

Ephesians 3:14—21

September 24, 2017

North Korea, the small communist nation, seems to constantly be flitting in and out of the news. This little country is famous/infamous for her eccentric leaders. Most recently we have a father and son tandem, before Kim Jung Un we had Kim Jung Il.

The North Korea propaganda is constantly humming with prodigious efficiency, but dropped some serious gems on the world in an effort to prop up the late despot's profile in the country.

Among some of the most incredible claims that the government made about Jun Il were these:

- 1) He invented the Hamburger.
- 2) He was a golf prodigy. The first day he touched a golf club happened to be the first day he played golf. He shot 38 under par including 11 hole-in-ones. He promptly retired from the game.
- 3) He started talking at 3 weeks old and could walk at 8 weeks.
- 4) When he was born, a new star showed up in the night sky.
- 5) During his studies at university he wrote (not read), wrote 1500 books. In his spare time he wrote 6 operas deemed by the experts, "better than any in the history of music."

Any thinking person hears those things and immediately realizes that those claims are total bunk. No way he did those things. No way he wrote 6 operas better than Mozart.

It is not that those claims are too good to be true, but too absurd to be true.

What was the propaganda machine doing? Trying to prop up the reputation of a foolish leader. To make the people feel better about their leader.

In just a minute I going to say something that you *might* think is just an effort to make you feel better about yourself.

It will sound too good to be true.

Not because it is absurd, but because it is remarkable.

Today we are going to hear a clear statement of purpose from God for your life. We are going to hear what God wants you to understand most.

And it is remarkable.

What is it?

PROP: You need a greater grasp of Christ's love for you.

NOT

Greater obedience

Greater devotions
Greater sacrifice
Greater surrender
Greater sacrifice

But a greater grasp of his love.

Why?

Because no one—not one of us
understands/grasps/comprehends how very much
Christ loves us each.

Not one.

No matter who you are, what experiences you have
had, how long you have been a Christian, you do not
sufficiently understand the love of Christ.

Today—we will explore the love of God in Christ.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,
¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is
named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he
may grant you to be strengthened with power through
his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may
dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being
rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ 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, that you may
be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ 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.” Ephesians 3:14-21

PRAY

We see three petitions in our passage this morning, three petitions that we take one at a time. A petition for:

Strength
Comprehension
Fullness

Strength for what?
Comprehension of what?
Fullness with what?

His love.

1. Strengthen (3:14-17)—

vs. 16,

“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...”

Strengthen with power.

Whatever he is praying for, it is clear that NO ONE has natural strength sufficient for living this life. He does not direct our gaze inward to drum up the power.

We are never asked to strengthen ourselves or to be powerful or to be strong.

But to be strengthened—receive power. God is the one who strengthens us. We can do nothing without him.

To understand the purpose of this prayer we need to grasp the reason for the prayer. Did you see that in verse 14?

“For this reason...”

In other words, he is praying this prayer for a specific reason. What is it?

When you come across a statement like that—you need to ask yourself—For what reason? If you don’t, you won’t really understand what is going on.

When he says, “For this reason...” he is harkening back to much of what he said before in this remarkable letter.

What did he say?

- 1:3—They were blessed with ‘every’ spiritual blessing in Jesus Christ. Not one is missing.
- 1:7—Received full redemption and complete forgiveness.
- 1:11—An inheritance of lasting value from our father in heaven.
- 1:13—Indwelt by the Spirit of God.
- 2:1—We were dead and now we are alive.
- 2:7—Had grace lavished upon us.

- 2:9—Saved by grace and not works of obedience.
- 2:13—We who were far were brought near in Christ.

And he crescendos with the ultimate in the program of the purposes of God—

“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” Ephesians 2:18—22

In other words, he is telling us what we have in Christ, who we are in Christ and what we are to do in Christ.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God took up residence in the temple located in Jerusalem. No longer. Now, the Spirit of God takes residence in the church of God.

One of the changes from the Old to New Testament is the shift from a holy place to a holy people. Every faithful church on the planet is even now being built as a dwelling place for his Spirit.

We are being built into something together that cannot happen alone. And because he has built us into a holy temple and is continuing to work on his

people—on us—he wants to pray for the church in Ephesus and we can say the same prayer is for us too—

What does he 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,

Why? Whatever it is it must be BIG

¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”

That seems anticlimactic. All that build up in prayer so that Christ may dwell in our hearts? What? Doesn't he already dwell in our hearts?

Why in the world is praying for something that seems to have already happened?

What is he saying?

Believers in Jesus as they are rooted (planted) and grounded (built) in the soil and on the foundation of love.

If you are in Christ—you are rooted in the soil of love and built on the foundation of love.

And he is praying that you would know this love as Christ takes residence in your life.

