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Sermon Notes

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Prayer for Christ to Dwell in Us

Ephesians 3:14-17

As we come this morning to Ephesians 3:14-21, we are coming to the loftiest theme that can ever occupy the human mind... here we are truly walking on the highest of high places in the experience of our relationship with Almighty God

In 2011, I went on an unforgettable mission trip, trekking in Nepal... we hiked among the highest mountain range in the world, the Himalayas...
[MARK EAGLE... slide!!!]

We flew into Kathmandu, the capital city... Nepal ranks as the second most polluted nation on earth, with Kathmandu leading the way in air pollution; Kathmandu is situated in a bowl-shaped valley, surrounded by stunning mountains. But because of the smog, the people can hardly ever see these lofty peaks...

I'd like to use that image to create a parable of Christian experience:

Picture a city, dwelling in a low-lying flat valley... covered by smog and a low, gloomy cloud cover; the people live their whole lives in the weak, filtered light of the pale sun; it is overcast all the time; mists and smog and drizzle are their constant experience

They have heard that, well beyond the city limits, there is a magnificent mountain – lofty, towering over the city, but barely visible from that city through occasional breaks in the low cloud cover. The mountain seems so distant and lofty and is so rarely seen that many of the citizens of the smog-covered city think such a mountain doesn't even really exist.

But one day, a breathless citizen of their city comes to tell them that the mountain does exist, that he has climbed that mountain, and has breathed the sweet mountain air and seen sights that are almost beyond his ability to narrate... he is overflowing with joy, he can scarcely put into words what he's seen and felt... and he's there to persuade some of the city members to leave the low-lying, smog-covered daily life, which is all they've ever known, and follow him in a vigorous climb. He promises that, if they will only exert themselves and climb, the mountain will eventually reward all

their efforts with a spectacular view, with sweet mountain air, with a breathtaking experience.

THIS IS WHAT EPHESIANS 3:14-21 is all about... a mountain of Christian experience... higher and higher and higher and higher Paul's language soars... more and more experience he offers any who will exert themselves spiritually and seek Christ.

My prayer is simple: exactly what Paul prayed for the Ephesians... this is what I want for you:

Ephesians 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

End PIC!!

I. A Glorious and Majestic Prayer

A. Quick Overview of Paul's Greatest Prayer

B. The Context: "For this reason..."

1. Paul's grand interruption

a. Ephesians 3:1 and 3:14... "For this reason..."

Ephesians 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father

b. Ephesians 3:2-13 is one long grand interruption

c. Paul describes his ministry as Apostle to the Gentiles and how it fits into God's redemptive plan

2. Looking back to Ephesians 2

a. So... "FOR THIS REASON..." looks back to Ephesians 2

b. The vision: a grand and glorious, spiritual temple: the Church of Jesus Christ

Ephesians 2:21-22 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

- c. The ultimate end: a temple in which God lives by His Spirit
- d. Built from “living stones” quarried from Satan’s evil kingdom

1 Peter 2:5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:21 the whole building is joined together

- e. Special focus: Gentiles who were at one time aliens and strangers... now, beloved members of the rising temple

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)-- ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

3. Paul PRAYS... because there is MORE TO BE DONE!
 - a. Yes, they are Christians now
 - b. Yes, they have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - c. Yes, they have been raised from the dead spiritually
 - d. Yes, they have been marked with the seal, the promised Holy Spirit
 - e. Yes, they are now living stones in this rising temple
 - f. BUT ... there is STILL MORE that needs to happen!
4. This temple has to radiate with the glory of God! Every living stone in it needs to GLOW with a fiery glow... the glory of God
 - a. The Tabernacle of Moses was filled with God’s glory and SHONE with supernatural light
 - b. The Temple of Solomon was filled with God’s glory and SHONE with supernatural light
 - c. How much more must the Church of Jesus Christ be filled with God’s glory and SHINE with supernatural light

These living stones need to glow from within as if we are burning, shining, radiating, heat and light

James 2:26 the body without the spirit is dead

So the life of these stones is the knowledge of Christ's love for us... a SAVORING... a SENSE of that love

C. Looking Up to the Summit: Where We Are Going

1. Complex prayer, we'll be looking at it for four weeks
2. When we get to the top, we'll be on the summit of all human experience...
3. We're at base camp, about to begin our ascent of Mt. Everest

Watching a documentary on a team that reached the summit of the highest mountain on earth, Mt. Everest; They had to labor for weeks to get up to base camp, which is almost 17,000 feet above sea level; there they have to wait for 2-3 days to **ACCLIMATIZE**... to get used to the thin air of such a high altitude

