is the great original. Every other fatherhood is but a copy.

Adam is called the Son of God, referring to his creation. Believers are referred to as the sons of God by our rebirth, by our being born again.

[ 14 : 34 ] All men are not children of God by nature. Instead, they are children of disobedience and children of wrath. Chapter 2, verse 2 and 3.

As creator, God is father of each man, but as savior, he is only the father of those who believe. There is no such thing in scripture as the universal fatherhood of God that saves all men.

No. to those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the right to be called children of God. The Ephesians had received Jesus.

They had believed in Jesus' name. They were part of the family of God. God is their father and this father has all authority. He has all power and all family groupings whether powers and authorities in the heavenly realms or family groupings on earth are under his control.

And in a culture where it would have been hard to be a Christian as Ephesus was, with all its black magic practice and temple idolatry, how comforting it would have been for Ephesian Christians to be reminded that their God, their God and father was God and father over all.

[ 15 : 56 ] Paul has already told them that this God loved them to a degree that he sent his son into the world to die for their sin. This was their God and he is the father from whom every family in heaven and earth is named.

He is sovereign. He is in charge. Everything belongs to him, even the city of Ephesus and for us, even the city of Glasgow. Nothing takes place that he doesn't rule.

One commentary points out Paul's words here would have assured the Christians that no hostile force, whether in Ephesus or anywhere else, could prevent God from hearing or answering their requests.

They have a father who is king, a king over all. Well, with that said, let's go from the style of Paul's prayer to looking at the substance of his prayer, verses 16 to 19.

Well, firstly, in verse 16, Paul prays that God the father, their father, he prays that God the father, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit and your inner being.

[ 17 : 08 ] At first glance, a statement like this in the Bible can leave us wondering what's being said. So, exactly what is it that Paul's praying for? Well, simply put, he's praying God would display his might and his power in that part of us that controls who we are.

And the part of us that controls us for heaven. Our inner being, or more literally, our inner man is the part of us that's left when our outer man has wasted away.

We live in a culture where few people in the church as well as in the world give any attention to their inner being, the part of them that lives forever after they've passed away.

Most of the time, our money and energy is spent not in our inner being, but on our outer being. Our priority is to look good on the outside.

Now, it's not a bad thing to try and make ourselves look cosmetically presentable. Some of us more than others. I mean, for us men, this is as good as it gets for us. We get up in the morning and we are stuck with the faces that God has given us.

[ 18 : 17 ] But you ladies, you ladies can change how you look with those vast array of products that you spend all your money on. Now, although it's not a bad thing in itself to try and make ourselves look more cosmetically presentable, it is a bad thing if we're putting more energy, more time, and more money on our outer being than our inner being.

If we're doing this as Christians, something isn't right. And Paul knows this isn't right, which is why he prays through the power of the Holy Spirit, God would strengthen the Ephesians inner being.

And the reason he gives for this is in verse 17. The purpose of our inner being being strengthened with power through the Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

This is an interesting statement, and it's an interesting thing to pray for a group of Christians. We know that when someone becomes a Christian, Christ already dwells in them through the Holy Spirit.

So if this is so, why does Paul pray that Christ may dwell in the hearts through faith of those who already know Christ? What is it he's talking about? He's talking about Christians experiencing the reality of Christ having complete rule in and over our hearts.

[ 19 : 39 ] Paul wants Christ to take up every single bit of us till our lives reflect the character and qualities of Christ's own life.

I don't know about you, but this is something I want more than anything else. And I want it because if I'm honest, I see such a lack of Christ likeness in my own life.

to the point of despair. Brothers and sisters, what Paul is teaching here is what we already know to be true in our own experience. That this side of eternity, there is more room for Jesus in our lives.

If we think otherwise, then let me put it politely, we're deceiving ourselves. The Apostle John picks up in this in 1 John chapter 3 verse 2 when he writes, Dear friends, now we are the children of God.

That is, Christ really does dwell with us. But he goes on to say, but what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

[ 20 : 49 ] John is in agreement with Paul. He's saying, yes, as Christians, we really are the children of God, and nothing can change that. However, as long as we have an outer being, that is, as long as we have what's described in Romans chapter 7 as a body of death, there will always be more room for Jesus to dwell in our hearts.

The old hymn puts it like this, more about Jesus would I know, more of his grace to others show, more of his saving fullness see, more of his love who died, for me.

This is what Paul wanted for the Ephesians, and this is what God wants for us. Power to be holy, power to think, power to act, act and walk in ways utterly pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul will go on to say in chapter 4, verse 1.

And Paul goes on in his prayer for the Ephesians, which again, like the first part of the prayer, has to do with power. So from verses 17b to verse 19, he prays, that you being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength, or better translated, that you may have power 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.

if you're anything like me, this is a prayer you need to learn to pray for yourself. Paul reminds us, and it's humbling to admit this, we Christians don't adequately appreciate or comprehend just how much Jesus loves us.

[ 22 : 41 ] No, Paul is not praying that we would love Jesus more, though this is a good thing to pray, but that we might have a better grasp of his love for us.

