

Paul to the Ephesians

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Preacher: Rev Robert Sinclair

[0 : 00] Which ye may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is a breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

That ye may be filled with all the fullness of God. Paul here is writing this letter to a new church. He is addressing them as saints, as Christians. Beginning with the psalm we see Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. So, much of what we will be looking at this evening might cause us to misunderstand what Paul is saying, but if we get this right, that he is writing to Christians, we won't go far wrong. The chapter that we read was reminding these Ephesian Christians that they were once unbelievers.

[1 : 18] And they once had no part, no portion, in God or in the promises that he had given to the Jews.

That they were strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. But now they have been elevated to a far greater height than the Jews ever were, or ever would be, until they come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The reason for the Lord coming into this world was to break down the wall of separation that existed between Jew and Gentile. Many of you, perhaps, have been to Jerusalem and know where the Temple Mount is.

On that Temple Mount, obviously there was once a Temple. Today it's dominated by the Dome of the Rock, which is a shrine raised up to some God.

But before that, the Temple of God was raised there, built by Solomon and rebuilt after the destruction of Jerusalem and after the exile, built once again by Erebron and Ezra and those who went with them back to Jerusalem and back to Jerusalem after the exile.

[2 : 50] And so we have here a description, really, of the Church of God as relating to the Temple itself.

As he says at the end there of chapter 2, you also are being built together into a dwelling place or a temple for God by the Spirit.

And so we have this description here of what God has done for these Christians. Remember, once you were Gentiles, once you were unbelievers, once you were outside of the interest and the knowledge of God and you were far off and having no God in this world or any hope in the world to come.

But you have been brought near. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off, separated, have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

And that is the medium by which each and every one of us are brought near to God through the blood of Christ. None of us has any access to God but to Jesus Christ and by His blood.

[4 : 06] And so we are met here today as those who acknowledge that great and wonderful time. Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. As Paul would say, of whom I am chief.

Each one of us would recognize that each of us, at best, are sinners saved by grace. And that's all we are. Sinners saved by the grace of God.

The grace, that is, in Christ Jesus. Now, Paul begins chapter 3 by saying, For this reason I call a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.

And before he goes on to say the words that he mentions there, verse 16 that he is praying for them, he has a diversion.

Something comes into his mind And he feels he wants to have them know the mercy of God toward him and the ministry that God had given him towards the Gentiles, not only in Ephesus, but in all the

churches that he had planted.

[5 : 19] Galatia, Philippi, to Thessalonica, Colossae. All these churches that he would have planted, he sent out letters to them.

The letters were circular letters. They weren't just in the church, but they were to be read in all the churches. And so, Paul here is asserting the primacy that God has given him in the proclaiming of the gospel.

Remember Paul's conversion, and that he was taken as a blind man into Damascus, and there in a street called Strait, he went to the house of one called Ananias, and Ananias was told to go to that house, and there he would find the man praying, and that would be Paul.

And Ananias wanted to debate that fact with God. He said, I have chosen this man, he has chosen vessel, to proclaim my gospel in all places, and to suffer many things on behalf of my name's sake. And that's what Paul has been doing as he went round all these churches, planting all the churches, and all the many journeys he took. He took three missionary journeys through the release, proclaiming God's word, and asserting God's challenges to all mankind.

[6 : 36] And so we find ourselves from there coming to verse 16. He says again, for this reason, the same thing he begins in the chapter with the same words, for this reason, and he says, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

God is the Father of all living. Everything living owes its origin of life to God.

If you remember, if you remember, beginning of Genesis, God said, let us take man in our own image. And so God made us in his own image.

The first man was created in the image of God after the fall. Every man after that was created in the image of their father. Remember back, at the beginning, Seth was created in the image of Adam. And ever since there, the nature that Adam received because of his disobedience toward God fell upon all his succeeding race. Covenant he made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity, all mankind sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression.

[8 : 00] And that transgression passed on to all future mankind. It's a theological word which is called traducionism, which means that whatever was in the sea is passed on to every succeeding generation of that race or even of a tree or a bush or whatever.

If the main tree is diseased, so that disease was passed on to every succeeding generation of that tree. And so, in the same context, the disease that was in mankind in Adam is passed on to every succeeding generation of mankind.