4. So, where are we going?
 - a. Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians to have **POWER** (along with all of God's saints) ... **STRENGTH**
 - b. Where does that power come from? From the **HOLY SPIRIT**
 - c. What is the focus of that power? Our "**INNER BEING**" ... the inner person... the **HEART**
 - d. To what end does he pray? The **CHRIST MAY DWELL IN YOUR HEARTS BY FAITH**
 - e. What does that mean?
 - f. That a **SENSE** of the **PRESENCE** of **CHRIST** may pervade every fiber of your being... from the **INSIDE OUT**
 - g. Paul goes beyond that: He prays that **WE HAVING BEEN ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE**...(in other words, that we are already rooted in love and founded in love... as a living plant as a root system, and as a building has a foundation... he wants every Christ to have a **STABLE BASE** in love—love for God and love for other Christians
 - h. That we would have **POWER** (together with all the saints) to **COMPREHEND** (grasp, grab hold of)

i. The BREADTH and LENGTH and HEIGHT and DEPTH (no object... just those... but I think it is tied to what's next)

j. The LOVE OF CHRIST...

This is the FUNDAMENTAL GOAL... to KNOW THE INFINITE DIMENSIONS of Christ's love for us

k. To know the love that surpasses knowledge

l. To what ultimate end?

m. That we may be FILLED TO ALL THE MEASURE OF THE FULLNESS OF GOD!!!

That every Christian would be strengthened to bear more and more the weightiest topic in the universe... the scope of the LOVE OF CHRIST for us... resulting in us being filled with God

n. Lest we think this is something we should not ask, that we've gone too far, asked for too much, Paul gives this benediction:

To the God that is able to do IMMEASURABLY MORE than anything we can possibly ask or imagine... To God be the glory in Christ and IN THE CHURCH...

Paul prays for all of this to the end that the church will maximally glorify God... radiantly glowing with all the FULLNESS of God, with a sense of the infinite dimensions of Christ's love for us

NOW... THAT'S A PRAYER!!

Basic idea: every Christian on the face of the earth VASTLY UNDERESTIMATES Christ's love for them!! All of us! We have no proportionate idea of how fiercely and powerfully and immeasurably Jesus Christ loves us—individually, and collectively

Song of Solomon 8:6 love is as strong as death

Actually, Christ's love is STRONGER than death... it triumphed over the grave, and will last forever, but death is actually temporary

Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians to have a greater and greater sense of Christ's love for them; without that, we will be like dead, cold stones in this spiritual temple... no light, no heat... no life

But if we have an ever-increasing sense of the love of Christ for us, it will empower everything we do

II. The Humility and Boldness of Prayer

A. The Vital Role of Prayer

1. Paul was fundamentally a TEACHER and PREACHER of the word of God
2. He poured out the word of God faithfully and had full confidence in the gospel to be the POWER OF GOD to save all who hear and believe its message
3. So he preached and preached and preached; he taught and taught and taught
4. BUT we see here, that's not all he did! He also PRAYED the truth into their hearts

It's not enough simply to teach the truth... however vital that is! We must also pray for the truth to take root in the hearts of the people

Prayer is as necessary to the salvation of the church as is the word of God

B. Prayer Cannot be Chained

1. Paul was a "prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of the Gentiles" (Ephesians 3:1)
2. He was in chains... but his spirit was not chained!
3. He prayed every single day for the churches he had planted and also for those he had not planted

Application: are we being faithful in prayer? Are we taking these deep truths and praying them into the hearts of people in our church, people we know, people all around the world? Are we praying for the Christians in China whom our church members are seeking to reach? Are we praying for the kinds of things Paul prays for here?

LET'S TAKE THESE MAGNIFICENT PRAYER and pray it deeply into the hearts of people! Take the church directory and pray for ten people this week the very things Paul prays for here. Also pray for the people in your Home Fellowship the things Paul prays for here!

Also, you may be SICK; you may be HINDERED in some way, bedridden; you still can serve the church all round the world by being faithful and passionate in prayer!

Prayer can never be hindered or chained

C. The Boldness of Prayer

1. We have astonishing access

Ephesians 3:12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

- a. Literally BOLDNESS and ACCESS (KJV)
- b. Boldness = a sense of confidence, not terror that God is going to lash out at us, strike us dead for our impudence
 - i) Amazing because at one time, we were BY NATURE OBJECTS OF WRATH
 - ii) The wrath of God could have lashed out at us at any time

Jeremiah 30:21 ...who would dare of himself to approach me? declares the LORD.

In the Book of Esther, it was made clear that, in the Persian Empire, if anyone tried to approach the emperor without being summoned, there was but one penalty... DEATH! How much more we, who have sinned against God. But now, in Christ, we have been FORGIVEN and SUMMONED into the King's presence

2. Christ's death on the cross...

Hebrews 10:19-22 there is a NEW AND LIVING WAY opened for us into the presence of God!!

