

Bibles???

The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority

Turn your bibles with me to Ephesians 3

We are continuing our verse-by-verse study through this amazing and powerful letter that the Apostle Paul wrote – from prison, in Rome, to the saints in Ephesus, to a church he dearly loved – and by extension to us here this morning, for the purpose of stirring up our passion to the magnitude of God's amazing grace.

Paul's desire is that the genuine believer – the individual who has placed his/her trust in Jesus Christ –

That the church would understand who we are, what God has done, and how to walk in His power.

I mentioned when we started our study in this letter – that Paul follows a similar pattern we find in his other epistles – where he spends the first half of the letter dealing with doctrine before he even begins to deal with the practical.

And so this morning, we are going to finish chapter 3 – or the doctrinal section of the letter.

And in it – we find encouragement.

Because before Paul moves into the “here is how to live this out” portion of the letter, he first reminds us –

“I am praying for you, I am talking to God about you, I am doing what I can to help you receive what God wants to give”

And so this morning –

I want to do something a little bit different.

For the prayer -

I want to pray these words the way that Paul was praying for the saints in Ephesus and for us today–

So let's bow our heads and hearts –

Heavenly Father –

We thank you for all the tremendous blessings You bestow upon us.

We bend our knees and our hearts before You

from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named

We ask You that You will grant us today – according to the riches of your glory –

that You will strengthen us with might through Your Spirit in our inner man.

That You may dwell in our hearts through faith and that we may be rooted and grounded in love.

Heavenly Father – we ask that we may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and the length and the height – that we would know the love of Christ which passes knowledge;

that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.

And Heavenly Father,

we lift up to You - to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, by Your Holy Spirit

So it is to You Lord God, that we bring glory as a church, by Christ Jesus – to all generations forever and ever

AMEN

So our text this morning will be verses 14-21

This is the prayer that I just read.

And in the prayer – one of the things that stick out is the unction in Paul's heart for the body of Christ – for the church

And really Paul's heart is God's heart for us – that we may be overwhelmed by His love, that we may be overwhelmed by the magnitude and abundance of His grace for us –

A few weeks ago – as we finished up chapter 1 –

we read of another of the prayers Paul was praying for them.

[Eph 1:18 NKJV] 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,

That was a prayer for **enlightenment**

That was a prayer that they may know their riches in Christ

This prayer is different

This is a prayer for **enablement and empowerment**

This is a prayer so that we may use those riches that we have in Christ.

Paul is not content that the Ephesian believers simply know all that they have in Christ

Paul desires that the saints also begin to live in all that they have in Christ.

Paul wants them and us to spend the richness we have in Christ – not to simply hoard it.

You see, many Christians know a lot about the great truths in the bible – but they fail to take advantage of the riches that are in Christ.

And so Paul prayed

Paul understood the importance of prayer and the fulness of prayer

Turn to Matthew 6

We are going to look at a portion of the Sermon on the Mount –

Where Jesus teaches about prayer –

[Mat 6:5-8 NKJV] 5 "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 "But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who [is] in the secret [place]; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen [do]. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. 8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

So Jesus is giving great instructions to His disciples.

And Jesus first teaches them - how not to pray – don't be like the hypocrites – don't pray to be seen by men, don't be like the pagans and offer up vain repetition prayers.

