

Ephesians 3: 14-17; “That Christ May Dwell”, A Sermon for the New Year
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 2nd, 2022,
in the Morning Worship Service.

We are told here that the reason that Paul bowed his knees to the Father, the reason that he was praying for these Ephesian believers was so that they would not lose heart at his tribulations; that is, the things that he, Paul, was going through on account of his preaching the gospel. These tribulations, he says, were for their glory. In other words, these tribulations that Paul was going through were actually intended by God to help establish their greater exercise of their faith in God. These trials and tribulations which Paul went through were intended by God to help them to persevere in their faith, so that they would become stronger Christians; better able to glorify God in the way that they would live their lives to Him, based upon what they saw Paul going through. It was on this basis that Paul prayed for them, that God would grant them to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.

What I want to bring to your attention is this. You will only grow and develop in your relationship with Him by comprehending the particular truths that Paul mentions here. Since it ought to be our goal to know Christ better, let me list for you these truths which our Lord would have you to better comprehend. 1st of all – That every Christian needs to be strengthened with might through Christ’s Spirit in their inner man. 2nd – That every Christian needs to be rooted and grounded in Christ’s love. And 3rd – That every Christian needs to come to see how great the love of Christ is. O that the Lord will work in our hearts at this time, so that we will understand the richness and the power of Christ’s dwelling in our heart by faith.

1st of all – The Lord would have you understand that you need to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.

These verses that we are looking at, give us the greatest understanding in all the Bible, in an overview, of the inner heart experience of the Christian in relation to Christ. They are speaking of our inner man; the person that we are in our heart before God. This is where fellowship and communion with our living Lord takes place. This is where the constant interaction between ourselves and Christ is going on. It is out of this interaction that we begin to see how important it is for us to be rooted and grounded in Christ’s love so that we might truly make progress in holiness. What does that mean, to make progress in holiness? It means that as I live my life for God; that I make progress in the realization that I am separated unto His purposes for me. I mean, personally, in my living my life to Him.

But it is also my coming to better understand how to live my life in connection with Christ’s Church; interacting with the saints, and my learning to show love to all of them. Verse 16 says – “....That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...” A number of things to notice here; first that you need to be strengthened in your inner man, dear Christian. I think that sometimes Christians may not understand how important this is to their not being discouraged when either you, or those around you whom you love, are going through difficulties and trials.

Notice the first verses of chapters 3 and 4 have this same phrase in them? “I, Paul, the prisoner of the Lord.” Why did Paul mention this twice? He mentioned it twice so that those who he was writing to would see that his being in prison did not come about simply because he got himself in trouble by preaching the gospel, and wicked men took action against him. It happened, it came about, because the Lord had him go to prison for Him, so that he would be a witness for Him. He was the Lord’s prisoner. What conclusion should we draw from this? Well, I think that the Lord would have you to know that all of the major trials that you will go through in your life as a Christian, the Lord has led you into to them for reasons of His own purpose.

Once He leads you into them, He will also lead you through them, and in His time He will deliver you from them, in the way that He knows will be best for you. You may be downcast, and you may and lose heart during your trial. You may feel that you are in prison, either in soul or in body, or both. And so what are you to do? You must follow Paul's example and instruction and pray. And you must ask others to pray for you, that according to the riches of His glory, that He would grant you to be strengthened in your inner man to continue to follow Him. You must pray and ask Him for strength in your inner man to continue to do His will, and keep His commandments, and in so doing this that He would be magnified in your life, no matter what stage of life that you are in. Christ dwells in your heart by faith.

Christ has riches of His glory which He will reveal to you in and through the trial. When Paul mentions his tribulations for them, the believers in Philippi, he is referring to his having had to go to prison because of the gospel that he had preached to them; the gospel of the grace of God. But Paul also says in verse 13, "Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory". What do you glory in? You make no boast in the flesh. You glory in Christ Jesus. You glory in having Him as your Savior and Lord. You glory that He is there in your heart teaching you. You glory in the fact that He is your continual Friend and Companion; that He is showing you His love in and through all the various situations of difficulty and trial that you go through. Not just that you know His love in the good times and in the good situations, but that you know His love in the difficult times, and you realize this in your heart in a tangible way.

