

Ephesians 3:16-19, pt. 1

November 22, 2009

As I think of prayer, one of the words that comes to mind is dependence

- Prayer is a cry for help
- It is an acknowledgment of “I can’t”
- It is an admission of need

Prayer is not just a ritual that we go through when we feel like it

- Prayer should be the natural heart-cry of believers to any and every situation
 - o In good times – prayer should be filled with praise, thanksgiving, and worship
 - o In times of trial – prayer should be filled with petitions, intercession, and help

So far in our study of prayer, we have looked at three Scriptural passages

- The Lord’s Prayer
 - o A framework and outline of how to pray from the Master Himself
- 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13
 - o A prayer for God to allow Paul to return to these young believers so that he might strengthen them
 - o This is a passionate prayer filled with love from Paul for these believers
- Philippians 1:9-11
 - o A prayer for the love of these believers to abound “**in real knowledge and all discernment**”
 - o Not a “sloppy agape,” but a discerning agape
- Ephesians 1:15-19
 - o A prayer for the believers to realize three incredible truths at work in their lives
 - “**the hope of His calling**” (1:18a)
 - “**the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints**” (1:18b)
 - “**the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe**” (1:19)

This morning we will move to the book of Ephesians 3

- But let’s back up and review

Ephesians is one of the “prison epistles” written by Paul from a Roman prison

- Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon

Paul is shackled to Roman soldiers at all times

- But he continues to pray for these believers at the churches that he has visited before
- And he continues to write epistles to the various churches as he has opportunity

Let’s read Ephesians 3:14-21

This is near the end of the first half of Ephesians

- He has given praise to God for His wondrous salvation and election (1:3-14)

He then begins to pray for these believers in chapter one

- The actual requests of his prayer are found in verses 17 and following, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,* ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” (1:17-19a)

Paul prays that these believers would know three things (1:18-19)

- The hope of His calling
- The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints
- The surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe

It is on this note of power that Paul makes a big detour

- As Paul writes this, he is enamored with the thought of God’s power
 - o The power that raised Christ from physical death
 - o The same power that raised believers from spiritual death

As Paul meditates upon that power, he launches into a short treatise on how God’s power has taken spiritually dead sinners and transformed them into living saints

- He details in chapter two that this is the essence of the Gospel
- God has taken both Jews and Gentiles and grouped them *together* in the Gospel

This is amazing theology that should inspire us as it relates to prayer

- It should also teach us the need to meditate deeply on the truths of God’s Word

For Paul, this meditation drove him to ponder the depth of the Gospel

- How God, in His grace, formed the Church from Jews and Gentiles

How often do you make the time for meditation upon God’s Word?

Psalm 1 writes that the delight and joy of the blessed man “is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.” (1:2)

- This isn’t a simple reading of the Text
- This isn’t an in-depth studying of the Text
- This is a deep meditating upon the Text

When you begin to meditate upon the Text of Scripture, you begin to examine your heart

- You begin to apply the Text on a very personal level

If we are honest, sometimes the reason we skip this is because it is such a personal experience

- It takes humility to admit our shortcomings
- It takes strength and resolve to change
- It takes time to meditate and not just skip over this crucial step

But for Paul, meditation was an essential part of his prayer life

- So much so that his prayer was “interrupted” in light of the great truths of chapters two and three of Ephesians!
- This is all carried out with prayerful meditation!

In chapter three, Paul tries to resume his prayer but is immediately caught in another thought of theology

- He finally resumes his prayer in 3:14

Notice the phrase “for this reason” that is repeated in Ephesians 3:1 and 3:14

- He starts, but is stopped again by his thoughts of the Gospel

So you can see that Paul’s overarching request is dominated by this thought of God’s power

- God’s power that has transformed the life of every believer
- God’s power that literally raised Jesus Christ from the grave

As we said earlier, prayer is an acknowledgement of a need for help

- Where do we turn?
- We turn to Someone who has ultimate, sovereign power

We see that Paul takes on a humble stance of prayer, “I bow my knees before the Father”

- This stance in prayer was uncommon
- The more common stance of prayer was that of standing

Paul realized that in all prayer, he was coming before the Father

- Not only is God the spiritual Father of all believers
- God is also the physical Father of all mankind as Creator
 - o We have seen this throughout our study in Genesis

Christ has taught us to pray to our heavenly Father

- Only those who have a saving relationship with Him can pray to Him as “Father”

When you look at the prayers of the Apostle Paul, you will find that the majority of his petitions revolve around spiritual concerns

- This is not to say that he didn’t care for physical concerns
 - o He prayed for Epaphroditus to be healed
 - o He prayed for his own “thorn in the flesh” to be removed
- However, Paul realized that the spiritual needs far outweighed the physical concerns which were of lesser importance

How is it in your own prayer life?

- What is most dominant on your prayer list: physical needs or spiritual needs?
- When was the last time that you took a real good look at your prayer life?

David Jeremiah has written a good little book entitled *Prayer: the Great Adventure*

- When I read this book a few years ago, I was really convicted about aligning my priorities in prayer with God’s priorities
- Dr. Jeremiah, in his book, gives four priorities of God for us to pray for:
 - o That God may be glorified
 - o That Christians may be sanctified
 - o That the Church would be unified
 - o That the world may be evangelized

I was convicted as I thought through my own prayer life, “How many of my requests reflect those four priorities?”