And then Jesus gives us a model prayer –

He gives us a pattern, He gives us a picture to understand that He is in charge

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

You give us this day our daily bread

You forgive us

You do not lead us

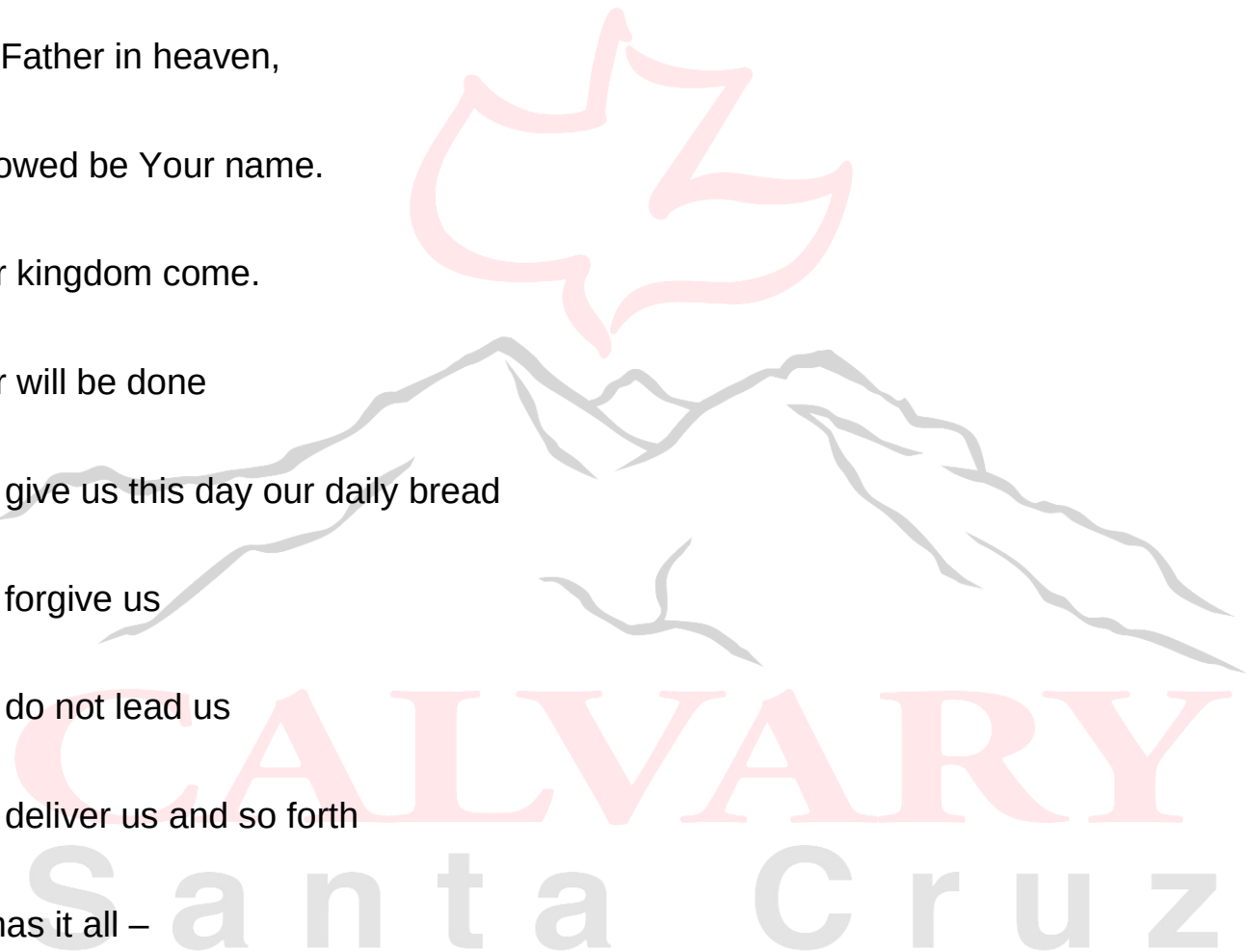
You deliver us and so forth

He has it all –

So let's look at this great prayer that Paul gives us

[Eph 3:14-21 NKJV] 14 **For this reason** I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ,



I had you make a note of the phrase – for this reason.

For what reason?

All that's come before.

Because God has revealed mysteries to Paul,

because God has a plan for Christians, because of His riches and His calling.

The magnificent work of grace for all mankind

That Jesus would be the fulfillment of the promises

That He would come to break down the dividing wall between the Jew and the Gentile

And He would say that All who would come unto Me would find life everlasting and everyone who calls upon My name would be saved

For these reasons, Paul goes to prayer.

It was God's purposes that made Paul pray, not man's purposes.

Paul understood things about God's care for humanity and he thought,

"Ok, now I am going to go to prayer, knowing what I know, and orient my prayer according to God's will and God's purposes, not just according to what I feel like or what I want or I need in the moment."

And we see Paul's posture in prayer –

Paul writes that in light of this mystery – it takes me to my knees.

Loved ones – when we grasp and fully understand the grace of Jesus Christ – this is where we will end up.

On our knees.

