

9AM, WAC & SNC – 30 MAY 2021

## RENEWED [EPHESIANS 3:14-21]

### Introduction – We Need Power

Earlier this week I was challenged as I was reading Luke 7. You might well know the story; Jesus has been invited to eat dinner at the house of a Pharisee named Simon. During the meal, a woman with a notorious reputation walks up to the table and begins cleaning Jesus' feet with her tears, hair and perfume. It must've been a really confronting and awkward scene for the other guests at the table.

Accordingly, the Simon starts looking judgementally not only upon the woman, but also Jesus. He thinks to himself, **"If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."** (Luke 7:39) Now Jesus responds and reveals just how far off the mark Simon was. He draws to Simon's attention how little love and hospitality that he had shown Jesus in contrast to the woman who had showered him with loving kindness. Jesus concludes that unlike Simon, she loved lavishly because she knew how much she had been loved and forgiven by Jesus.

Now you read a passage like that and you naturally think, "Yes I want to be like that woman, I want to be lavish, generous and heartfelt in my love for Christ." But how often instead are we just like Simon – cool, reserved and perhaps aloof. We know that we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, but we are ashamed of how often we are given to apathy. Perhaps you've even felt like that this series – as we've covered extraordinary doctrines in Ephesians and considered the incredible news of God's great love, rich mercy and sovereign grace extended to us in Christ, we know we should be moved, but instead our hearts have been a little ho-hum.

If that's you, you no doubt feel frustrated with this coolness, frustrated with your apathy. You want to be like this sinful woman, you want to be lavish in your love for Christ, but the difficult thing is that you don't know how to go about it. You know you can't simply work it up or produce this loving affection, and so you feel frustrated or stuck in your lovelessness.

Alternatively, perhaps you're feeling discouraged that you haven't made more spiritual progress than you have - you know the call to be salt and light in this world, to be bold for Christ and sharing the gospel, but you just simply can't break the shackles of your timidity. Perhaps this morning, you're even feeling despairing. You know the call to be holy as God is holy, but there is that recurring lust, that ever-present greed, that anger which flairs up and lashes out, or that twisted pattern of narcissism in the way you relate to others that you just can't seem to move past. You want to move forward in faith, but can't seem to be able to do so, you feel stuck.

Does any of the above describe you? Do you feel stuck and powerless to know how to move forward in Christ? If so, then that's not a bad realisation to have, because the Christian life continues as it begins – dependent on the gracious intervention of God. We who are stuck don't need more of ourselves, we need the power of God in our lives, and the good news for stuck people is that Ephesians 3:14-21 is a prayer for power.

And you'll remember from 1:19-20 that God's incomparably great power for us who believe is no less than his mighty strength which God exerted when he raised Christ from the dead. It's this resurrection power that Paul prays would be at work in the lives of stuck Ephesians. And as Paul prays for the Ephesians he establishes for us a model for how we too should pray - for power for Christ to more completely take up life-changing residence in our lives by faith and power to grasp the limitless dimensions of Jesus' love for us. He prays for power in this sense that the Ephesians might be filled up to be like they were created to be – like God in Christ.

## 1. Why We Can Pray for Power (3:14-15)

But before we dive into the prayer, let's first consider it's rationale in verses 14-15 - **For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name**

What *reason* is Paul referring to at the beginning of verse 14? A quick look at the context reveals that before Paul briefly digresses on his apostolic ministry in 3:1-13, he repeats the same phrase in 3:1, indicating that the reasoning for this prayer is the whole train of thought in Ephesians 1-2. We are able to draw near to God in bold prayer because we have been reconciled to God in Christ. Because of Christ we have been adopted as God's children and can know him and approach Him as Father. The reason why, and the only reason why we can confidently approach God for power is because we have been saved from our sins through Christ. As 3:12 goes on to say, **In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.**

## 2. Prayer for Power for Christ to Dwell by Faith (3:16-17a)

Let's now jump into the first part of the prayer in verses 16-17, **I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.**

This is a prayer that God with his resurrection power might so strengthen us through His Holy Spirit that Christ might more fully and completely take up residence in our hearts by faith. The result of all of this will be lives that increasingly reflect Jesus' residency in and lordship over our hearts.

Let me explain. When we went away on long service leave, we spent two months up in an apartment on the Central Coast, and because we were there for such a period of time, we really made it our own. I mean previously we had stayed at the complex on week-long family holidays and I'd never worried too much about settling in, but this time around we really nested. We filled up all the draws and storage spaces with our clothes, bathroom and pantry items. We moved furniture. We removed all the items the boys would be likely to break; stocked the kitchen with our own kitchen appliances; put up and left up birthday decorations; went to Bunnings to carry out minor maintenance like replacing the fan switches, getting strainers for the sinks and demoulding the shower tray. I even meticulously weeded all the asparagus fern out of the pot-plant on the balcony.

Because we were going to be there for two months, our presence permeated and filled the apartment and it began to take shape around our personality and presence. You can imagine how much more we would have done so had we owned the apartment and moved there permanently.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, Jesus desires not just to be a hotel guest in our lives, but to increasingly take up residency in our hearts that he might fill every aspect of our lives and begin his renovation work to make our lives look more like Him, our heart's resident and King. Though obscured in the English, the language of the inner being resurfaces in 2 Corinthians 4:16, where this reality of Christ's renovative work in our lives is similarly reflected, **therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.**

What a joy to see that lived out here at 9am. I see many older brothers and sisters sweetening in their Christ-likeness even though outwardly they face health challenges as the years wind on.

