



Ephesians 3:14-21
Big God, Little You

In order to understand where we are in Ephesians this morning, we have to backtrack and review the overall flow of the letter because we need to see the whole picture. Paul has a tendency to go on some rabbit trails, and we looked at one of them last week, so now we need to get back to the main road and remember where things were headed before we diverted.

If you've been with us for a while you remember Paul opened in chapter one with a burst of praise about who God is and what He has done for us. Then toward the end of the chapter Paul says he prays to this amazing God, asking Him to make Himself more known to us.

In chapter two he goes on to remind us of the gospel, how God has saved us by grace through faith in Christ. He says God has accepted us and He is forming and shaping our lives, he says we are God's workmanship, (Eph 2:10) "[created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.](#)"

And he says this is absolutely incredible because most of us are Gentiles, which means we are not ethnically Jewish. We have no direct connection with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and yet we have come to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - the God of the Jews who is actually the one true living God. He sent His Son Jesus as the Savior not only of the Jews, but of people from every nation, language, tribe, and ethnicity on earth.

And He's bringing us all together into this new thing called the church. It's an invisible, global, spiritual structure spanning the ages linking together every Christian with every other Christian to form something that God is living and operating within.

[Eph 2:20... Jesus Christ Himself \[is\] the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.](#)

God is living inside of each Christian, and he's also stacking Christians together in a community called the church. We have both an individual and a corporate relationship with God.

But, this idea was really problematic for some people. They resisted Jesus and they resisted Paul who found himself in jail, a fact he mentions at the beginning of chapter three, because others wouldn't believe that God would take people like you and me, who are not ethnically Jewish and that He would save us, forgive us of our sins, have a purpose for our lives, and actually dwell inside of us. They thought it was blasphemy so they tried attacking Paul and began a riot which led to his arrest so that now he's in jail writing this all down.

And that's where chapter three of Ephesians begins, with Paul reminding everyone why he's behind bars.

Eph 3:1 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

But then he gets distracted, he goes on a bit of a tangent that we traced out last week, and he shares some of the background of how he came to be the one who declared this message to the non-Jewish parts of the world and how much he suffered for doing it. That was in chapter three verses 2-13.

Now when we pick things up this morning in verse 14 he's back on message reacting to the the incredible fact that God has called and chosen people like you and me and included us in this holy temple that He is building as a dwelling place.

And so Paul prays for the church again:

Eph 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 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,

Paul prays that we would be “strengthened *with might*” by God out of the *riches* of His glory. Here's the basic summary of what Paul is praying in verses 14-21, he's asking God to make us aware of what it really means to be born again. To be alive spiritually because God has forgiven us and come to live within us individually, and then to stack us up corporately to make a home for himself.

So as we look at the rest of his prayer this morning you're going to notice he struggles for words – he struggles to find ways to talk about the mystery of how the all powerful God of the universe, maker of the world and the solar system and the galaxy and everything we see when we look up or look out or, or when we look in – whether you use a microscope or a telescope, God made all of that, and according to the very clear and plain teaching of Scripture, when you are saved, that God dwells inside of you.

It reminds of some pictures I saw recently with my family of a volcano in Hawaii that has been gushing a stream of lava in a phenomenon they call a firehose. Red hot, molten rock is just gushing out of the side of the earth because there's so much power going on inside that the earth can't contain it. Now the Bible talks about streams of living water coming up out of the Christian, and I know this is blazing fire, but it gives you a sense of something doesn't it?

In a similar way people are always trying to figure out how much more power they wedge into something – there's almost a comical drive to see how much power can you fit into something small. Someone recently crammed a fully blown 462-cubic-inch Chevy V8 into a smart car, the engine seems like it has to be half the car! How do you even begin to talk

about the power to weight ratio here and the absurdity of having so much power in such a ridiculous application?

But, Paul is busy praying here in Ephesians that we would understand that this is our reality. We're out there driving around like we're a normal little Smart Car and we don't realize what God could actually do in and through us and so Paul is praying that God would crack open our understanding and help us know intellectually and experientially what's really possible.

Understanding this is important, in fact, I would say it is absolutely essential to the flow of this book. If you want to understand Ephesians, and if you want to understand the Christian life, you MUST see and understand what is happening right here in this passage as Paul prays. It really is that important. Your entire approach to the Christian life is affected by whether or not you grasp what is happening here as Paul prays that we would be strengthened by God.

And here's why: when you read Paul's letters, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and the others, you discover a particular pattern, a very important pattern. He always begins with doctrine, the things that Christians believe. He begins by telling you who God is, what He has done, He begins with theology. And then, after he has said all these things about God he says some things to us. But it's always that order: this is who God is, now this is how you should respond. Doctrine, then devotion. Theology lesson then to-do list.

