

A Christmas Prayer Part 3

A Prayer For Love

Ephesians 3:14-21

Memory Verses: Ephesians 3:17-18

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Christmas morning is beautiful chaos. Wrapping paper flying here and there, coffee spilling, kids squealing, dogs barking, presents sharing, Bing Crosby singing, everyone laughing. There is a love in the room that is palpable. But that love isn't for the activity or the excitement of the event itself. The love is for those who are in the room. It's for the meaning behind the event and the appreciation for the one it points to. That's what Christmas is really all about. The love of Christmas isn't about what's under the tree, but the one who came to hang on a tree.

We've been praying our way through Christmas because this year our theme has been a year of prayer. Our moto has been "prayer makes all the difference." And as we celebrate Christmas and the start of a new year, we offer these prayers for joy, for peace, and for love. We come before our Lord, asking him to focus our hearts on him and on his ability to do what we cannot do. Prayer should be our first response and not our last resort. Prayer should be the first step of our faith, each and every day of our lives. So right now, let us **pray**.

Today our Christmas prayer comes from **Ephesians 3:14-21**. Here we see the trinity should be present in our prayers. The majesty of the Father proclaimed. The power of the Spirit embraced. And the love of the Son filling each of us to overflowing. And you see the Christmas story. An earth to be filled with every family. The glory of the Lord displayed in humanity. The Spirit in our inner being. And the Messiah, Jesus Christ in our hearts through faith. Love doesn't just emanate from Jesus. Jesus is love. And to know this love, to experience this love is to be filled with God. The baby born in a manger is the manifest love of God poured out for us on the cross.

I'm just going to be real with you. You are created to be a creature of love. But perhaps you aren't very loving. Perhaps you have not loved as you should. Perhaps you don't feel loved like you want. The answer isn't out there. The answer can only be found when what is here (the Bible) becomes real in here. True love is found in Christ. And this morning, as our passage states. If you trust him; he is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. The main point this morning is this... **Prayer opens our hearts to experience the boundless love of Christ.**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to notice today is that... **Love is Rooted In The Presence of God**. Look at **vs.14-17** again. Paul kneels before the Father, praying that Christ may dwell in our hearts. Dwell means to "settle down and make oneself at home." You have heard a home referred to as a "dwelling." Dwell means to be fully present with. To be settled. To be there. And, isn't that what Christmas is all about. The manifest presence of God coming to be with us, coming to dwell with us?

But get this, this Christmas today is even greater than the first Christmas 2000 years ago. Why? Because back then, Jesus came in the flesh for only 33 years. Today, Jesus dwells with us permanently in our hearts through the Spirit. His love is a continuous presence. His love isn't the guest that visits occasionally. No, he is a savior who moves in permanently. Get this... **Love grows where Christ dwells.**

For example. A tree can't grow without soil. You can water it, sing to it, even decorate it, but if it isn't rooted, it dies. A tree needs somewhere to dwell. It's the same with Christ's love. If your life isn't rooted in the presence of Jesus, your love will wither after the Christmas lights come down.

And how do we allow Christ's love to dwell in our hearts? How do we continuously invite the presence of God into our lives? Prayer. **Prayer opens our hearts to experience the boundless love of Christ.**

But there is another thing we need to see here and that is... **Love is Measured By the Cross of Christ**. Look at **vs.18-19** again. Paul prays that we may grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Those four dimensions point us to the cross. Represent the cross. It's wide enough for the whole world. It's long enough to last forever. It's high enough to reach to heaven. It's deep enough to reach the lowest sinner.

The manger was the doorway to the love of Christ. The cross is the full display of that love. When I want my kids to get a real picture of how much I love them I will stretch out my arms and say "I love you this much." It's a silly little way to say I really really love you. But God truly demonstrated his love for us by stretching his arms very wide and very long. At Christmas we see the length of his love. A love so big that it took the kingly robes of Christ off and had him humble himself in the likeness of man. He, for a time, gave up heaven for us. And at Christmas we see the depth of his love. A love so big that it hung Christ on the cross to die for our sins. A love so big that it paid the price we should have all paid. A love so big that it made a way for us to experience the presence of God forever. **The cradle and the cross are carved out of the same wood of love.**

But knowing about this love and experiencing this love are two different things. Events thousands of years ago are hard to connect to sometimes. But prayer puts us back in the center of the story again. It puts us back in the presence of God again. If you feel disconnected from the

love of Christ and the cross of Christ... its time to pray. **Prayer opens our hearts to experience the boundless love of Christ.**

Application

And, so we pray this Christmas prayer for love. Lord, let us receive your love, let us reflect your love, and let us rest in your love.

Conclusion

We pray **Ephesians 3:14-21**. Lord, let us know your love displayed for us at Christmas.