When I look back at who I was apart from Christ -

The brokenness

And to fully understand that God loved me despite my brokenness

That I brought nothing to the table

Bowing our knee – is expressing an attitude of humility, dependance and submission to God.

It represents a yielded heart

It is our response to who God is

So Paul – even under house arrest, and despite being chained to a Roman guard – he doesn't allow that to hinder his awe of God.

Please understand -

The position of the body isn't as important to God as the attitude of your heart.

There are instances when we read that Jesus prayed with eyes looking up to heaven and then we find instances – like in the garden of Gethsemane where His posture is one of falling on His face.

Through the scriptures we find Solomon, Esther, Daniel, Peter on their knees in prayer.

Turn to Acts 7

Here in Acts 7 – we find another person who prayed on his knees.

He was the first martyred believer – Stephen

He was the one who was picked by the apostles to wait on tables

He had a great reputation,

He loved the Lord

And the same people that brought accusations against Jesus brought accusations against Stephen.

So, in Acts 7

Stephen, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he gives a sermon in front of those who were persecuting him.

He preaches the gospel from the Old Testament all the way through pointing to them how everything pointed to Jesus and how they missed Him here and here.

He calls them a stiff necked generation – because they missed the Messiah

So the religious rulers are cut to the heart – they can't take it anymore

So – look at verse 57

[Act 7:57-60 NKJV] 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; 58 and they cast [him] out of the city and stoned [him]. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on [God] and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen, with the last moments of his life –

he is filled with the Spirit of God,

he is strengthened by presence and the purpose of God,

and in the moment of his death – he didn't pray for God to smite those that were smiting me.

He didn't pray for the stones to bounce off of him or for protection or for healing for himself.

Instead, he goes on his knees and he says – forgive them (just like Jesus when He was on the cross)

Saul is there – he is witnessing this young man – Luke tells us that they all looked at him and saw his face as the face of an angel.

committed to the Lord even in the face of death

willing to be used by God for His plan and purpose

Who is his last prayer before he sees God – is praying for Saul.

Stephen was completely surrendered to God's will –

And God uses this to transform Saul to Paul

Because as Paul writes this letter – he is completely surrendered to this mystery of grace that was revealed to him – and it brings him to his knees as he prays for us.

15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

Question?

How much glory does God have?

There is simply no end to His glory - it is infinite because He is infinite

And Paul prays that God would bestow strength on them, according to that abundance, not merely out of it

Paul prays that God would do a work in the Ephesians corresponding with who and what He is.

And He is God, whose glory is without end

Paul is asking for an unending, inexhaustible supply of strength to be released to them

You see –

For the believers, we tend to cave into the temptations of the world really quickly when we are not having fellowship with God.

When we are not in awe of His mercy and His grace and we are sort of doing things our own ways – when troubles come into our lives – instead of going to God first, we tend to lean toward things that we know best – we start to depend upon our strength and wisdom and fail miserably.

But it is only through communion and fellowship with Him – which starts as we bow our knee and we surrender to the One who is in charge – and we know that it comes from His riches for us – then we can trust that He gives us strength and power to stand against the darkness.

To be able stand against the sway of the enemy

Remember, the very act of prayer becomes an acknowledgement that I can't but He can

And it is through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit – that we find strength

It is the Holy Spirit who begins the lifelong process of making us more like Jesus

We need spiritual strength to be built together as God's dwelling.

We need strength to shine the light of His Gospel in a dark world.

We need strength to be His Body and share one another's burdens and to exercise our faith.

The good news is that this strengthening can happen even if our physical lives are defined by weakness.

In fact, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:16, "Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day."

God has strength for you and me this morning, no matter how weak we may feel.

As believers – the Holy Spirit dwells inside us.

He fills us

But many of us fail to rely on that strength and power

God's goal is always the same – every morning that we wake up.

He wants to make us more like Jesus

And He has the resources of the universe to bring about His goal.

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

For the genuine believer – the moment we respond to the work of the Holy Spirit pointing us to Jesus as our Lord and Savior – the moment that we place our faith and trust in Jesus and His work on the cross – Jesus comes to live in our hearts.

Paul is not denying this biblical truth.

Here, Paul is making a reference to a quality of presence.

