

A Trinitarian Prayer

Ephesians 3:14-21

DT- Never underestimate the power of prayer.

It is good to be back in the pulpit, and back with you guys. We had a great time in Romania as I said last week. Got the building demolished and rebuilt. No major injuries to speak of. Just some soreness to work out. Dan and I will have a bigger presentation of our trip at the upcoming mission Sunday. I got to preach each Sunday while I was in Romania but preaching with an interpreter is a whole other experience. It will be nice not to pause after each thought today.

I appreciate Steve and Mitch filling in for me while I was gone. Big thanks to those guys. With today's sermon we will finish out the first half of Ephesians and the second half of Paul's letter is packed with application, but today our focus will be on Paul's prayer for spiritual growth. I chose to title this sermon with a bit of a 10-dollar word. A Trinitarian is a person, like us, who believes in the trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I would describe this text as a trinitarian prayer because Paul incorporates each person of the trinity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are all part of this prayer for spiritual growth. Before we get into the text, it would only be right to begin with prayer.

PRAY

Never underestimate the power of prayer. Do you understand how powerful prayer can be? Not because it changes the mind of God but because it can change the hearts of men. Why do you think we use phrases like prayer warrior; because of how powerful prayer can be. Here's the problem we tend to have with prayer. We put prayer into one category; physical healings. There is nothing wrong with praying for and about the physical healings of anyone, especially the people we love. However, using prayer for just that alone is like having a car but never putting gas in it. It's a good car, it looks good, it could work really well for you, but you never put a drop of fuel in it and use it.

Dan and I arrived in Romania at about 1am Sunday morning and we had a driver pick us up. His name was Elijah. Elijah is essentially a car dealer, but he also functions like the DMV here in America. We had a 2½ hour trip from the airport to the camp where we were staying, and we had a great conversation. At one point Elijah was telling us that some people in Romania will buy a nice-looking car that doesn't actually run just to put it in their driveway for appearance's sake.

When prayer is only used to request physical healing, it's like putting a nice car in your driveway that doesn't run or having a car that you never put fuel in and actually use. Prayer requests for physical healing are absolutely a part of how we should pray, but too often our prayer lists predominately consists of physical needs and almost no spiritual needs. Why is that? Why don't we pray more about the spiritual nature, and the spiritual battles in our life?

There are probably several reasons why. We aren't vulnerable enough. Now I'm not saying that you should be vulnerable with absolutely everyone. I read somewhere once that we should be honest with everyone, vulnerable with some, and accountable with a few. It may not be appropriate to be vulnerable with everyone but are you even vulnerable with a few. If you are do you stop and pray about it? Perhaps another reason we don't share our spiritual struggles and battles is because we don't believe in the power of prayer enough. Daniel is famous for his time in the lion's den more than anything else. Prayer got him tossed in with the lions of course, but sometimes I wish instead of Daniel 6 being his most well-known story, that his prayer in Daniel 9 was the most well-known thing about him.

I don't have time to read the whole chapter, but you should go home and read Daniel 9, it's awesome. I do want to read a little bit of it and especially point out just how powerful his prayer was. Daniel 9:3-6 says, "So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and fasting. I also wore rough burlap and sprinkled myself with ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land."

Daniel goes on to confess the sins of the people and the last written portion of the prayer that we have says this in Daniel 9:17-19, "O our God, hear your servant's prayer! Listen as I plead. For your own sake, Lord, smile again on your desolate sanctuary. "O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy. "O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name."

I don't know about you but that prayer convicts me because I don't often pray like that. You may wonder how we got this prayer of Daniel, did he write it down? Yeah he did. If you want to take a huge step of faith in your prayer life, start writing out your prayers. I want you to see how powerful this prayer was. In the very next verse Daniel 9:20-23 Daniel says, "I went on praying and confessing my sin and

the sin of my people, pleading with the Lord my God for Jerusalem, his holy mountain. As I was praying, Gabriel, whom I had seen in the earlier vision, came swiftly to me at the time of the evening sacrifice. He explained to me, "Daniel, I have come here to give you insight and understanding. The moment you began praying, a command was given. And now I am here to tell you what it was, for you are very precious to God."

His spiritual prayer was so powerful that the arch angel Gabriel showed up. Never underestimate the power of prayer. Paul did not underestimate the power of prayer so in the middle of his letter to the Ephesians he prays for the spiritual growth of those who would read this letter. There are 3 important things to notice in this prayer. First is his posture. The posture of prayer.

