



Every Spiritual
Blessing

EPHESIANS - WEEK 8

The Blessing of Prayer

Opening prayer

Prayer for the millennial generation:

We pray that the church would mourn for those millennials who do not know or keep your law. That we would be moved to reach out to millennials with the gospel. “May our eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your law.” (Ps. 119:136) We pray that the millennials would seek out teachers who will give them the truth of the gospel and not false doctrine. For “the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Tim. 4:3)

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we pray for our brother Sabo Cortez and Covenant Grace Church.

Closing prayer

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is something most Christians struggle with. There's a lot of guilt associated with prayer, because of this. We know we should pray more, so when we hear about prayer we feel guilty. But guilt and the burden of duty are lousy motivators for prayer. But just because something is a duty doesn't mean it should be a burden. It is my duty

as a husband and father to love and care for my wife and children, but my duty is also my pleasure. The guilt and burden of prayer is removed when our view of God is expanded. How much we pray, whether we enjoy praying or not, all has to do with how we view God.

The little Old Testament book of Zephaniah is instructive here.

- Believing Zephaniah's description of God
- The opening chapters of Ephesians do the same when we trust the truth of what Paul is

telling us.

Is He truly for us?

Big Idea: As our view of God increases, our prayers increase.

Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason

Last week we began with “for this reason” and we begin again this week with “for this reason.”

In other words, because of everything that came before this — “for this reason” he is praying. Now, last week we covered the blessing of stewardship, so Paul just ended with that focus, so we could also say “for this reason” —because of the stewardship he’s been given, because of his responsibility to take the gospel to the Gentiles...

I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

1 Point #1 - He prays because of his stewardship of the gospel.

In other words, because he is responsible for others, he prays for them. Who are you responsible for? Now, of course, you're responsible for your family, but if you are someone who claims to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are also responsible to those around you, neighbors and strangers. Do you have a neighbor or friend or relative who does not have saving faith in Jesus Christ that

you're praying for regularly?

But in a more general sense of prayer — who do you go to when you have an issue? Where do you go when you need help or answers? How do you get the resources you need?

Paul bows his knees before the Father, the One who created all things and therefore knows all things intimately and has the power to change anything and give what is needed.

MLJ speaks of two extremes in prayer — one is

too formal and the other is too casual. In evangelicalism today, formality in prayer isn't a concern, but this casual laissez faire attitude is a concern, speaking to the Lord as if he's your drinking buddy. It doesn't demonstrate intimacy with God. It demonstrates an ignorance of his nature and character. That's why prayers are often weak, when our view of God is weak.

Now, what does Paul mean by "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named?" Historically, families have taken on the name and identity of the father. Israel was the father of that

family, which became the tribe or the nation of Israel. Judah was the father of the family of the tribe Judah, because everyone from that tribe came from that family line. That's what the Bible means when it speaks of the family of David or from the line of David.

Paul here is emphasizing yet again that God breaks down all barriers between people, between family lines, between races, between cultures, between Jew and Gentile, between slave and free, because he is the Creator of all. Most importantly, God has broken down the

barrier between us and Him through Jesus Christ. God has removed the barrier of sin. **“The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies.”** (Zephaniah 3:15)

This is the God who brought every family in heaven and on earth into existence. When you ask people, “What is the most important thing in your life?” The most common answer is family. Not the God from whom their family came, but the creature rather than the Creator. He is the God who creates families, saves families and

repairs families and breaks down barriers so the church can be a family. But God wants to be a great blessing for your personal family, too. **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.”** (Acts 16:31) That’s a great verse to trust God for the salvation of your family.

Praying for your family isn’t about whether or not your family is important to you. It’s about believing that your family is important to God. If you believe your family is important to God, then you will be more apt to pray for them.

Paul not only believed the immediate family is important to God, but the church family is important to God. Paul prayed for the Christian churches he was writing to:

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

2 Point #2 - Prayer strengthens others.

It strengthens those prayed for. Listen to the words associated with prayer: riches, grant, strength, power.

Riches

Paul prays that God will answer his prayer for the Ephesians according to the riches of his glory. What are the riches of God's glory? Having no beginning and no end, knowing the end from the beginning, being able to create worlds with a word, fashioning human beings in their mother's womb, being all-powerful, everywhere at once,

mindful of every thought you have, knowing what you're going to say before you say it, knowing what you truly need, not what you think you need — those are just a few of the ways to think of the riches of his glory.

Grant

Paul prays that God will grant them his request. To grant something is to allow it or provide it. Paul believed God wants to give people what they need. He wants to provide you with what you need to grow into Christ-likeness.

