

“True Riches”
Ephesians 3:14-21
March 1, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

Paul returns to the prayer he had planned on starting in verse 1 before he digressed into a discussion of his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. He prays for the Ephesians because they were battling discouragement, and he asks for God’s richest and greatest gifts to be given to them. In Paul’s words, he prayed for God’s gifts “according to the riches of his glory.” It is as if Paul were given complete access to the treasury of God and told that he could take anything he wanted for the Ephesians. The riches of God are greater by far than anything we know on earth, though they include all earthly riches as well. But Paul doesn’t waste his time asking for such temporary treasures as the ones lovers of this world would ask for. He is not foolish like Esau, who traded his birthright for a single meal. He asks for some of the best of God’s riches to be given to them.

Imagine being given a present on your birthday that consists of a small box with only a key inside. It’s an intriguing present because its value depends on what is behind the lock the key will open. Suppose you are told that the key fits the safe deposit box holding the most treasured possessions of Bill Gates. You are free to take any or all of what is found inside that safe deposit box. That is essentially the situation Paul contemplates in these verses, except that the treasury belongs not merely to some earthly billionaire, but to God himself. These gifts are available to us through prayer, but do we have the wisdom to know what is truly of greatest value? Let’s consider four gifts from God’s treasury, all of which Paul prays for and all of which are available to us if we only have the wisdom to ask for them.

I. The Power of the Spirit

Paul prays for power and strength to be given to the Ephesians as the Holy Spirit comes into the “inner being” of their lives. This “inner being” is that part of us that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians 4:16 when he talks about the outer self wasting away while the **“inner self is being renewed day by day.”** God is so concerned about our outer self that he will one day give us resurrection bodies like that of Jesus, but his current concern is more for this inner self. God is at work changing us from the inside out, and it is such an important work that he sends the Holy Spirit to accomplish it.

What exactly does the Holy Spirit do in our inner being? I like to think of this inner being as a house with many rooms that have been closed and dark

for a long time. The Holy Spirit comes and throws open the door and the windows, bringing the cleansing power of truth, both truth about ourselves and truth about God. So he comes to the part of our inner being called the understanding, and he makes us able to grasp with our minds what God is like. He comes to the part called emotions, and he begins to restore right affections in the heart. We begin to hate sin and love holiness, instead of running from holiness and enjoying sin. Then the Holy Spirit comes into the room called the will, and he begins to make God's will attractive to us, strengthening the will for obedience.

We have a desperate need for the Holy Spirit's work in our inner being. Proverbs says that **"the purpose in a man's heart is like deep water"** (20:5). Deep water means dark water. Especially in biblical times, before there was such a thing as submarines or scuba diving equipment, what was deep in water was hidden. The heart of man is the same, not just to other people, but also to the person him or herself. Our own hearts are largely hidden from us. The application of this is to welcome God's Spirit into your inner being. Invite him to come in and show you the sin in those deep, dark places of your heart, places where your sin is hidden even to you. For example, several years ago I first came to see that much of my hard work was selfishly motivated. I had always told myself that my hard work was part of loving others. But then the Holy Spirit entered a dark room in my heart and showed me that I was really doing it out of love for self. It made me feel better to get something done, and that was a large part of my motivation. I still battle with this sin in my heart, and I am so thankful for the Spirit's power to show this to me.

II. The Residency of Jesus

As the Spirit does his powerful work in the inner being, shining his light on the dark, sinful places in the heart, Jesus comes to dwell there. So Paul prays that **"Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"** (v. 17). There are two Greek verbs for "dwell". The weaker of the two means to inhabit a place as a stranger, similar to our idea of visiting some place. The other means to settle down somewhere as a permanent residence. It is this stronger verb that is used here of Christ's dwelling with us. We frequently have guests in our home. Some spend one night, others more. But there are only two people who dwell at 4612 South Lakeridge Drive in Hoover. Brad and Wendy Allison have their permanent abode at that address. Jesus doesn't just come and visit us, he lives with us—a staggering statement. Most of us have little trouble believing that the gospel is true for other people, but struggle to believe that it could be true for me. One of the things that helps us believe it is true for me is this truth that Jesus dwells with us. He doesn't stay far away, but comes to live as intimately as possible.