We're in Ephesians three this week and thus far in the book we've covered a lot stuff about God - who He is, what He's done, there's been a lot of doctrine and theology, more knowledge than personal action.

But we're coming up on teaching that hits us in our everyday life. When we enter chapters four, five, and six we're going to see truth that touches on who we are Monday - Friday at home and at work not just on Sunday at church.

We're going to talk about walking in the flesh versus walking in the Spirit, we're going to talk about husbands loving their wives and wives submitting to their husbands, we're going to talk about children obeying their parents and fathers not provoking their children to wrath. We're going to talk about servants being obedient to their masters, and masters treating their servants well. We're going to talk about changes we need to make in our lives, things we need to be doing, and keep doing, day in and day out that are difficult at times, but also life-defining, relationship defining. Things that make you who you are.

It's going to be hard hitting, scab picking, gut punching stuff at times. We're going to be brought face to face with issues in our lives that need to be changed. Sins that need to be confessed and repented of, habits that need to be started, bonds and addictions and character traits that need to be broken. It's going to be hard stuff.

So before we get to any of that, God wants you to know who He is and what He is doing for you. Before we see what the task is, He wants us to know where the power is, so Paul is

praying 16 that [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

When we get to chapters 4,5, and 6, and you start hearing the direct call to change certain parts of your life, your heart, your outlook, your attitude, you need to know that the power to change and the power to be what God wants you to be, to live the life He's calling you to, comes from Him not you.

Now, we can do a lot. Some of you in this room have a lot of strength, a lot of drive. Strength of personality, physical strength, emotional and mental strength, you can make things happen. But we've all got our limits. There's a cliff or a ceiling out there for all of us.

Two weeks ago Jerry Pritchett pushed his limits a little farther anyone else on the planet – he successfully pulled a deadlift of 1031lb at the Arnold Classic in Ohio. It's an incredible feat of strength, and he should be proud of it. He's got a lot of strength, a lot of power in himself. It's visible in the outer man, you can see the brute strength of his arms and legs. But Paul is praying that we be strengthened in the inner man - **strengthened with might through [God's] Spirit in the inner man.**

The Bible always places a greater importance on the inside aspects of heart and character than on the outside aspects of strength or beauty. The Scriptures emphasize the need for character, drive, dependability, trustworthiness, the things that spring out of who you really are over physical beauty or physical strength.

We've already spoken before in chapter one about how Paul's prayers tend to be focused on different issues than our own prayer requests. He's writing from prison, his life is miserable at times, and yet he's not complaining about it all, he's focused instead on the issues of the inner man.

Of course, some of you know there's a little secret here – when the inner man is healthy and aligned with God the outer man will soon follow, but it has to come from the inside out. Which helps us understand why Paul prays what we see next:

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

Now, that should get the attention of some of you Bible students out there. Because you know that we've already said that this letter is being written to Christians, to people in the church in Ephesus. And you know that when we are saved, Christ immediately dwells in us. In fact, we're sealed with His Holy Spirit of promise, this is what brings us new life, it's why we are described as being born-again. So why is Paul praying for something that has already happened? Why is he praying that Christ may dwell in the hearts of Christians?

Well, the answer lies in the what we mean by the word dwell. There are two words in ancient Greek that convey the idea "to live in." The first is the idea of living in a place as a stranger, a sojourner. You're there, maybe even staying there for a season, but it's not really home. Around here we often ask people, where do you call home? They might live in

Northern Virginia, but where do you think of as home? There's a difference between the two for many people. But then there are those of us who God has called to settle down here and make this our permanent home. Madeleine and I tell people we're here until God parts the Potomac and calls us out. We're putting down roots.

That's the idea behind the second word in ancient Greek, and it's the idea behind the word used here. That Jesus would make a permanent home in our hearts. So once you drop that V-8 into the Smart car, that you would understand it's staying there. It wasn't just a neat trick to see if we could do it, it's the new reality. We're not going back to the little gas-sipping, safe, economical model you had before. Christ has come, and He has come to stay.

So Paul continues to pray that we would really get it.

Eph 3:17 (cont.) that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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;

For those of you who are engineers out there, think about what's really happening when you mount such a massive engine in such a small little car – an engine it wasn't designed to hold. What kind of calculations do you have to do to figure out what kind of bolts do you need to hold things together as that much power comes out of the engine into that tiny little frame? You know we lost one of the space shuttles because there was a tiny crack in an O-ring and all the power of the booster rocket wasn't held in the way it should have been and the whole thing exploded.

There needs to be a strong connection between the power and the frame. So Paul prays that we would be rooted and grounded in love.