And that's why we are born into this world of fallen, sinful, human nature. And we have to be found with God and brought once again to know God as our Lord and Saviour for time and for eternity. And so, here is Paul bowing his knees to the Father from whom every family of heaven and earth is named. He is bowing his knee.

He is praying. It's not a posture that Paul here wants us to think about. It's the fact that he is giving reverence to God and that he is praying.

[9 : 19] And very often when we find ourselves perhaps laid aside whether we're sick ill or injured we think that because we can't get out of church and we can't be in the mainstream of the church fellowship or activity there will be no more use.

But that is the very time that God wants to use us and to utilise the agency of the spirit in praying for the work throughout the world.

I remember some years back now we were going into homes where they were all Christians lonely Christians and they would be in their own in their home and on their knees there would be a Bible and they would be praying praying for the work of missionaries praying for the work of their congregation praying for the work of the ministers and the elders so that the work could be prospered.

They perhaps couldn't get out to prayer meetings or the means of grace but there they would engage in this work of ministry praying through the Spirit for the work of the Spirit in the wider church and so that's what Paul is doing here.

He's in prison. Remember these epistles which in the churches were called prison epistles and they were called prison epistles because he was imprisoned in Rome.

[10 : 46] He'd been taken to Rome remember after he'd been captured in Jerusalem and he's sent to Rome for his own protection. He'd appealed to Caesar and so he's there in prison waiting

Caesar's judgment upon his future.

And as he is there he writes these letters and as he's there he tells them that he continues to pray for the people.

If you think of one specific one for instance he talks of the church in Philippi. He tells them I want your love to abound more and more. That's his prayer for them. That they might grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That they might be filled with the blessing of God and they might be given the gifts of Christ because of his work. And so here this is this prayer for the Ephesian Christians and it's really a marvellous prayer.

These petitions all lead up to the final petitions that she might be filled with the fullness of God. That is the ultimate of what these petitions lead up to.

[11 : 54] But we've got some way to go before we get there. And so he is here bound with these praying to God that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through the spirit of your inner being.

that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory not just a meagre supply but the riches of God's glory.

Not just something which would be sufficient for your need but exceeding abundantly above all that you would ever ask or even think.

The riches of God's glory mean that he is mindful of each one of us in our own situation and he is willing to supply that need. But we must ask.

It's like all parents when we have young children and we want to teach them manners and they want something. I'm not talking about the please and thank you but we want them to ask.

[13 : 07] we want them to ask what they want. We want them to tell us when something is wrong. We want them to come to us when they are feeling hurt or when they are feeling frightened.

And so also this is what Paul here is expressing to us. That according to the riches of his glory he might grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being.

Now one of the great benefits of being a Christian is that we have an inner being. We have an inner man.

Those who are unbelievers, those who are not Christians, those who worship other gods, who belong to other faiths, do not have this particular benefit afforded to them by our father in heaven. It is only those who are in Christ Jesus who have an inner being. When we are saved by grace through faith that inner life, that inner man, that inner being comes to life.

[14 : 22] When we are born into this world, we are born as we've been saying with fallen human natures. The inner man is dead. that means we have no interest in the Bible.

It means we have no interest in prayer. The being of God and the character of Christ are unknown to us and we have no interest in them. But when God in his mercy comes to us and brings us to life by his Holy Spirit, suddenly this inner man is resurrected.

When we are born, that inner man is dead. That's what Paul says at the beginning of chapter 2. And he found you dead in your trespasses and in your sins. But now he has brought you to life.

He has resurrected you to life in your inner being. In the same way that the Lord Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead after the crucifixion, so we are resurrected to life after being born dead, being born dead in trespasses and sins.

And so look, we are now alive. We are those who have an inner being, and Paul here is stating or praying that he will grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

[15 : 43] The same Holy Spirit who gives us life now indwells us. The same Holy Spirit who has brought us to be translated from the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God's own dear Son now is being given this task of strengthening us in our inner being.

If I go on, one thing we can see here in Paul's prayer is that he doesn't pray for irrelevances. He doesn't pray for a change in the circumstances.

He doesn't change, he doesn't pray that his imprisonment might cease. He doesn't pray that he might be set free.

He doesn't pray for material things. He prays specifically a spiritual prayer. That is something that defines each and every one of us as we go before the throne of grace.

Very often our petitions are like a shopping list. Give me, give me, give me. Lord, I pray you, give me this. Lord, I pray you, give me that.