Although we need to know about this love, that is, although we need to have a knowledge from scripture about it, Paul would have us say that this ought to lead us to experiencing this love.

Sometimes in more conservative churches, we're scared to talk about our experiences in case we're branded as wacky, charismatic Christian. I want to admit, regardless of what anyone else thinks, I'm desperate to experience more and more of Jesus' love for me.

I want to swim more in his love, to relish it, to enjoy it, and to get lost in it. Isn't that the case? We don't experience it.

We don't experience this enough as believers. Isn't it the case that although we sing hymns about here is love vast as the ocean? All too often, we never venture any further than ankle deep.

[ 23 : 57 ] Paul certainly believed Christians need to keep on grasping how wide and how long and how high and how deep Christ's love for them is. Otherwise, this prayer wouldn't be in Ephesians.

John Owen said, words that are a great challenge to me. We are never nearer Christ than when we find ourselves lost in a holy amazement at his unspeakable love.

We are never nearer Christ than when we find ourselves lost in a holy amazement at his unspeakable love. I wonder if, like me, this lets you see that we are not as close to Christ as Christ longs us to be.

We are never nearer him than when we find ourselves lost in holy amazement at his unspeakable love. He loves us. It's good to experience love from one another, but no one loves like Jesus loves.

There's warmth in his love no other lover brings. There's security in his love no other lover gives. Paul describes the love of Jesus as love that surpasses knowledge.

[ 25 : 09 ] With these words, he wants us to see how limitless that love is. He's telling us no one gets to a place of discovering all there is to know about the love of Jesus.

And the reason Paul prays for us to grasp and to know this unfathomable love is verse 19, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

In other words, that we might be spiritually mature, Paul wants us to be all that God wants us to be. Do you see what Paul's teaching in all of this is?

He wants us to see that we can't be as spiritually mature as we ought to be unless we receive power from God that will enable us to grasp just how much Jesus loves us.

Jesus loves us. Friends, take a second and just tell that to yourselves. Jesus loves me. Just whisper it to yourself. Jesus loves me. Richard Pratt, the president of Third Millennium Ministries, who we had the pleasure of taking this pulpit last year, Richard Pratt said that when he goes to church to listen or when he goes to church to preach, there's one thing that he prays.

[ 26 : 29 ] Oh Lord, help the preacher to tell me just one thing, just one thing that will help me keep believing in Jesus for another week. Just one thing.

Well, the one thing that this preacher wants to tell you is that Jesus loves you. Often we measure spiritual maturity by things like theology, education, years of experience or tradition, but the apostle Paul will have none of it.

He wants us to see we can't be spiritually mature as we ought until we know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. There's such a lesson in all of this because we're tempted to think the thing that above all else that makes us spiritually mature is being orthodox in doctrine.

You can go to a church that has all the doctrine in place, but the lack of Christ's love can be totally unbearable. Why? Because unlike Paul, they've never understood that to grasp the love of Christ as we should, then we need to cry out to God for power to know it.

A friend sent me this quote, It takes nothing less than the power of God to enable us to grasp the love of God. Part of our deep me-ism is manifested in such independence that we don't really want to get so close to God, that we feel dependent upon him, swamped by his love.

[ 28 : 00 ] God's love to God. We're back off and take out our own turf, wanting to experience power so that we can be in control, rather than what Paul prays about, which is power, so that we will be controlled by God himself.

I wonder if God is challenging some of us about this this evening. If he is, then do you know there will be part of you that will be coiling up and trying to hide just now.

Part of us will be resisting God, resisting him, while God is showing at us with divine love and saying, let go and come rest in Jesus.

Perhaps you're sitting here and wondering, can God really do this for me? We're tempted to wonder if it's possible that a group of ordinary folks like us can experience and know such extraordinary love from God.

Well, in the verses our passage ends with, Paul wants us to see that it's possible. The God we're dealing with is the God who, verse 20 says, is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think.

[ 29 : 13 ] And note, Paul adds, this is according to his power at work within us. Perhaps we've experienced this love we've been looking at this evening. Perhaps it was some years ago in our Christian walk, but the years have gone by and we no longer experience it.

And perhaps this has led us to fearing that this side of eternity, we're never going to experience it again. We're even scared to believe this evening that we could even get a breakthrough with this just in case it doesn't happen.

Well, the Holy Spirit through Paul writes these things for people who feel this way. Through the Spirit we can be changed. Our hearts can once again be warmed and set in fire for Jesus.

God can do abundantly, immeasurably more than all we can ask or think or imagine. And he can do it now.

Why don't you take a moment to ask God in prayer if this is something he would do for you? Let's tell God, as Paul does at the end of chapter 3, we want to experience this love.

[ 30 : 26 ] We want the power to experience this love, not for experience sake, but so that God himself would receive glory in the church and in Christ Jesus and throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. Let us pray together. Father, we come asking that you would give us power to know more about Jesus.

we pray that you would give us power to know more of his saving fullness. We pray that you would give us power to more of his love, the one who died for us.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can 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.