- Perhaps you need to realign your prayer life
- If so, then take comfort

The Apostle Paul gives us three practical petitions to help us in our own prayer time with the Lord

- These are not petitions for physical health or well-being
- These are not petitions for financial prosperity

In this prayer, Paul reaches, if you will, to the heavens and asks God for the very best

These three petitions are progressive – they build on one another

- They are like steps on a ladder
 - o As you study each one, you see that each one is built on the previous

Here are the three petitions:

1. Be strengthened by God's power (3:16-17a)
2. Be grounded in God's love (3:17b-19a)
3. Be filled to God's fullness (3:19b)

I. Be strengthened by God's power (3:16-17a)

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory.

Paul doesn't depend on human resources when he prays

- He prays for God to do something that could not be done in human strength and power

God certainly doesn't have any restrictions or limitations when it comes to His power

- This is why Paul refers to the "*riches of His glory*"

The psalmist said this, "*For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves in the field is Mine. 12 If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all it contains*" (Ps 50:10-12, emphasis mine)

Do you keep this in mind when you have needs?

- Do you ask God for financial provision, all the while doubting that God has the resources to provide?
- Do you truly believe that God has limitless resources and abilities?

In the book of Philippians, Paul makes this statement, "*And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*" (Philippians 4:19)

- God is able to provide our needs, because He doesn't have an end to His resources

We are coming to the One of whom Paul wrote in Romans 11:36, "*For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be the glory forever. Amen.*"*

Isn't it amazing that you and I can come before the very One who has ultimate power and ability?

- The One who has demonstrated His power time and time again throughout history?

Paul leads us by example in reminding us of this

- If we have needs, then God is the One who can meet them!

to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man:

God is petitioned to grant power to the believers

- If you refer back to chapter 1, verse 19, Paul asked God to help the believers to know the “surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe”

Why is Paul asking God again to give power to the believers?

- 1:19 – prayer for enlightenment – to know the power
- 3:16 – prayer for enablement – to use the power

In our own power, we cannot please God

- Christ wrote, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5)

It is only through the power of God that we can accomplish anything for Him

- Acts 1:8, “but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”
- 1 Cor 2:4-5, “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”
- 1 Thess 1:5, “for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake”

When you are praying, do you ask for the Holy Spirit to empower others? yourself?

- We can either minister in our own power, or beg for the Lord to fill us with His Holy Spirit!

This empowering takes place “in the inner man”

- 2 Cor 4:16, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day”
 - o Paul is contrasting the “outer man” (our physical body) with the “inner man”

The inner man is the inward part of us that relates to our spiritual relationship with God

- It is used to contrast with the outer man, or the external part of us (our bodies)
- It is the mind, the will, and the spirit
- It is the “deep seat of the personality, where the Spirit seeks to have His dwelling and so transform the whole life of a man”¹

Why does the heart or inner man need to be strengthened?

- Every day, there is a battle that goes on in our minds
- We struggle with sin, sometimes winning the battle, sometimes losing
- In Romans 7, Paul painted a vivid picture of someone who struggled with doing the right thing

So much attention and resources are dedicated to the physical well-being of our bodies

- This isn’t to say that physical exercise is useless
- If you don’t take care of your temple, then you aren’t being a good steward of what God has entrusted to you

But how much attention is given to your spiritual well-being?

- Paul prays for the “inner man,” not the outer man, to be strengthened with power

¹ Francis Foulkes, *Tyndale NT Commentaries*, 103

I think this is yet another reason why our prayers need to be focused on spiritual matters, not physical matters

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith:

Paul has already told us that his prayer is for the Holy Spirit to empower the believers with strength

- Divine enabling and empowering

The word that Paul uses for “**dwell**” implies a permanent dwelling

- The opposite of this word is actually found in Ephesians 2:19, “**you are no longer strangers and aliens**”

Paul said in Colossians 1:27, “**God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**”

Have you ever thought of your heart being the home of God?

- Have you ever entertained the idea that the holy God takes up permanent residence inside of you?
- Does this thought come to mind when you begin to sin?
- The fact of the matter is that His presence should always be a deterrent to sin!

Paul certainly lived in the sphere of God’s power when he wrote Gal 2:20, “**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me**”

- “Christ cannot be ‘at home’ in our hearts until our inner person submits to the strengthening of His Spirit. Until the Spirit controls our lives, Jesus Christ cannot be comfortable there”²

You and I need to keep in mind that Jesus Christ is not a visitor, but the Head, of our lives

- Jesus Christ Himself wrote, “**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him**” (John 14:23)

When we hear of someone coming over to our home, we make an effort to clean up and make things presentable

- We want to be good hosts and not have everything in disarray

Christ is not just visiting us

- He indwells us on a permanent basis!
- “**Christ in you, the hope of glory**” (Col 1:27)

This strength of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of the risen Lord both take place “**through faith**”

- It is not something that we see tangibly
- It is something that takes place in the spiritual arena of our lives

Our entire Christian life is one of faith

- If we really believe these truths, then we will put them into practice
- But if we doubt them, we will dismiss them as being unimportant

Paul’s first petition is one of power

- God’s very own power that has raised us from spiritual death
- God’s own power that has changed us and sanctified us

² MacArthur, *The MacArthur NT Commentary*, 106.

Paul asks that we would be empowered even more with God's power

- That we might experience the power of God in our lives

Paul now transitions from speaking of power to speak of love

- Remember, we said that these petitions are *progressive*

The first step on the rung is power, “to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man”

The second step on the rung – the second petition – is related to love

We will cover the rest of this prayer next week