[17 : 08] And so on. And if our prayers are very formal, or if our prayers are very superficial, it defines what sort of Christians we really are.

Are we really in the meat of prayer? Or is it just that we are going to God as something we've always done? As children, we say our prayers are a prayer that we learnt as a child, perhaps as adults.

We have the same idea, we go to the same road, we pray for the same things, for the same people, and that's all we think about. And when we do it at certain times. Paul here is saying that he wants us to be strengthened in the inner being.

Well, why do we need to be strengthened? Whether we are 15 years of age, or whether we are 85 years of age, we are still babes in Christ.

And as babes, we need to be strengthened. We need to be fed on the sincere milk of God's word. We need to be strengthened so we can enjoy the strong meat of the gospel and begin to understand the truth as it is in Christ's Jesus.

[18 : 20] When we are Christians, sometimes very often, the doctrines and the teaching of Scripture, we find sometimes above us.

But as we go on in the Christian faith, the Spirit illuminates our minds into the knowledge of Christ. And as he illuminates our minds, we begin to understand, and we rejoice in what we are reading. The Bible is a closed book to us, and it becomes an open book. And we understand what is being said to us, we understand what the Bible is revealing to us, and we rejoice in it.

The Bible is no longer a dry-ened book, but we go to it with joy, anticipation, and pleasure, and it becomes the very life flood of our existence here upon earth.

And so, we praise, first of all, that we being made to Christ might be strengthened in a man, be raised up to spiritual maturity.

[19 : 27] And also, we are to be strengthened because we have a very fierce adversary. The devil is like a roaring lion seeking to devour, especially those who are weak in the faith of those who are new to the faith.

And that's his whole endeavour. In the same way as he tried to destroy Christ as a child, as he tried to destroy his ministry as an adult, so he would try to destroy the witness of every child of Christ. And so, Paul, he is praying that God, through his Holy Spirit, would strengthen us. so he become knowledgeable about the violence of the devil, knowing that he uses firing acts against God's people.

There's nothing more than the devil would want to do than to destroy the Lord's people, not injure us. Not simply call us to Paul, but he wants to utterly destroy that witness, so the testimony of Christ and the work of Christ will be made to none of it.

And so, we are the beneficiaries of the prayer that Paul is making. We might be strengthened in the inner man to resist the violence of the devil, to know the way he works, to know where our weaknesses are, to know that we are never strong enough to stand because if we think we're standing then better beware because we are going to fall.

[20 : 55] And so, we are given this wisdom to know and understand where our weaknesses are and where we should go to for being strengthened at the total place.

And also because we are being indulged by the fullness of God. That is the ultimate petition here in this prayer.

So that we might be strengthened in a man so that Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith. Christ the infinite being.

Christ the incarnate God. That he might dwell in our hearts right away. I wonder do we ever think on this thing that we as Christians are being indwelled by the Spirit of God.

We're no longer as those who are men and women who are just being born into this world with an inner being and inner man which is dead. But that we have been made alive and the Holy Spirit now lives in us.

[22 : 03] He lives in us, he guides us, he directs us, he educates us, he disciplines us, all these different things which are part of this ministry in our experience. And so that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith.

Christ might not just be merely a visitor, here for a moment and then going away. He doesn't come here merely to sojourn for a time and then go away somewhere else, but to dwell, to stay with us entirely and completely.

That we never be a time in our experience where we don't know of Christ's presence, we don't know of Christ's guidance, we don't know of Christ's love and his spiritual embrace. that as our minds are enlightened from the knowledge of Christ and our will is renewed, so we embrace Christ and he embraces us and he brings us to know the fullness of our joy of being his children.

It's not just a doctrine that we love Christ and Christ loves us, but it's something that we experience. In the same way as we experience love on a human relationship, on a horizontal relationship, so with that love, should we be able to be experienced on a vertical on the relationship between God and man.

[23 : 24] And so anything that we would expect from a human relationship of love, of giving and receiving, so we should expect and know in our relationship with our Father who's in heaven and with our Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so he says that Christ might dwell in your hearts in faith and that you will be rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breath, the length, the life and death.

You might be able to comprehend, not just a mental ascent, but have a deep understanding, something, it's like reading a book, and sometimes you read a book and you say, yes, that's fine, I know what you said, then you pass on.