As Christ takes up residence in our lives, he finds much in need of repair. Like a derelict house someone buys to fix up. Christ—by his Spirit—indwells us and begins more and more to change us into his likeness.

And the number one factor that changes us is his unstoppable, immeasurable love. You see, you are rooted and grounded in his love.

How does love change you? Think about it from the other way around. Love is always a better change agent than dread.

If you dread someone you will act out of animal fear. You will do or not do out of fear of punishment.

What do I mean? Maybe an analogy could work here.

Imagine a little girl who lives in dread of her dad. Her dad has a demanding work schedule and he is usually tired when he comes home after a long day. And when he comes home he is apt to yell and carry on if she doesn't do exactly what he wants.

And so, the little girl stays out of his way. She knows he loves her, but she has to look past what he says. She lives in dread of her father and her life is not centered on his love for her.

She will live trying NOT to make him angry.

Jesus is not like that.

He never flies off the handle.

You never need to stay out of his way.
You never have to fear his outbursts.

Your very existence is rooted and grounded in his love.

The center of this prayer is that we would have the strength from the Spirit to have the faith to grow in the understanding that our life in him is from the beginning to the end rooted and founded in love.

He prays for strength for us to have Jesus dwell in our hearts. You know Jesus best when you know understand that he loves you.

Christian—do you ever think:

- I am a disappointment.
- He is displeased with me.
- He loves others, but not you.
- You never measure up.

No. Not true. Those that are in Christ are rooted and grounded in his love. To grow as a Christian is to grow in an understanding of his love for you.

He you will know his nearness as you know that he regards you with an unquenchable love. You will grow in maturity NOT just when you confess sin but when you grow in understanding how much he loves you.

You need to strength to understand this love.

But that is not the only thing he prays—he prays that not only we would be strengthened with power but also

2. Comprehend (3:18-19)—

Vs. 18

“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,”

What does he pray? That we would have the further strength to comprehend how much he loves us. He moves from fact that he loves us to talking about how much he loves us.

And it sounds too good to be true. And it takes divine strength to understand this love.

He prays that we ‘may have strength to comprehend...’ Comprehend is a good rendering but not strong enough. When I think of comprehending something I think of sitting in a classroom in a dispassionate setting trying to understand something the teacher is saying.

But a better word is grasp. He is praying that we would grasp the love of Christ. He is praying that we would clutch the love of Christ with all we are worth and wrestle it into our hearts.

And it does take wrestling.

This is vitally important. You can understand something without really grasping it. And Paul prays here that we would not merely understand the love of Christ but that we would grasp and hold it with all we can.

It takes strength to understand a love like this. Only God with his infinite resources and strength has the ability to give us the ability to grasp the love of Christ.

Notice—

He prays that we would have the strength to understand the love of Christ—

NOT

- That we would love Christ more.

That is what I would expect him to pray. I would expect that he would pray that we Christians would love Jesus as he deserves to be loved.

I would expect that the apostle would call us to dwell on Christ, who he is, what he did, what he is doing, what he will do for us—and love him.

But that is decidedly NOT what he does. The focus has to be on his love for us and not our love for him. That is what makes following Jesus different.

Other religions say—love this or that deity more.
Christianity says—you need to grasp how much he
already loves you.

No he prays that we would have the strength to
understand the love of Christ for us. Paul is writing to
a church and to a group of Christians. And he assumes
that they do not adequately understand the love of
Christ.

What was true for the Ephesians is true for us too.

We don't grasp how much Christ loves us. When it
comes to the love of Christ there is always more.

It is an eternal love.

It is an inexhaustible love.

It is an infinite love.

It is an unchanging love.

It is an indomitable love.

It is an unquenchable love.

It is a limitless love.

But it is—if you are a Christian—the love Jesus has for
you.

We need the Holy Spirit to help us continually grasp
the love of Christ for us.

Why?

There are forces aplenty that erode our grasp on that
love.

Maybe you feel burdened by the weight of sin. You came into today carrying the intolerable weight of secret sin.

And you think—he could not love me—FALSE.

Maybe your heart melts each day with a soul splitting sorrow. You have suffered losses and disappointments and setbacks of one kind or another and you wonder if he loves you at all.

You think—he must not love me—FALSE.

Maybe you recall with vivid detail haunting mistakes and biting regrets. Things you would give anything to go back and change. Things that you feel render you damaged goods.

You think—he can't love me—FALSE.

Maybe you feel the shaking tremors of hardship. Your life is so difficult that you feel like you are cracking up and losing your sanity.

You think—he must not love me—FALSE.

We need nothing less than divine intervention to wrestle the love of Christ deep into our hearts. We can't find strength within. We cannot work up sufficient grit.

