

THE BIG IDEA: To really know the Father's love, get to know the Father's family.

The Take-Off

This morning, we're wrapping up the first half of the letter to the Ephesians, and it's a pretty big deal, because after today, Paul is going to make a pretty big shift, from the theoretical to the practical.

This is kind of normal for Paul in his letters, and it's really not much different than most of us do ourselves.

We say what we want, and then we say how we'll get there.

For Paul, the first 3 chapters have been the goal, and the last 3 will be the roadmap for how to get there.

So, let's quickly recap these first 3 chapters, and then we'll see how Paul closes it all out with one huge prayer

First, everything is in Christ. Our identities, our needs, our desires - all are perfectly met in a relationship with Jesus.

Second, we've been selected by the Father, set free by the Son and sealed by the Spirit. All of this comes by grace.

Third, this leads to a full life - one that is thankful for what God has done and prayerful about what God's doing

Fourth, we're in the process of being transformed, which means that who we are is greater than who we were and who we'll be is greater than who we are. In the family of God, we are always surrounded by masterpieces in progress!

Fifth, God knows that walls keep us from experiencing those transformations in each other, and so he sent Jesus to be the original wrecking ball and to destroy the walls that divide us.

And finally, last week Paul started to make the turn from doctrine to practical when he wrote that this whole thing - the salvation of very different people to make them one family - was a mystery that couldn't be explained without a real life example. That example is the church.

Now, if you're like most people, everything I just described probably doesn't accurately describe you, your family, or this church. It's such a high view of who we are, and with most high standards, we fall short in many areas, and that's normal.

And so Paul prays.

This isn't the first time he prays in Ephesians. In fact, he prays a lot in this letter. Some scholars estimate that half the letter is prayer.

This morning, we want to understand the content of his prayer as well as the context of his prayer.

We're in Ephesians 3:14-21. Let's read it, and then we'll take a look at the content and context of his prayer.

1. The content of Paul's prayer

- a. Paul's like an onion, and it has nothing to do with how he smells or whether he makes us cry
- b. It has everything to do with long sentences and never-ending layers to even the simplest of things
- c. This prayer is no exception
- d. Paul actually prays for just one thing, and yet in the process of praying for that one thing, he throws in a couple more requests
- e. So we're going to need to dig through a few layers to get to the main purpose of his prayer
- f. Unlike an onion, the layers we'll be digging through don't have to be thrown out because they're each so good
- g. First, Paul prayed for the followers of Jesus to have strength (v. 16)
 - look how God gives us strength and power
 - from his glorious riches
 - he isn't afraid to run out, and because he is rich, he can give richly
 - never feel bad for asking God for strength
- h. Second, Paul prayed for us to have the presence of Jesus (v. 17)
 - More specifically, Paul prayed that Jesus would move in instead of just visit
 - the word Paul uses - "dwell" - has the meaning of "to settle, inhabit"
 - Paul's prayer is that Jesus wouldn't have to visit us, but that he would make his home with us
- i. Third, Paul prayed for us to have power (v. 18)
 - A bit more Greek, if you don't mind
 - Here the wording for "may have power" means "to have full strength"
 - It's one thing to want something and another to be able to get it

- Ron White in the Blue Collar Comedy Tour when he got arrested for DUI - “The cop told me I had the right to remain silent. I had the right, but I didn’t have the ability.”
 - Paul prayed that we would have full strength.
 - No governors on the engine - full steam ahead!
- j. As far as onions go, that’s a pretty good one.
- k. Paul prays for the Ephesians - knowing that they are a bit overwhelmed by what they’ve heard since the letter began to be read - and he prays for strength, for presence, for power.
- l. But those are just the layers, because he prays that they would have all of that in order that they could do ONE THING: grasp the love of God (v. 18)
- m. The word for “grasp” isn’t about knowing in your head, but knowing in relationship and experience
- n. It is the difference between sex with a prostitute and intimacy with your spouse
- o. Of all the things that Paul could have prayed for the Ephesians - power and strength to DO something - he instead prayed that they would grow more and more intimate with God
- p. That they would be filled to overflowing with the love of God
- q. And while that’s a great prayer - it is the context of that prayer that really opens up this passage

2. The context of Paul’s prayer

- a. So the question isn’t what Paul desires for the Ephesians (and us)
- b. The question is how does this knowing of God’s love happen, or maybe more importantly, where it happens
- c. First, it happens in the context of fracture (v. 14)
- Paul was well aware of this church - he planted it
 - He knew of the potential problems between the Jews and the Gentiles, and that even though the wall of hostility was gone, there was a very real potential for continued fracture and division
 - When Paul said “for this reason” that is what he had in mind
 - All the previous truth that he had shared to this point still had to worked out - these were 2 groups who hated one another now being brought together
 - When there is fracture and division in the church, it’s a good time to pray
 - It’s a good time to kneel before the Father
 - For Paul, prayer was the first response, not a last resort
- d. Second, it happens in the context of family (v. 15)
- we can never forget this one simple truth: the church is a family
 - there are definitely some components that can seem business-like, or clubish, but at the end of the day, the church is the only organization on the planet that carries the redemptive message of the Gospel
 - a lot of groups can do good, but only one - the church - carries the label “Bride of Christ”
 - you and I are family - we play like family, we cry like family, we fight like family, we’ve got each other’s back like family
 - family means the freedom to be who we are as we grow into who we’ll become
 - it means that we have a Father, and so it’s never enough to just love him anymore than it would be enough for any of my kids to tell me that they love me but not their siblings
- e. Third, it happens in the context of a foundation (v. 17)
- Paul talks about being rooted and established - an agricultural term and an architectural term
 - both these terms carry with them the idea of deep roots and firm footings
- f. It is in this context - the context of fractures and family and foundations - that we are able to truly know the love of God - how wide and long and high and deep it is
- g. It happens “together with all the saints” (v. 18)

The Landing

For so long, it was really cool to say things like “I love God but hate church”

It was almost like if we said to someone else “I don’t need to be in a church, I’ve got a good thing going with Jesus” that it was the get out of church free card

But this passage is telling us that it’s in the context of the church that we really start to grasp the power of God’s love Remember verse 19? Paul wants us to be filled in every way - to overflowing

We can be full to a point with just the Father, but in community with his children we get to really see him fathering, loving, growing each other

Today's Big Idea hopefully helps us get it: **To really know the Father's love, get to know the Father's family.**

Tie your roots up in the roots of others. Share your story and let them share theirs.

Take a chance at some horizontal relationships, because seeing God's grace in their lives will give you a greater appreciation for the loving Father that he is.

Is it easy? No. Will it push us to our limits? Probably.

But the results aren't up to us!

We may not be able to, but we serve a God who isn't just able, but MORE THAN ABLE to accomplish this.

And in the end, when he has pulled it off, we'll stand knowing each other and knowing - in our heads and our hearts - the loving Father who is making us one.

And the glory will be his throughout all generations.

We're going to end this morning doing for one another what Paul did for the Ephesians.

We're going to take the time to pray for each other.