But when you read the book and it really hits you, you want to understand what the person is getting at. You want to understand the way that he's dealing with the theme of what he's writing about, and you want to get good, you don't just read it once, go back to it and you dissect it, and you try to investigate and meditate on what he's saying.

And that's what Paul here is saying, that we might not simply be superficial Christians, we might be those who enter into real living religion of Christ, being rooted and grounded in our love.

[24 : 55] What Paul here is talking about is our love for Christ. He goes on in a minute to talk about Christ's love for us, but he's talking here about our love for Christ.

How true is it? How does it testify towards our own relationship with Christ and with our Father who is in heaven?

I'm sure each and every one of us have to confess that we are not as we should be, that our love is not as right as it should be, we are not zealous in our lives towards Christ because it is not towards us, we don't respond in the way that we should respond, and we have to confess that before his throne, that we are unworthy of the least of his mercy, and yet we pray that he would not leave us, and that he would not desert us, but he would continue to strive with us, and continue to bring us into that situation where he will perfect us, as he will do.

And so, having gone through the section where Christ is talking, or Paul is talking about our love of Christ, being rooted and grounded, that our roots go right down into the soil.

We as Christians have been implanted in a soil that is prepared by God. It's a soil which is beneficial to growth, a soil whereby we are able to bring forth fruits to God's glory and to the growth of God's kingdom.

[26 : 37] Not only that we might grow, but that Christ's kingdom also might grow. So rooted in that soil which God has prepared and granted also, that our foundation is in Christ.

It's not on, and some imagine, other God or other benefits, but in Christ alone. As that, we receive and rest upon Christ alone for salvation, that we are able to love and efficiently.

That's what Paul is talking about here, this love towards Christ. And then this next verse here, verse 18 and 19. And we have the strength to comprehend with all the saints, love of Christ towards us. What is the breath of that love? Well, at one time, as I said earlier on, only the Jews had access to God.

If you were to go to the temple platform, I think I got a word here when I was talking about that, I meant to say, on the temple platform, there was a division between Jew and Gentile. One time, on the wall of the temple, there was a plaque, a tubular.

[27 : 52] In Galilee, it says, any non-Jew passing beyond this point will be stoned to death. And that tablet is not a table, it was found in the ruins of Jerusalem at the time when they were doing excavations in front of the temple platform.

So that's a reality. But Christ, as we are told in the previous chapter, has broken down that middle wall partition between Jew and Gentile.

Broken down that wall of division, which meant that only the Jew could worship God, and the Gentiles could not. They only worshipped all God. For in Christ Jesus, that division has been taken away.

He came to break down that middle wall of partition. He came down so that both Jew and Gentiles may have the one way of access unto God the Father.

And we know from the scriptures that it is Jesus Christ himself who is the only way of access. Jesus Christ himself is the only one who can bring us to God, who can reveal God to us, who can introduce us to God.

[28 : 58] And this is God's love for us. This breath of God's love means that every child born into this world has the opportunity for access to Christ Jesus and through him and to our Father who is in heaven.

it means that there is no one. No one excluded except those who exclude themselves. And we know many in the world today who will exclude themselves, who will be taught by Christ Jesus and rejected.

They'll be taught about the love that there is in him and prefer to go their own way like Igritch young ruler. He was offered heaven and he said no, I prefer my riches. And others who say offer Christ and not prefer my own God.

I prefer my own faith. I prefer my own way of something. And so we have this breath of the love of God which is to every creature, every child born into this world, every soul formed in the womb. And also we're told of the length of Christ's love. How long has Christ loved us. He loved us with an everlasting love. But he loved us even before we were brought into being.

[30 : 29] There was never a time in the experience of God when our names speaking anthropologically, speaking a way which God can be defined as human being.

When our names were not engraved in the palms of God's hand, we are of that number whom he gave to his son. We're of that number whom the son came to die for.

And the length of that love has been before the foundation of the world. God prepared this world for his own people. God prepared this world knowing that mankind would fall but that he would send his son into this world to die for those whom he gave to his son.

There are those whom God has chosen, those whom God has given to his son, and of that number I have lost none. Christ says in the 5th day, except the son of perdition, by which he was reading Judas Iscariot.

And so here we have this length of love. It's endless. There's never a time God did not love us. There never will be a time that God will stop loving us.

[31 : 52] Sometimes we feel we don't deserve to be loved by God when we have a tender conscience, when we sin against rights, when we go out of the way, we think we don't deserve God's love. And that the devil said to us, I don't deserve to be loved by God.