We must be empowered by the Spirit to grasp his limitless love.

Why does love make a difference?

When it comes to Christ—it means everything. To understand the nature of the love of Christ we must understand where it comes from and why.

Love comes from Christ to us—because he has chosen to love us.

Not because we obeyed.
Not because we are loveable.
Not because we are worthy.
Not because we are worth it.

But because he loves us.

When you see the stirring reality of the love of Christ you find that though you fall short in many ways—he loves you.

And not with a be-grudging kind of love or a stingy—bring home all the change kind of love.

But a lavish infinite love.

You need his power to grasp his love because it doesn't come naturally, sounds too good to be true. You see, the reason it doesn't come naturally is because we know ourselves.

We know that we aren't always easy to love or loveable.

Our problem when we hear of the love of Christ—we think—can that be true for me? And then we look at ourselves and wonder how he can love us like that when we fall short. When we sin when we wander away.

The reason we need divine strength to understand this divine love is because we need to look away from ourselves and see him.

The ground of his love is NOT in you, but in him. And we need the Spirit's strength to ponder his love—because it sounds too good to be true.

Look again at verse 18,

“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

Here words fail us. Do you see why we need his strength to help us see his love? He is praying that we would, ‘know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.’

How can you know something you can't know?

That is why we need strength. See?

May we have **“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth...’**

His love for you is infinitely broad. Wider than the horizon. It is stable and not wobbly. His love for you is not narrowly defined and expressed under exactly the right conditions.

No wonder you need strength to grasp this love.

His love is not only wide but it is long.

His is a love that never ends. There is no expiration date—never a time when God says—I’ve had enough of you. You have gone too far. You are not worth it. He will love you for eternity. He has loved you for eternity. There was never a time that he did not love you. Before time began its march—he loved you. Before Adam breathed the breath of God—he loved you.

No wonder you need strength to grasp this love.

His love for you is wide, long and high.

His love for you immeasurably high. His love for you stretches beyond the heavens. He loves you with a high and lofty love. He could speak in a high and lofty way spinning off wisdom we could not understand—but instead he gives us a high and lofty love.

No wonder you need strength to grasp this love.

His love is wide, long, high and deep.

His love is deeper than the depth of your sin. You can think as your sins pile up they are so very deep. You

might think that your heart holds sin so deep no one can plumb it. Not true. His love is deeper still.

No wonder you need strength to grasp this love.

He does not pray that we would understand the width, breadth, height and depth of our sin. But of his love.

He knows all our sins. And invites us to know his love. Your sin may dominate the landscape of your life.

He counted out our every sin and carried them to his death. His love for us is infinite, our sins are not. The most pressing matter for you today is to understand that if you are a Christian—he loves you.

And he wants you to know and experience this love.

“So when Paul asks God that Christians might have the power to grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ’s love, he does not use the language of merely intellectual comprehension. How do we appreciate love? How do we measure it? Can we speak of forty buckets of love? Of three-and-a-half acres of love? Paul resorts to metaphor, and then to paradox. His metaphor is linear measure: “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” His paradox is more stunning yet: “and to know this love that surpasses knowledge”—that is, to know what is beyond mere knowledge.” D.A. Carson

In other words, it is one thing to know about his love and another to experience that love. He wants us to experience that love.

3. Filled (19-21)—

“and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

I look into that verse and see eternity. To me, it is a vista that I never tire of looking into—filled with all the fullness of God.

How is that possible?

As a young child, I remember contemplating eternity. I remember lying in bed thinking about the scope of forever.

My dad told me God had no beginning and I thought back and back and back. Eternity past. Always there was God.

I remember my insides squirming at the thought of a God that surpasses time.

And now we are invited to think of a God that loves with an infinite love.

Filled with the fullness of God—do you see what that means? I’m not sure I’m up to explaining it, but I’ll try. I feel like I am standing at the edge of an infinite vista trying to describe how grand it is.

To be filled with the fullness of God is to grasp, hold and wrestle into your heart the love he has for you. There is the reality that you begin to understand your purpose when you realize how much he loves you.

How can we grow in grasping this love?

- It is a community project: Throughout all the pronouns are plural.

“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”

Those you’s are plural. It is to be experienced with all the saints. You cannot know this love in isolation. It takes others to know the other worldly love of God.

If you don’t feel like God loves you—let me ask you—do you have Christians involved in your life? Do you pray with others? Do you make Sundays a priority?

We need to read the word together, sing the word together, pray the word together and hear the word preached together. So we can be reminded that this love is NOT too good to be true.

- We can pray for strength to grasp

This is more than just knowing that God is love. It is knowing and experiencing his love for you.

I know it sounds too good to be true. I know. But it is not.