1. The posture of prayer.

This is certainly not the most important part of prayer, how you posture your body when you pray, but it is worth thinking about. Look at how Paul postures himself in Ephesians 3:14-15 where it says, "When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth."

Paul falls to his knees to pray. The usual posture for prayer in the OT was to stand with your hands lifted towards heaven. There were always exceptions to that. Solomon got down on his knees when he was praying to dedicate the temple. Daniel knelt down as well when he prayed with his window open towards Jerusalem just before they arrested him and threw him in the lion's den. Early Christians in the time after Jesus ascension knelt down or prayed from their knees often. Perhaps they were imitating Jesus garden of Gethsemane posture when he prayed.

Stephen, the first martyr of the church, fell to his knees in prayer as the stones began to hit him. Peter knelt in prayer when he raised Tabitha from the dead in Acts 9. The very last time that Paul sees the elders from this Ephesian church he kneels with them in prayer; Acts 20:36-38 says, "When he had finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with them. They all cried as they embraced and kissed him good-bye. They were sad most of all because he had said that they would never see him again. Then they escorted him down to the ship."

The posture you take when you pray is not the most important thing about prayer, not by a long shot; but it might help you turn your focus towards what is happening in prayer. You are communing with the almighty God. It would do us some good to remember that, and to posture our bodies accordingly.

Paul's posture is to fall to his knees and recognize that he is speaking to the creator of everything on heaven and on earth. Then Paul begins the petition of prayer.

2. The petition of prayer.

His petitions again are not related to the Ephesians physical ailments or issues, but the spiritual growth he hopes they have and will continue to experience. His first requests to God is for inner strength.

- Inner strength.

Ephesians 3:16 says, "I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit."

Paul is not asking God to do something beyond his resources, because God's resources are unlimited. The Greek word for strength is the opposite of discouragement. You need spiritual inner strength; ask for it. That inner strength is going to come from the Spirit. The Bible, both OT and NT, is packed with instances where the Holy Spirit filled someone with an extra measure of strength. Gideon during the time of the judges was weak and fearful and then the Holy Spirit filled him with inner strength and with just a few hundred men he destroyed a force of 120,000 Midianites.

The Holy Spirit filled the disciples at Pentecost and with that came signs and wonders; and a multitude of people confessing Jesus as Lord. Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you."

As you read through the book of Acts you see the importance of the Holy Spirit filling these new Christians with inner strength. We need that inner strength from the Spirit as well. We need to yield to the Spirit, let him control our inner thoughts so that we can live to the glory of God. In the end it's our inner nature that continues on from this life. 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Warren Wiersbe in his commentary on this passage in Ephesians says, "This means feeding the inner man the Word of God, praying and worshiping, keeping clean, and exercising the senses by loving obedience."

Paul's first petition is for inner strength. His next petition is for spiritual depth.

- Spiritual depth.

Paul is going to use 3 pictures in his prayer to describe the spiritual depth he hopes that they will achieve. The ESV version points these out the best using 3 verbs; dwell, rooted, and grounded. Ephesians 3:17 (ESV) says, "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love..."

Our spiritual depth comes from and grows from the fact that Christ dwells in us. The NLT describes it as Christ making his home in our hearts. That word dwell literally means to settle down and feel at home. Paul is praying for a deeper experience between Christ and these people. Think of it like this; when you visit someone's home for the first time you might not feel comfortable. Do you take your shoes off, where do you sit, are their coaster for your drinks? You're on your best behavior.

In contrast when you go over to a good friend's house that you've been to several times the atmosphere is much more comfortable. You know where the cups are, you know where the bathroom is, you know where you can sit. You have a deeper relationship with those people because you have dwelt in their house many times. That's the kind of spiritual depth Paul is praying for us to have with Christ.

He also uses the image of a plant. He wants our spiritual roots to grow down deep into the soil of God's love so that our spiritual depth increases. Then lastly is the word grounded. That's an architectural term which refers to the foundation upon which we build our lives. I read recently about a pastor who had a building project going and the foundation was taking a long time to get laid and poured. Lots of soil tests had to be done because of where they were building.

One day this pastor complained to the architect about it and the architect said, "Pastor, the most important part of this building is the foundation. If you don't go deep, you can't go high."

