



The Power and The Glory

Ephesians 3:14-21

Week 6 | Feb 11, 2018

Summary: The first half of Ephesians crescendos in Paul's prayer at the end of chapter three. The apostle has worked himself up, writing about the full sweep of God's salvation—from his electing love in eternity past, to his recent saving actions in Christ, to the formation of the church which is just now coming into its own. The church is a new humanity, a new Israel, a new Temple, comprised of as many different colors of people as the gemstones and fabrics in the original edifice. Of course, Paul himself writes not as an outside observer but as a personal recipient of God's grace; that's why what he started to write in 3:1 led to a 13-verse detour of personal testimony. But now he is ready to proceed, saying that "For this reason"—because the cross creates Church—I kneel in prayer and praise. Paul prays for:

1. The inner power of faith so that Christ may dwell in us deeply
2. The experiential power of love so that God may fill us fully
3. The ministry power of prayer so that the universe may see God's glory in us

Discussion:

1. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. How would you describe Paul's spirit and emotion in this passage?
2. We likened Paul's exuberance, in some respects, to the Eagle's Super Bowl victory. Why do you think it is so easy to get excited about human glory and so hard to get excited about God's glory? Is there any remedy? What would it take for us to get more expressive in prayer and worship?
3. Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians is that they would have power in their souls to house Jesus as a fully-at-home, permanent resident. Compare the state of your soul, your interior life with Christ, to a kind of dwelling. The more vibrant your relationship, the bigger the house. So, on a scale of pup tent to palace, what is your life like? How would you rate our church?
4. Paul's second prayer is for a grasp of the infinite expansiveness—the breadth, length, height, and depth—of God's love. Somehow he wants them to know by experience what is unknowable intellectually. When have you felt or experienced God's love most profoundly? Have you ever had a mystical experience of God? Do you even believe in those? What is their benefit, should God ever grant such an encounter?
5. The doxology is about the God of "immeasurably more" being glorified in the church and in Christ. What do you think are the most God-glorifying prayers we can pray? What are the most God-glorifying actions we can take as a church? What about you personally—how might God be more glorified in you?

Encountering the Power and Glory and Love

While it is often foolish to seek spiritual experiences, it is never foolish to seek God. To focus one's soul on God the Father, or on Jesus Christ, our Savior, is what we were made and saved to do. And sometimes when we seek God with all our hearts, we actually find him (Jeremiah 29:13)! We encounter him like Jacob did at the foot of the staircase from heaven, like Moses did at the burning bush, like the disciples did on the Mount of Transfiguration, or like Paul did when he was caught up into the "third heaven" (in the Jewish mind, the first heaven is the sky, the second is outer space, the third is the abode of God). We come to grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of God's love.

Blaise Pascal was a mathematical genius born on June 19, 1623, in France. On November 23, 1654, at the age of 31, Pascal met God in an entirely unusual way. He wrote it down on a piece of parchment and sewed into his coat liner, where it was found after his death eight years later. It said,

Year of grace 1654, Monday 23 November, feast of St. Clement...
from about half past ten at night to about half an hour after midnight,
FIRE.
God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,
not of philosophers and scholars.
Certitude, certitude, heartfelt joy, peace.
God of Jesus Christ.
God of Jesus Christ.
"My God and your God."
Joy, Joy, Joy, tears of joy.
Jesus Christ.
Jesus Christ.
May I never be separated from him.

We're uncertain whether this was Pascal's original conversion, or a kind of "second blessing" that radicalized his faith. But historians are clear on one thing: from this time on, Pascal was a changed man. He became a staunch defender of the faith, an apologist for the truths of Christ, and a resister to the godless enlightenment rationalism that took philosophy by storm through Pascal's French contemporary, Rene Descartes.

Among his famous writings, Pascal records this astute observation:

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves."

Pascal's contention is that we find ultimate and lasting happiness in God alone, in the breadth, length, height, and depth of his love.

May we pray this knowledge into our hearts and that of our church. May we invite God earnestly and regularly to visit our church with certitude, peace, and "joy, joy, joy, tears of joy" in Jesus Christ. Should God revive us in this way, we can expect no less radical effects. Imagine what God might do through us! Imagine him doing immeasurably more than we ask or imagine—and doing it "according to his power that is at work in us"!