You may remember seeing this here on our own property recently. We had those massive wind storms a few weeks ago, several days of winds sustained at over 20mph and they brought down one of our nice evergreens, one of the trees we were hoping to keep as we clean up the rest of the property. But you can see why it fell. There's a whole sermon in that one tree. It fell because it didn't have any depth to it's roots. There was no anchor to hold it in place when the storms of life beat upon it.

Friends, trials are going to come in life, they are going to come from the outside as the enemy and the effects of life on a sin-sickened planet smash into you. They're going to beat against you as you try to live the life that God is calling you to – as you arrange your marriage, your home, your work ethic, your life in a way that is going against the flow of everything else around you, you're going to be meet resistance, and you need something to hold you in place so you aren't knocked over. You're going to be knocked around, I guarantee, so you need deep roots, you need a strong foundation, so that you are not knocked over. You need to be **rooted and grounded in love.**

And even if you would say math isn't your subject, you need to gain an appreciation for spiritual geometry, that you **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

You need to know that when things get hard, when winds blow, when people resist, when life hurts, you need to know that there is no where you can go to find the end of God's love for you. If you're a citizen of the heavenly kingdom, there are no borders. There is no corner of the globe where God cannot project His power. He has absolute air, space, land, and maritime supremacy. And you should marvel at it. You should consider it, chew on it, and know it. You should get lost in the irony of the fact that Paul is praying that you would *know* the love of Christ which passes *knowledge*!

And let's add to that one more thing:

Eph 3:19 (cont.) that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Christian, you have to get this, you have to consider this, you have to chew on this. Don't miss what is happening here because it's going to be really, really important in a few weeks when we're talking about things that need to change or be strengthened in our lives. Paul is praying that we would be filled, with all the fullness of God. Not just filled with God. Not just filled with the fullness of God. But filled with ALL the fullness of God. Paul is pushing the boundaries of language here in order to help us grasp what's going on.

Remember, we already said Christ does come to dwell in the Christian. We already have God in us. But look at your life. Are you the sad little stock Smart Car putting around town, or are you full of spiritual power blowing the doors off of muscle cars that look powerful but can't match what you've got? Would you describe your own life as being filled, with all the fullness, of God?

For most of us the answer is no. But look, don't get too beat up about that – that's why Paul is praying and that's why this prayer is captured for us in Scripture. It's here to let us know that more, much more, is possible in our lives. And there's still more to say:

Eph 3:20 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.

Exceedingly abundantly? Do you see the stretch that is happening here? Paul is grasping for words to get the idea across that God can do more than anything you've ever experienced, anything you've ever asked for, beyond anything you have ever conceived, dreamed of or found the words to ask for. How do you express the power and ability of the infinite?

But bring that dead horse back over here because we need to beat it again. There is a purpose behind this praise. I'm trying to hammer home the link between what God wants to do in and through you and HOW He wants to do it – He wants to give you the power, He wants to be your strength. He wants you to be at the end of your rope and then discover

you don't have to hold on with your upper body strength, He wants you to let go and find your feet firmly planted on the rock, on a firm foundation. He wants you to feel empty so He can fill you. He wants you to feel weak so you'll learn His strength. You couldn't save yourself, so why do you think you can sustain yourself?

And yes, God is calling you to hard things. Yes He is allowing difficult times to come our way. Yes, sometimes things seem and feel impossible. But He is with you, He is in you and He is able to do [exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think](#).

We need to get this in our heads, in our hearts, and settle down into our souls. This is life-altering truth. If you understand this, it will affect the way you see and approach the rest of life. So Paul was praying that Christians, people already in the church would understand.

Those of you who are involved in teaching – in AWANA or children's ministry, or leading a home group or ABF, those of you who are teaching in the Assisted Living Facilities, or the jail – can I encourage you to pray this prayer, specifically, for the people God is allowing you to share with? Moms and dads, grandparents, would you pray this exact prayer for your kids and grandkids? If you want to put something on a prayer list, why not pray these exact words of Scripture?

And why not pray these things for yourself?

[Pray 16 that \[God\] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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.](#)

Would you join me now?

Heavenly Father, we need to know who we really are in Christ. We need to know what it really means to be a Christian. We need to know the reality of the transformation that has occurred. We need to know and understand that we are fundamentally different than other people around us, that you have made us something that we were not before.

We need to know who you are and what you have done and what that means to us. But we can't figure it out on our own, so open our eyes, give us understanding, help us to comprehend, and let us see your power on display in the trials and temptations and pain of our own lives. Make us strong in you. Make us victorious in you. Make us more than conquerors in Christ Jesus our Lord. For it is in His name we pray, Amen.