

A Powerful Prayer

9th Sun. after Pent. – 7/25/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Ephesians 3:14-21 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14, 16 (select portions) **“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...that...He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being...”**.

Introduction

- ⊗ In Luke 11:1-2, the disciples of Jesus ask Him, “Teach us to pray”. And Jesus replied by saying, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come...’ continuing on through what we all know as The Lord’s Prayer.
 - ➔ But sometimes we forget, or perhaps don’t realize, that this is not the only place in the New Testament that teaches us Christians how to pray.
- ⊗ Yes, this morning Paul interrupts the message of his letter to the Christians in Ephesus to offer up a powerful prayer for those who face great difficulty and concern in situations where their very faith is shaken. And so, this prayer serves us today as well, as a teaching opportunity; as an example both when we pray for others and also for ourselves.
 - ➔ In chapter 3:13; the verse just before our Reading today, Paul tells us what it is that has shaken the Ephesians. He says, “So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory”.
 - ➔ You see, Paul, their pastor; their spiritual leader had been arrested and taken into prison under false pretenses. Now, the people are shaken and wondering, “What is going to happen to us now that Paul is in prison? Will we be arrested too? Should we continue in our new Christian faith or return to our old, but safe religions?” So Paul shares his prayer with them here to calm their worries and fears.
 - ➔ He wants to assure them all that the message he shared with them and the truth that he taught them is not about; not dependent upon him. Though Paul may not be with them, Christ still lives within them through faith.
- ⊗ This is why Paul says in verse 14, “I bow my knees before the Father...”. What an important example for us to follow. When members of your family, friends, or co-workers face difficult, faith-threatening situations; as it was with Paul, a good start is to fall to your knees in prayer for them and for you.
 - ➔ So let’s see how Paul teaches us to pray for those whose troubles may weaken their faith in Christ.

I. Christ dwells in their hearts...

- ⊗ When you hear that a person is facing difficult times, what is commonly offered to them for comfort? Is it something like this: “You are in my thoughts”?
 - ➔ But think about that. Honestly, what can our thoughts accomplish? Just “thinking” about someone in trouble has no power to change anything.
- ⊗ So, we Christians; we can do better. We can pray as Paul did, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (vv. 17, 19).

- What a bold prayer there in verse 19, “May you ‘be filled with all the fullness of God’.” That’s actually the climax of Paul’s prayer, because it summarizes all that he has asked of the Lord earlier.
- But, what does it even mean to be filled with the fullness of God? Well we know that Colossians 1:19 tells us that, “in [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”. So this is a prayer to God that someone would be filled with Jesus; that He will dwell in them through the gift of faith given in their baptism.
- ✘ So Paul is really praying here that their faith will remain strong despite his imprisonment and absence. The only way that faith remains strong is as Paul says in verse 16, when a person is “strengthened with power through [God’s] Spirit...”. And the only way that the Spirit rejuvenates a faint heart is through the saving power (Rom. 1:16) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; whether it is read, heard, or received in the Lord’s Supper.
 - You see, the Spirit never works apart from the Word of God. That’s why it is so disturbing when someone with a troubled and shaken heart turns away from hearing or reading God’s Word, because they are refusing the only thing that actually has the power to help and strengthen them! And if that separation; that refusal and absence continues, they end up running on empty!
- ✘ So dear Christians, if you see fellow members isolating themselves, you have much more to offer them than to just say, “I’ll be thinking of you”. Instead, like Paul you can say, “I’m praying that God will fill you with all the fullness of Christ!”
 - That’s a prayer with real power. I mean you tell me, is there anything in the entire world that you can think of that offers more power than asking God the Father to strengthen an anxious heart with His Spirit so that the fullness of Christ will dwell in him/her? This you see, is going to the source. Only Jesus brings peace, forgiveness, life, and salvation to a heart and soul troubled by fear and anxiety and so much more!