Look back at ch 1 –

[Eph 1:22-23 NKJV] 22 And He put all [things] under His feet, and gave Him [to be] head over all [things] to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Christ “fills all things in every way.” And yet, God has given human beings the freedom to bar the door and keep Christ from coming into our hearts.

In Revelation 3, the Lord says, “I’m outside the door of your heart, knocking, and I hope you’ll let Me in to come and have a meal with you.”

He’s talking to the church – Jesus is talking to believers.

Here we see it's not just a quick visit.

Paul's term for dwell means a longterm habitation.

God, Who can do whatever He wants, has decided He wants to dwell with you and me and interact with you and me every single day.

He wants to set up a permanent home in our heart – not just be a visitor when He comes

He wants to walk through the halls of our heart –

And the way for us to engage with this incredible offer is to believe.

Paul desired that their faith would be of such content that they would know it and live it.

They were vessels of the Lord; bearing His presence in the world as a vase bears a rose.

And the permanent presence of Jesus being in their heart leads the believer to be rooted and grounded in love.

When we yield to the Spirit's power, when we submit to the lordship of Jesus in our lives – the end result, love in our hearts for God and love in our hearts for others.

Paul prays that all of us would have a “lifestyle of love.”

If that's what our lives are rooted in, then we will bear the fruit of love.

Not pride. Not hatred. Not greed. Not vengeance. Not resentment.

Love is the soil that allows the roots to grow deep

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what [is] the width and length and depth and height-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul wants the Ephesians to not just know about this love; he wants them to comprehend it

the word means to lay hold of something

to take a firm grasp of it

God's love is not supposed to be a mere doctrine we keep in our head - it is to be a reality that fills our heart!

How can we know the love of Christ, if as it says here, it passes knowledge?

This is why Paul prays for them and us

God's love cannot be grasped by man's unaided mind - it takes the revelation of the Holy Spirit to enable us to comprehend it

and that is precisely what he is praying for

But also, the word know here speaks of the kind of knowledge that comes from experience

We can know that God loves us because of the cross - if you need proof that God loves you, then consider the cross

But God wants you and I to experience His love

He wants us to know its width, its length, its depth and its height

And here's why it's so important - once we know the love of Christ, it becomes the strength of our lives

This is what energizes us - this is the power of the Holy Spirit

This is the motivation that drives the engine of our lives -
not guilt - not fear

but love

Look at that last part of verse 19 again –

that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Tying Paul's prayer together -

Being strong in God's spirit, makes it possible for Jesus to make His home in our heart,
the presence of Jesus in our heart leads to us being rooted and grounded in love,

being rooted and grounded in love means we experience God's love and as we experience God's love, we are filled with the fullness of God.

I had you make a note of the word fullness – because fullness means lacking nothing

There is nothing lacking in our relationship with the Father through the Son by the Spirit

Because the fullness of God is found only in Jesus

It is found nowhere else

[Col 2:9-10 NKJV] 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

We have the fullness of Jesus – but here is the paradox, there is still room to grow

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him [be] glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

After three chapters of talking about the wondrous things God has done and is doing through the Church, Paul focuses our attention on the One Who does it.

Christ is the focus.

It's His glory. It's His plan, His power, His goodness, His Body.

My life is not really meant to be the focus of my life.

God's glory is!

The focus of my life should be the presence and glory of God. Because my life is His home.

My heart is His throne.

He is able!!!!