But sin is the handle by which each one of us hold on to Christ. If we are sinners, if we acknowledge our sin, if we repent of that sin, well, Christ wants us.

And he will never let us go. Our lives are hid with God in Christ. And he talks also here about not only the breath and the length, but the height and depth of that love.

Look at the depth of our love first. What Christ had to suffer for us and for our salvation. He came to this earth, made a woman, made under the law, to receive us, to die for us who are under that law that we might receive the adoption of sons.

And in that dying for us, he suffered much. He was made in the form of God, thought it not of robbery to be equal with God, yet made himself of no reputation.

[33 : 10] And in that form, he suffered. In that form, he died. To the people of his day, generation, he was out of the prime ground. No form, no comeliness, no beauty.

He was despised and rejected of men, esteemed, smitten of God, and afflicted. And yet, it was not for himself, not because of what he was, it was for us.

He was made as a man in a low condition, so that we, and might be raised, elevated, into the status of sons and daughters of the Most High God.

That's the great privilege that is offered to each and everyone. So often, we will dispense with that offer, we're offered heaven, and we reject it, or we ridicule it, or we mock what's being said.

But here is this great offer of the gospel in Christ Jesus, the suffering through which Christ himself suffered. He went to the cross, he was there, emulated on that cross, he hung between the earth

and heaven for you and for me, that we might have our sins forgiven.

[34 : 22] he rose again from the dead that we might be justified and set before God as though we have never sinned, as though we are innocent of all the kinds that we have committed, because of what Christ has done, because of what he suffered, the death that he was suffering for us and for our salvation, and finally here, just briefly, that the height of that love also, and that we might know the height of that love.

It's the great climax of God's work for us in Christ Jesus, that we might be with him in the glory Christ had with the Father before the world was.

We might be with him in that glory, we might share his fellowship, we might share his image, we might share every gift and benefit of love that God has made to his son, we might share.

We might share even the sonship Christ has. Christ was the only begotten son, we are adopted children. But as in the natural sense of the world, of the word, when in this world, children are adopted into the family, they have all the rights and privileges of those who are born to the family, so also we, as we are adopted into God's family, have all the rights and privileges that Christ himself has.

We are a son or a daughter of the most high, or a child of God. We shall have access to the very centre of the throne of God, the place where the fountain of the rivers of life rise and bubble up as the spring, and that is to be our destination.

[36 : 04] salvation. It is there that we shall be led to and there shall be fed with the very fineness of the provision that God could make for us as his children.

And we shall also be participators or partakers of the divine attributes. Not as partakers of the divine image, not attributes, partakers of the divine image.

we shall not become as God, but we shall have all those in a mission, the attributes that God himself has. And we shall share that glory and that position throughout all the endless ages.

Not because of what we are, never because of what we are, but all because of what Christ is, and what he has done, and what he has brought into our experience, and what he has suffered, so that we are might live.

And here we have that final petition, which all the other petitions are leading up to, that he might be filled with the fullness of God. Can you think of any greater petition than that particular one?

[37 : 18] He might be filled with the fullness of God. What shall we say to these things? How shall we be able to thank God enough with the endless ages of eternity to hear the praises of those who should be there, singing the praises of God and of the Lamb?

May it be that each one of us here this evening might be there, each one of us might be in that place where God is, taken there and by the blood of the Lamb, the One who so loved us and that he died for us.

Let the Lord then bless these thoughts. We conclude now our worship, singing to God's praise in Psalm 145, page 189, page 145, I will exalt you, O my God and King, whatever I will praise your holy name, I will extol your name whatever more the after day of praise I will proclaim.

To the end of verse Mark 9, five stanzas to God's face. I will exalt you forevermore, praise I will proclaim.

This is the Lord most worthy of all praise. His greatness not can search or comprehend.

[39 : 45] Each generation will En transcript are sent on the prest ■■ this is great.

The precious render of your majesty, the power of the works that you have done, I too will meditate upon your knees, and your majesty as I will rejoice.

They will rejoice in your benevolence, and your abundant crystal celebrate.

The righteousness that you have shown to end, in praise and joyful song they will relate.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, each soldier I have with riches set but love.

[41 : 47] The Lord is good to all that he has made, and merciful to all other that have moved.

And now may grace, mercy and peace, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, rest on you and abide in thy laws.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. »