II. Grasping the magnitude of God’s love.

- ✘ As if that’s not enough, Paul’s prayer goes even further. He asks in verses 17-18 that his hearers, in their struggle of thinking that they’ve been abandoned might have the ability to grasp the magnitude of Jesus’ love for them – “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” of Christ’s love, Paul prays.
 - When you and I face difficult times, the question often comes, “Why did God let this happen to me?” Why? Why cancer? Why conflict? Why the death of a loved one? Why stress at work, or in selling and buying a house? Why the pain as I grow old? Why the lack of respect? Where is God’s love?
- ✘ Well, we all start out very limited in our grasp of God’s love for us. There is a time where all we knew was this: “Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so” (LSB 588:1). And although that is “enough”, the Lord offers far more. So, it is the wise pray-er that asks God to give one who is anxious the power to see beyond his or her condition to grasp and know the magnitude of Christ’s love for him/her.
 - Why the prayer for God’s power to grasp the enormity of His love? So that they won’t lose heart!
 - You know, the devil loves nothing more than to isolate us; to make us believe we are insignificant; that God has better things to do than think about or be with you; that He has better

people to look after. And so Satan's goal is to get you to think, "Who am I among the billions of people, that God should help me?"

→ After all, the numbers of people in North America who claim to be Christian have been falling fast in every denomination and style of church. Before long we will no longer be in the majority. And that fact can make us feel insignificant, just as the Christians in Ephesus knew that they were an insignificant number of people too.

✘ The Hubble Telescope has made it possible for us to more fully understand how immense the universe really is; that our planet is like a mere speck of dust. Yet it's here on earth where God has chosen to focus His redeeming love. It was for our sin-fallen humanity that God sent His Son to set things right between Himself, us, and all creation.

→ Yes, all of human history reached its climax when Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, died on a hill in that little patch of land called Israel. But even as vast as that love of God is there in Jesus' saving love for us all, the enormity of God's love still continued. He sent apostles and missionaries throughout the world to spread and show the Good News of the word of life. He saw to it, as Paul says in verse 21, that the glory and love of Jesus would go out through faithful parents, grandparents and friends sharing it and showing it "throughout all generations" of people.

✘ And what they have shared is so much more than just, "You are in my thoughts". How much better Paul's example would be for us to say, "I'm praying that God will help you see the enormous scope of His love for you, that He is not limited in the way that He can help you."

III. May they experience the love themselves.

✘ Paul's prayer asks God that the Ephesians might understand the enormity of God's love in all of its fullness, yes, but there is so much more. It's one thing to know that Christ's love is greater than any other love that exists.

→ But Paul asks the Lord in verse 19 that they will "know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...". He wants them to experience God's love in Jesus for themselves!

✘ It's like the difference between hearing about a great teacher's techniques and then actually sitting in his/her classroom to experience it firsthand.

→ Being a Christian; being a Christ-follower is not just a matter of knowing that God is love, for even the devil and demons know that, much to their dismay. But it is actually living and breathing and receiving God's love in Christ directly; so much so that you get it when Paul says that it "surpasses knowledge"; that it is beyond our human ability to comprehend.

✘ So, how and when does that take place? In our current culture, folks jump from one church to another; so fast and so often; trying and trying to find the experience that they are looking for.

→ But you see, the experience of God's love; that which brings true contentment deep into a person's soul is not something that any human being can come up with and define on our own. It doesn't fit into any spread sheet or check list of preferences or qualities. It's not about a church's size, worship, or its architectural style or types of ministry or pastor and staff personalities.

→ No, it is found where Jesus speaks to you and me in Holy Scripture each week as He gathers His people together by His Spirit. As we hear Him declare His forgiveness through the Absolution, for example, we experience His immense love for us. For Jesus said to the apostles in Luke 10:16, "The one who hears you hears Me". When He feeds us His own true body and

blood in the Sacrament as a pledge that He has given Himself completely for us on the cross, we experience firsthand the full “breadth and length and height and depth” of His love for us all.

- ✘ The words, “You will be in our thoughts” come nowhere close to holding all of that, does it? Instead, how about, “I’m praying that you will experience God’s love as He gives it to you in worship and as the members of His church care for you”?

Conclusion

- ✘ So, when Paul makes his bold prayer requests, does he cross the line; does he ask too much of God? Is it okay for us to pray this way? Of course it is!

→ Paul is only praying for that which God already desires all souls to have and experience and receive. So his words inspire us; they give us confidence to pray for others and for ourselves just as he did: verses 20-21: “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”. Amen.