That's why Paul is praying this trinitarian prayer of spiritual growth, where God's love is experienced through Christ, and then lived out by way of the Spirit. If you don't go deep, you can't go high. We need that spiritual depth to grow well. The next petition of Paul is for us to grasp the love of Christ.

- Grasp the love of Christ.

To comprehend something means you understand it, but to apprehend something means you've taken hold of it. Paul doesn't want us to just comprehend the love of Christ mentally, he wants us to apprehend the love of Christ, to grasp it for ourselves. Ephesians 3:18-19a says, "And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully."

So there is this paradox when it comes to grasping hold of God's love. We need to take hold of how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. We need to experience that to its fullest, but we can't. that's the paradox. His love is actually too great for us to fully understand. It's like looking at the ocean for the first time, it just seems to go on forever. Isaiah 54:10 says, "For the mountains may move and the hills disappear, but even then my faithful love for you will remain."

I told you about the driver that Dan and I had in Romania who drove us from the airport to the camp we were working at. Elijah surprised us and made a special trip to the camp on the last day we were there to say goodbye and thank you to Dan and me. Why did he do that? Because of the love of God. I know that in his life he is trying to grasp the love of Christ, and that love for Christ overflowed into love for his newly found brothers in Christ from Tonganoxie Kansas.

Paul's final petition in this prayer for spiritual growth is a prayer for fullness.

- Fullness.

Not physically full of course. He's not asking for a Golden Coral or a Cicci's Pizza buffet. He wants them to experience a spiritual fullness that can only come from God, through Christ, and by the Spirit. Ephesians 3:19b says, "Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God."

What does God fill us with? The Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, "Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit."

The Holy Spirit fills us by giving each of us spiritual gifts that we use to equip one another, to build one another up, and do God's work. What does it look like to have spiritual fullness? It looks like Ephesians 4:13-16 where Paul writes, "This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."

That's what spiritual fullness looks like. That we are so filled by the Spirit that we look and act like Christ for the glory of God the Father. In one sense we have already been made full in Christ. Positionally we are complete, but practically we still need God's grace and forgiveness every day. Colossians 2:9-10 says, "For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority."

Because we have been united with Christ in baptism we are complete, we are full, but we are still sinners in need of grace and thankfully his grace is sufficient for us all. These are Paul's petitions, these are his requests for spiritual growth. Our prayers should include things like this, the spiritual needs, just as much as they should include the physical needs for healing.

Paul is almost done with his prayer. The posture was kneeling, the petition for spiritual growth was made, and finally we see the praise and power of prayer at the end of this text.

3. The praise and power of prayer.

Remember to never underestimate the power of prayer. Here at the end of this text Paul offers his praise to God and then reminds us of the great power there is in our prayers as well. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, "Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen."

Paul offers up his praise using that word glory. Glory to God, glory to him in the church, and glory to Christ Jesus. Again, there is this trinitarian emphasis in his prayer. He prays to God, about the power that the Holy Spirit imparts to our life, which was made available to us through the Son.

Paul is literally trying to use every word he can to describe the enormity of God's power. In English it just says that God, through the spirit's power, can accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. We use that word infinitely to try and describe what Paul is saying. A better way of translating this might be to say that God is able to do all, above all, abundantly above all, exceeding abundantly above all we might ask or think.

In other words, the power of Christ is like the love of Christ, it's beyond our comprehension, and understanding. We have no way to measure it. That's the kind of power you and I need as we go to war with Satan and the spiritual forces in the unseen world. You need spiritual growth and spiritual power to fight spiritual beings and spiritual battles. Therefore, we should be praying more like this. Never underestimate the power of prayer.

Why does God share his power with us in the first place? So we can build churches for our glory? Boast of our own success? No. The Spirit of God, the Spirit of power was given to us so that we might glorify the Son. The end of that verse in Ephesians 3 says glory to Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. What we do with the power that we pray for and receive from God will glorify the Son forever. What you do now is just preparation for eternity. Here we learn how to do everything for the glory of God, because someday we will share in his glory forever.

The best way to learn how to do that is to pray and ask God to help you grow spiritual. Pray this same prayer of Paul's. James 4:2 says very plainly, "You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it."

You don't have because you don't ask. Do you want inner strength, do you want spiritual depth, do you want to grasp the love of Christ, do you want to be spiritually full? Then ask for it. Again, and again, and again, until your time on earth is done. If it's asked with the right motives he'll give it to you. Never underestimate the power of prayer.