Strength

Paul's request is for inward strength for these Christians. Not just a resolve, but inward power that comes from the Holy Spirit, not from yourself. Whatever the Spirit brings is from the Spirit, not from you. That's why we're dependent upon the Holy Spirit. He doesn't give us a grace that we possess and then expect us to run out and use it to do something wonderful for God. As C.H. Spurgeon said, "It is not that — my faith is so steady that it will not stagger — my love is so warm that it will never grow cold — my resolution is so firm that nothing can move it; no, our

dependence must be on the Lord alone. If we indulge in any confidence which is not grounded on the Rock of ages, our confidence is worse than a dream, it will fall upon us, and cover us with its ruins, to our sorrow and confusion.” Everything we receive we receive by trusting the provision the Holy Spirit brings to us.

Power

Paul goes on to explain what it means to be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner being. He tells them why he’s making this request and in the following verses

we find the the meaning of being “strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—

You have an actual inward experience that Christ is the Living Savior because the Holy Spirit gives you the witness that Christ dwells in you. His Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are his. The Holy Spirit verifies that you're his. This inward witness will help you feel rooted and grounded in love.

And here's where we get it wrong so often. You go looking for the inward feeling and that's just the thing to breed insecurity. If you want to be strengthened by the Spirit and be rooted and grounded in love... you need to comprehend, you need to understand. This is how doctrine (which is simply teaching) when rightly taught and applied brings about an inward strengthening by the Holy Spirit. It goes down deep in your soul and then you feel rooted and grounded in love, but you don't go looking for the feeling. We first look for comprehension, which

will lead us to feeling rooted and grounded in love.

If Christ dwells in your heart by faith, this means you trust who the gospel writers have revealed Jesus to be, the One who heals lepers and gives sight to the blind and has compassion on the sick, the One who has shown us the heart of the Father. It also means that you trust what he has done — lived a sinless life, died for your sins and rose again from the dead. And this comprehension (this understanding) leads to —

that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

That's the love you're rooted and grounded in — his love. The love God demonstrated to you in Christ. The love Christ demonstrated to you because greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for a friend. He died that you might live even before you knew he wanted to be your friend. He did this while you were still his enemy.

18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints

Strength to understand. Strength is power, but Paul is not speaking here of physical power but of the power to understand. For this, we are all dependent upon the Holy Spirit to give us understanding.

This is taught consistently throughout Scripture. In the little Old Testament book of Zephaniah, the prophet tells God's people to "not let your hands grow weak." It's the same idea about being strengthened. And what does Zephaniah give God's people to strengthen their hands? He

gives them doctrine, teaching about God.

Zephaniah 3:17

**17 The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.**

Your sanctification is his joy. Your growth in grace is his joy. If that's what you want, he wants it more. He wants you to know his will. He wants to

supply you with the power to understand his will and the power to do his will.

Now if you understand that, you are on your way to seeing:

what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul doesn't say it's a love without knowledge. It's a love that surpasses, goes beyond

knowledge. There is knowing Christ — understanding who he is and what he has done. And there is *knowing* Christ — experiencing for yourself that he is alive now. That he is engaging you in your life. But you cannot experience Christ without comprehending Christ.

3 Point #3 - Prayer gives you experiential knowledge of God's love.

The great sadness of our age is how many

people look inwardly to themselves to find what they need to live life. The sad thing is we are all such weak sources of the things we need to live life well. We are a feeble source of wisdom and power and strength and might and grace and truth. There is this prevalent idea that everyone just looks inward to find their own truth and their own resources. But the sad fact is humans make the worst gods. Even the gods we substitute for the real God are lousy gods.

Be careful who you listen to about what will make you happy. If you're being told not to listen

to anyone, but to look inward to yourself you're being told a lie, because the person who tells you not to listen to anyone wants you to listen to him or her. The fact is humans make lousy gods, but God made a wonderful human. Christ came as God in human flesh and he is wonderful. He is the only human being who is mighty to save, because he is the only human being who is also fully God.

What keeps you from going to him?

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,

4 Point #4 - Prayer actually accomplishes more than we realize.

- Greater things & Eden's birth & Kate's birthday

21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

5 Point #5 - Prayer is the means through which God works in the church.

- Rigo

Application

God uses prayer to unfold his plan in history. If

you believe God has a plan, then you should be praying about the part he wants you to play in his plan of making all things new.

Prayer is the means that God uses to bring the gift of faith alive. All who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Do you call upon the Lord regularly? If you don't know Christ, call upon the name of the Lord and you will experience the risen Christ.

There is only one way to get your prayers heard and that is by going through Jesus Christ. In the

famous statement of Jesus where he says that he is the way and the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through him, that means you're only connected to God through Christ. That's the only way your prayers will be heard, if you're willing to go to Christ.

This means the public good of our communities, the public good of our nation hinges upon the prayers of God's people. Prayer is God's chosen means to bring about change.

Even the Lord Jesus Christ, who never sinned,

went away alone and prayed. That shows us that prayer is relational. As hard as it is for us to believe, God sees his Son in us when we go to him in prayer.

That puts you on equal footing with any Christian in history. God's as willing to answer your prayers as he was the Apostle Paul's prayers.