It is a very great and good thing when you realize that it His love for you that enables you to minister to others. This was the very thing Paul was experiencing. He was ministering to those dear people in the church at Ephesus. But I am saying that the way that he could do that was because he knew the love of Christ towards himself, in a very real way, even there in prison. And you and I need to understand the same thing, lest we grow faint, lose heart, become discouraged, downcast, frustrated, and therefore don't really want to glorify God. Why is it that Christians fall into that? Why is it that they stay in that mode, sometimes for a long time? It is because they do not realize the love that Christ has this great love for them.

What I am saying here is experiential. It's not just simply that I know intellectually that Christ loves me. That's not what I am talking about. I am wanting you to understand that Christ is with us always. You know that as a fact. But what we are talking about here is Christ love experientially in your heart in relation to His good word. It is His giving you answers to your prayers by means of His fulfilling His promises to you. It is your learning to glorify Him by keeping His commandments by your showing love to other people, and thereby being a good witness to people around you. Why? Because you are being satisfied with His lovingkindness, each and every day, which is what you and I must strive towards. We desire to be strengthened according to the riches of Christ's glory, so that He will dwell in our hearts in a more tangible way, so that we can minister to all who have spiritual needs.

Paul's tribulations were intended by God for their glory; that is, for their being able to understand the glory of Christ better. What does this mean, in the outworking of it, in the life of the person going through the trial? It means that each and every Christian ought to have a great expectation that in the midst of all trials and difficulties that Christ will strengthen you in your inner man to do His will, as you pray and seek Him for it. As you seek Him more and more for this, He will, in accordance with His Spirit's working, strengthen you and dwell in your heart in a very rich spiritual sense. The heart is the house of habitation in which Christ lives and dwells by His Spirit. Having that base of operations there in your heart, He supplies you with grace and strength and peace and blessings too numerable to count.

These blessings are all related to the Spirit's communication of the fruit of the Spirit to you in relation to your being able to do God's will by faith in Christ. Now, I wonder if you

understand, dear Christian, that each and every day the Holy Spirit, and His motions in your heart, His impulses in your heart, His enlightening your mind, in all this, He is showing you what you should do. He is leading you, and giving you actual grace, to work in your heart, so that you might manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit. That is really taking place in your life as a Christian. The way that you understand this is by faith, it says here. I guess what I trying to say is that Christians a lot of times take things for granted because they know certain things. What I am asking is whether you experience these things in your heart by faith? Do you see Christ as the great king that He is; that He is able to answer all of your prayers and fulfill all of your requests. When you will ponder what these verses are saying, and you believe these promises, you will come to understand that Christ can indeed strengthen you with might in your inner man through His Spirit.

When you pray and ask others to pray for you, you will really come to understand that with the Lord, all things are possible. You really will be able to begin to think realistically about things that you can do to serve Him, and to serve others, and to accomplish all that is related to His good will and purpose for your life. Where this begins is with your praying for His good working in your heart; that He would more and more show you the riches of His glory. His glory is His excellence, His strength, His power, His wisdom, His ability, to do all things well; to show you mercy, and to do you good, in the situation that you are in. It's not to say that you will not have to go through terrible trials; I am not saying that. What I am saying, is when you go through these things, that Christ will be with you, and you will know it, that He is with you. That's what I am saying.

2nd – The Lord would have you to comprehend how much you need to be rooted and grounded in His love.

What does this phrase mean in verse 17 b – ...”that you being rooted and grounded in love may comprehend with all the saints”, the love of Christ? Being rooted and grounded in love is the word picture of a plant. In this sentence it refers to the Christian as the planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified. If you are rooted in Christ's love then you can grow up in Him to be like Him relation to His love, and bear fruit to God in righteousness and holiness. Turn with me over to Matthew chapter 15, verses 13 and 14 – “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.” “Let them alone.” “They are blind leaders of the blind.” “And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” The plants which the heavenly Father has planted will not be uprooted.