If you are struggling with pressing on in Christian maturity, pray with Paul that through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ would take up increasing residence in your life by strengthening your faith in

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<sup>1</sup> This illustration is owing to inspiration from D.A. Carson in his relevant chapter in *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*

him. Pray that Christ would be so central and embedded in your life that you would be rooted and established upon his love. Pray that God in his power would so strengthen your faith that there would be no part of your 'house' that would be off limits to Christ, no part of your day that he fades to the periphery. In our own strength this would be impossible, but with God's incomparably great resurrection power for us who believe, such transformation will come.

## **2. Prayer for Power to Grasp the Love of Christ (3:17b-19)**

So following Paul's example of prayer for the Ephesians, we are to pray for power for Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith, yet we are also to pray for power to grasp the love of Christ. Let me read again from the second half of verse 17, **And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God**

There is no exhausting the love of God for us in Christ. There is always more to know, more to enjoy, more to discover. There can therefore be no graduation in the Christian faith. I remember being powerfully taught this at the hands of my late-grandfather many years back. Into his early 90s I used to go around and read him the Bible. I distinctly remember one occasion when he had me read from 1 Peter to him. After reading the passage, he said, "I couldn't tell you how many times I have read that passage over the 70 years that I have been a Christian, but yet reading it again this morning I was brought to tears."

Now for those of you who knew my late grandfather, you'd know that he was tough as nails and these weren't flippant words. What struck me was that God was still speaking to this man in new and powerful ways through his old and timeless Word even after so many years. I remember thinking to myself, "That's how I want to live the Christian life!"

Grandpa experienced what Paul prays for the Ephesians in these verses. When it comes to the love of God there is always more to know of its limitless dimensions, we can explore it for decades, indeed forever, because it surpasses knowledge. And it is by the power of God, the work of His Holy Spirit, that we are able to grasp it in the first place, and go on to increasingly understand it.

Indeed, the Holy Spirit inspired text of Ephesians 1-2 has already revealed some of its width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ. Christ's love is *wide* – it embraces Jew and Gentile and bids all humanity to be reconciled to God. It is *long* – God predestined us in love to be adopted as his children and this love will stretch into eternity. Christ's love is *deep* – the love of Christ went so deep that it stooped down to bring life and love to us spiritual corpses, for we were but dead in our transgressions and sins. This is why the woman in Luke 7 loved much because she understood just how deep was the love of Christ – she was a great sinner, but she knew Jesus' love went deeper still. And God's love is toweringly *high*, in Christ we have been swept up to join him eternally in the heavenly realms. And verse 18 reveals that it is this love that God desires *all* His holy people to grasp– not just special individuals here and there, but all of us.

So Paul's prayer is that God in his immense resurrection power might fill us with the Holy Spirit that we might be increasingly overwhelmed with knowledge of his love which actually surpasses knowledge. And if we pray that prayer in expectant faith, we'll position ourselves where we expect Him to answer that prayer – just like my grandpa, under the Word of God. The Word is the Sword of the Spirit. The gospel is the power of salvation. In Sydney we position our water reservoirs where we expect rain to fall. In faith, we position ourselves where we expect the Spirit to move and to reveal to us more of the abundant love of Christ, and that is nowhere else than under God's Word.

The result of all of this is found at the end of verse 19 - **that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.** In other words, as Christ takes up increasing residence in our hearts and as we increasingly comprehend the abundant love of God for us in Christ, we will increasingly attain to the measure of him who was the fullness and exact representation of God.

Don't think 'what would Jesus do', rather imagine what it would be like to be like Jesus. Imagine being like Jesus in his loving obedience to the Father, imagine being like Jesus in his confrontation of evil, imagine being like Jesus in his discipling relationships, imagine being like Jesus in his prayer life and leadership. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians and his model prayer for us is that God in his power might move us from being stuck to becoming more like Jesus actually is.

#### **4. The Source and Goal of All Power (3:20-21)**

And to instill in us a great confidence as we pray this prayer, Paul finishes with a doxology in verses 20-21, **Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,**<sup>21</sup> **to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.**

Notice the word power there? It actually lies underneath the phrase, 'him who is able' as well. The power we pray for is the power of the powerful one that is at work in us. We need power and he will lovingly supply it

Paul is tripping over himself here to try to convey how absolutely capable God is – he is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (and that in itself is an understatement). We will never max God out with our prayers. Pray big. Pray expectantly. Pray confidently. Praying small and doubtfully in this regard would be like someone walking into this church building worried that they might hit their head on the roof! Yet the ceiling is so high that even if you jumped up on a trampoline you'd never hit the rafters! So in a similar vein, in your prayer life, jump high, pray expectantly, knowing that whatever you pray, God is able to do infinitely, abundantly more.

And we know he will do so, because his desire is to be glorified not in others, but in you and me, his Church, through all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

As we finish, let us stuck Christians pray this prayer together. Some might even want to kneel just like Paul as an expression of our dependence upon and need of his power –

**Heavenly Father, we pray that out of your glorious riches you might strengthen us with power through your Spirit in our inner being, so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. And we pray, that being rooted and established in love, we may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**