Exceedingly abundantly all that we ask and think

God wants something even greater than that

His expectations are higher than our expectations

His thoughts are greater than our thoughts

He is able

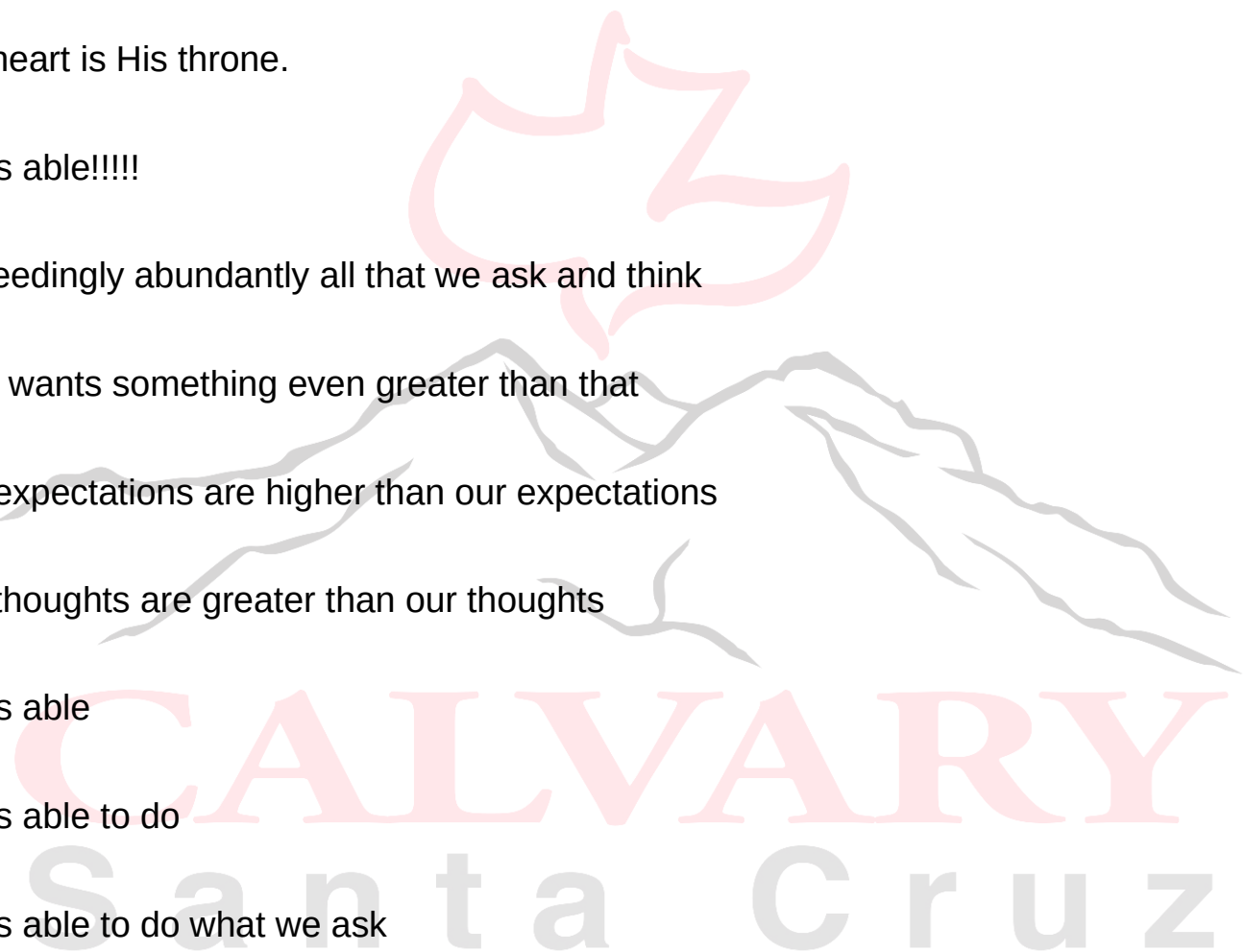
He is able to do

He is able to do what we ask

He is able to do what we think

He is able to ALL that we ask or think

His able to do more abundantly than all we ask or think



He is able to do FAR more abundantly than all we ask or think

Paul is trying to enlarge our understanding of the power and of the grace and goodness of God as it relates to prayer –

and so when we come to Him in prayer, we may not hinder the work of the Lord because our faith being so small – we may even wonder if God is even listening – let alone, that He is able to do far far abundantly of anything that we may ask or even think.

When we grasp this – it changes the way we pray – and the things we pray about

So we pray Paul's prayer –

"How do you want to use my life?"

And we believe, by faith and we walk by faith

All for His glory!!!

It all starts with coming to the Father and it ends with praising God with whom all blessings flow

Amen

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

I want you all to write this verse down –

[Isa 55:3 NKJV] 3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live;

What God is telling us to do in this passage – is to incline our ear to His voice.

And the reason this is fitting in our study is that most of the time when we pray – our ear is inclined to our own voice

and when that happens – it is our demands, our desires and our will that are on the table.

We need to incline our ears to His voice –

[Num 6:24-26 NLT] 24 '

May the LORD bless you and protect you.

May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.'



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