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

3. Paul's actual requests are STUNNINGLY BOLD!!

Ephesians 3:17-19 I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

But this is not too much to ask! As we've already said:

Ephesians 3:20-21 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, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

BOLDNESS in prayer HONORS the infinite power and grace of God!!

D. BUT We see also the HUMILITY of prayer

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father

1. There is no one set physical posture for prayer
2. In the Bible, the most common posture for prayer is STANDING:

Mark 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him

3. But Paul specifically speaks of KNEELING in prayer here
4. Kneeling shows immense reverence and respect
5. He is praying (literally) TOWARD the Father... toward his face;
6. But the kneeling shows deep humility and respect; a sense of meekness and lowliness and brokenness; awareness of the greatness of God and the sinfulness of our natural state
7. Balance here: we can err in many ways in prayer
 - a. Greatest error: not to pray at all
 - b. But also we can either be TOO FORMAL in prayer or TOO CASUAL
 - c. Paul shows us the healthy balance of deep reverence before the Father, but also a joyful exuberance and expansive BOLDNESS to ask for the most astonishing level of blessing one could possibly imagine:

To be FILLED TO THE MEASURE OF ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD!!!

III. The Fatherly Love of God (vs. 14-15)

Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

A. Paul Zeroes in on the Fatherly Love of God for His Children

1. The word “Father” is the most common word for God in the NT
2. It conjures up power, authority, provision, protection, wisdom, discipline and fatherly LOVE
3. Many of us did not have good fatherly role models when we were growing up
4. That doesn’t mean we should minimize the father’s title of God here
5. If anything, we should emphasize it and maximize it; we so yearn for our father to love us

6. Prayer flourishes best in understanding that God is our Father

John 1:12-13 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Luke 11:11-13 What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; ¹² or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

B. All Fatherhood Comes from God

ESV Ephesians 3:15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named

1. Difficult expression
2. One interpretation: Every tribe and nation and people and language comes from one God, the creator of all things

To Abraham, God said:

ESV Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Paul may be saying ALL FAMILIES of Gentiles on the entire planet derive their fatherhood from God's original creation of Adam, the "son of God"

3. Probably better to see the fact that there is ONE GOD and FATHER for every Christian:

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

4. In other words, I kneel before the SAME HEAVENLY FATHER all Christians in heaven and on earth have

IV. The Resources: God's Glory, God's Spirit

Ephesians 3:16-17 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

ESV Ephesians 3:16-17 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

A. Paul Immediately Speaks of the Resources from Which God the Father Answers Prayer

1. God's glory is the radiance of his perfections... his brightly shining attributes
2. God the Father will give POWER to the weak, but his bestowing power never in any way diminishes his own personal storehouse of power

Isaiah 40:28-29 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Psalm 121:3-4 he who watches over you will not slumber; ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

3. God's glory is like the radiance of the sun, INEXHAUSTABLE... that is in no way diminished by thousands of years of shining

B. The Request: POWER, strength

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power

1. The image: like the SUN causing a mighty oak to grow from a tiny sapling...
2. The sun keeps pouring its life-giving energy out day after day on the fragile green leaves of the sapling... but it is in NO WAY EXHAUSTED by the effort...
3. One day, the oak is MIGHTY, POWERFUL... standing over 100 feet tall
4. So Paul prays for the INEXHAUSTIBLE POWER of God's glory to be the limitless source of this request

C. God's Power Mediated by the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being

1. The Holy Spirit is the effective agent of salvation, bringing the power of the Triune God directly to the souls of people
2. The Holy Spirit delivers the power directly to your souls

Genesis 1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

3. The Spirit specifically mediates truth about CHRIST to our hearts

John 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

So God the Father will answer this prayer based on his limitless glory and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit

V. The Request: Strength in the Inner Person... So Christ Will Dwell in You

Ephesians 3:16-17 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

A. Focus: the INNER PERSON... your INNER BEING... your HEART

B. The Focus is Spiritual... Not Material

1. So many of our most fervent requests have to do with TEMPORAL THINGS
 - a. Healing of a loved one
 - b. Protection from a storm
 - c. Financial resources... getting a good job
 - d. Success in some earthly endeavor: acceptance at a college or a medical program, a godly spouse, children etc.
2. Paul's prayers are almost always spiritual in nature

Matthew 6:31-33 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Application: What do you pray most fervently for? Is your mind consumed with earthly, temporal things? Or are you able to lift your eyes to the eternal, spiritual things?