What plants are those? They are those persons who have been planted, they have been rooted in the good soil of the grace of God which comes to a person through believing in the gospel; through believing in the the love of God for fallen sinners. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” When you believe the gospel of God's love in Christ, then you are rooted in His love. The disciples had reported to Jesus that the Pharisees had been offended by Him when He had said to them in verse 8 – “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far Me.” “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”

In other words, they did not see the love of Christ for sinners as good thing, because they thought that they were being saved by their own supposed good works in relation to their futile attempts as keeping God's law. They did not see that being able to bear fruit to God in righteousness and holiness is dependent upon your experientially knowing the love of Christ for you. No, a person must be rooted and grounded in God's love to be able to truly know God and to keep His commandments. Turn over with me to Matthew 7, verses 15-20. “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” “You will know them by their fruits.” “Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?”

“Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” “Therefore by their fruits you will know them.” Thornbushes and thistles are word pictures of what here? They are pictures of the false prophets who attempt to teach you that you don’t need to be planted and rooted in Christ’s loving obedience to the Father, or that you need His love working in your heart to bear fruit to God. The unloving words and actions coming from such persons, Jesus says, should show you that they are not good people; they are not good trees, and thus they cannot bear good fruit. No, you must be rooted in Christ’s love.

But you must also be grounded in Christ’s love. To be grounded is not only to be planted in Christ, but it is also to be an established plant. Turn to Psalm 1 and you will see this. “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” So, a Christian is established by their being planted in the love of Christ, and then they are placed by the rivers of waters of the Holy Spirit, they meditate day and night upon the law of the Lord, which teaches them about Christ, His love, and His grace which leads to their obedience.

Turn over to Romans chapter 5, verses 1-5, and you will see more about what it means to be grounded in Christ’s love. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” “And only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Now, once again, you will notice that it is the love of God which establishes us in our being grounded in our faith. It is because the love of God has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit that you can glory in tribulations.

You can glory in tribulations because you know that they will produce perseverance in your faith, hope, and love toward God, and love toward our fellow men. This proven character will lead you to understand that you have a hope that will not disappoint you because God’s love has been poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit. It did not originate from your own feelings about your having to go through tribulations, or that somehow you see the strength to do so as coming from yourself. You rather see all of your spiritual strength as coming to your inner man from the Indwelling Christ; His Holy Spirit communicating that grace to you, leading to your being able to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in all of your speech and conduct.

3rd – The Lord would have you to comprehend just how great the love of Christ really is.

Paul says in verse 18 – “That you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Is it not good for us to remember this blessed truth, that the love of Christ passes knowledge? We cannot comprehend all that is in God, but we can know that He loves us, and that His love will go beyond all of our knowledge of Him, beyond all of our knowledge of ourselves and how far short we fall of His glory. There are many things which happen in history that we say – Why, Lord would You permit this to take place? And what we need to understand is that the love of Christ passes knowledge. God has reasons for all that He permits and all that He does. Since that is the case and He knows the end from the beginning, what is it that we need to comprehend? We need to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

A lot of people are great theologians in this life, in this world. But the love of Christ goes beyond them, and their knowledge, to the wisdom and knowledge of God. We apprehend, but we do not comprehend all about God. We apprehend that God is good. We apprehend that God is love in His essence; in His essential Being. And that should say something to us, when we read in Psalm 107 – “Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and His wonderful works to the children of men.” It says that 3 times in Psalm 107. And if men would study that, they would be wise, that study His providence. But even when we do that, we need to understand that the love of Christ is going to go beyond knowledge. All the knowledge that you can accumulate concerning God; God is greater than that.

You can never search Him out to the ultimate extent. In fact, throughout all of eternity, you and I will be searching out the depths of God and never come to an end. After we have been around 10,000 years, or 10,000,000 years, in heaven, or in the glory, or in the New Heavens and New Earth, that we will never exhaust God. We will never come to the end of Him, and be able to say – We know it now, we know God now, to His full extent! Oh no! But you will know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. It is that great. It is that glorious! The love of Christ goes beyond all of our understanding of what He is leading us into, moment by moment and day by day. He is with us, and He is for us, during the times of our greatest difficulties and trials just as much as He is when we are experiencing His love in our most peaceful and joyful moments. In our next message I will speak to you about the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ which passes knowledge. And how we may be filled with all the fullness of God by that love.