3. Notice also how SPECIFIC this spiritual prayer is!!
4. Notice also that Paul is praying for people who are ALREADY CHRISTIANS and are ALREADY BLESSED... to be blessed more
5. Christ ALREADY dwelt in their hearts... but Paul yearns for them to have a far more vivid sense of His indwelling... of his being there in their hearts

John 14:23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

C. Why the Prayer for POWER for Christ to DWELL?

1. Paul is going to be speaking of some MASSIVE TRUTHS... some overwhelming truths... so massive, they can barely be comprehended
2. Paul is going to pray for them to have a sense of INFINITY... a greater and greater sense of the love of Christ for them
3. It is so massive that it can take your breath away! It can crush you, cause you to stagger and collapse under the weight...

During WWII, Fort Knox was a storehouse of almost 20,000 tons of gold

Gold is one of the densest metals one would ever store...

If you were going to move gold bullion in large gold bars into Fort Knox, the engineers would have to calculate the load on the floors and be sure they wouldn't collapse under the weight

Paul is about to start trucking in phrase after phrase of the sense of the INFINITE GREATNESS of Christ's love for us

Ephesians 3:17-19 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This is MASSIVE!! HEAVY!! It takes POWER in the INNER BEING to handle the immensity of knowing how great is Christ's love for us

The first level of STRENGTH is just the power, the perseverance to follow Paul's teaching MENTALLY... to bear with it, meditate on it, consider it, and grow by it

BUT THEN... it gets to a vastly higher levels of EXPERIENCE of the LOVE OF CHRIST

In the Bible, people can barely handle these experiences:

In Daniel 10, the godly man Daniel had a vision of merely an angel who came to bring an answer to prayer. Daniel was knocked breathless to the ground:

Daniel 10:17-19 How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe." ¹⁸ ¶ Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. ¹⁹ "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength."

Ezekiel had a similar vision of the glory of God:

Ezekiel 3:15 And there, where they were living, I sat among them for seven days--overwhelmed.

The apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration:

Matthew 17:5-6 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.

John had a vision of the resurrected Christ:

Revelation 1:17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

D.L. Moody: [He had been a Christian, a minister in charge of a mission; he was seeing people converted, but he wanted more] "I began to cry as never before, for a greater blessing from God. The hunger increased; I really felt that I did not want to live any longer. I kept on crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit. Well, one day in the city of New York—oh! What a day! I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say, God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand."

D. The Role of Faith

1. Christ dwells in our hearts BY FAITH!!
2. As we feed on God's Word as ministered to us by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we SEE MORE AND MORE PLAINLY the greatness of Christ's love for us

Ephesians 1:18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...

VI. Applications

A. Trust in Christ

1. These words mean nothing to a person apart from faith in Christ
2. A blind man cannot understand at all what we sighted people mean by color... we cannot possibly explain what the difference is between red and blue

3. But if God opens the eyes of your heart by giving you faith, you will see the beauty of Christ's great love for you, expressed first and foremost in his death on the cross for your sins

4. TRUST IN HIM!!

B. Lessons on Prayer

1. What is your prayer life like?
2. How can you emulate the Apostle Paul in his faithful, spiritual, fervent, detailed prayers for the Ephesian Christians?
3. Do you kneel daily before the Father?
4. Do you understand both the BOLDNESS and the HUMILITY involved in a healthy prayer life?
5. Do you understand how essential prayer AND the ministry of the word are to the health and power of your life and of the church?
6. Are you willing to pray these things for yourself and then for others in this church?
7. Are your prayers SPIRITUAL or mostly PHYSICAL and EARTHLY?

C. Meditate on the Fatherly Love of God

1. Understand what Jesus taught about prayer:

Luke 11:11-13 "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? ¹² Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? ¹³ If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

D. Meditate on the Riches of God's Glory... and How God has Power to Strengthen You

1. God's strength is inexhaustible
2. He is able to give power to the weary and increase the strength of those who are fainting
3. You will be able to mount up with wings as eagles if you have God strengthen you in the inner person

E. My Heart, Christ's Home

1. A delightful little book I read some time ago

2. It fits very well with this text... Paul prays for the Holy Spirit to strengthen us in the inner being SO THAT CHRIST WILL DWELL IN OUR HEARTS BY FAITH
3. The idea of this is an ever-deepening sense of the presence of Christ at all times, of His immeasurable love for you, of the PERSONAL NATURE of it

Galatians 2:20 "I no longer live but CHRIST LIVES IN ME. And the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, WHO LOVED ME AND GAVE HIMSELF FOR ME."

4. My Heart, Christ's Home teaches constant fellowship with Christ
5. It also teaches a yearning that we have to be searched and known by Christ... that Jesus would be searching the inner recesses of our hearts and the secret corners of our lives
6. BUT at every moment, done with perfect love and tenderness
7. Related to this is a sense of ABIDING in Christ like a vine and the branches

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

John 15:4-5 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Abide= dwell, remain, live moment by moment

Get ready to seek a deeper level of knowledge of the unknowable than you have ever experienced before!!