Note that Jesus dwells in the heart *through faith*. After the Holy Spirit does his work of showing us our sin, even in the deep places of the human heart, we experience the presence of Christ through faith. The opposite of faith in the Bible is not doubt, but self-trust. The biggest reason people don't experience the indwelling presence of Jesus is this lingering idea that I must clean up my life first before Jesus will come in. But this doesn't say that Jesus dwells in the heart through self-purification, but through faith. We don't cleanse ourselves so that Jesus will come in; we trust Jesus to come in so that he can cleanse us. Alexander Maclaren said it like this.

The man who cleanses his own soul by his own strength, and so expects to draw God into it, has made the mistake which Christ pointed out when He told us that when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he leaves his house empty, though it be swept and garnished. Moral reformation may turn out the devils, it will never bring in God, and in the emptiness of the swept and garnished heart there is an invitation to the seven to come back again and fill it.

III. A Knowledge of God's Love

The central effect of Jesus dwelling in the heart is a grasp of God's love. Paul assumes that the Ephesians are deficient in this area of grasping God's love. He wants them to know that they are loved by God because he knows what spiritual damage comes to Christian who are insecure in God's love. Richard Lovelace says, "Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons." Paul says the same thing by the use of two metaphors, one agricultural and the other architectural. He wants his readers to be "**rooted and grounded in love.**" Both of these speak of the foundational need to know God's love. It serves the same purpose in our lives that roots serve for the plant, being the source of stability and nourishment. It serves the purpose that the foundation serves for the building, providing stability even through times of upheaval.

Then in the next verse, Paul prays for strength that the Ephesians might comprehend the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love. In every dimension, God's love is extensive. And note that it is only comprehended "**together with all the saints.**" As John Stott says, "It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God." You do not come to rely on the love of God all by yourself, but together with God's people.

Then Paul prays this paradox, asking that the Ephesians would "**know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**" (v. 19). How can you know something that surpasses knowledge? The paradox is not difficult to resolve if we recognize that there are two different senses of knowing God's love. You can know something as part of your understanding, and you can know something

experientially. I have a bicycle computer that tells me the grade of my climb at any given moment. I can know that a 20% grade climb means that the road rises two feet for every ten feet of distance travelled. But I don't really know experientially what a 20% grade is like until I get on my bicycle and climb it. You can know from theological propositions about the love of God, but you don't really know the love of God until you experience it, until you taste its sweetness. So Paul is asking that they would know experientially the love of Christ, love that surpasses mere intellectual knowledge.

Do you know the love of Christ in this experiential way, or is it mere intellectual assent? Or worse, do you simply presume upon God's love without any real experience of it? Satan knows that if Christians know in this experiential way the love of Christ, they will love Jesus and love others, thus fulfilling their God-given purpose. So he does all in his power to keep this from happening. One of his chief weapons is to counterfeit the love of God. It is a rare person today who would not agree with the statement, "God is love." But what is often affirmed in this is the counterfeit version of God's love, not the real thing. Satan's counterfeit says, "Of course God loves you; that's his job. And since he loves you, he makes life work for you, the way you want it to work." This is the self-centered version of God's love, seeing God's job as essentially serving my aim of having everything go the way I want it to go. Notice how Paul challenges this right at the beginning of his prayer. He says that he bows his knees before the Father. This bowing of the knee indicates the submission of his will to that of God. And then he describes this Father as the one **"from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named"** (v. 15). In the Bible, the authority to name someone indicates dominion and superiority. So God gives to Adam the role of naming all the animals to indicate Adam's superiority and dominion over those animals. God has naming authority over every being, both earthly and heavenly. You will never experience the true love of God until you bow the knee to his authority.

Another way we fall short of experiencing God's love is when we believe the devil's lie that God only grudgingly forgives us. He does so with a shake of his head and a look of disgust, as if he is saying, "There goes that Brad Allison again. Bless his heart." That's southern for "What a loser!" Yet the Bible teaches that God, and all of heaven, rejoice when a sinner repents. We tend to think that God is like the airlines with their frequent flyer miles. Since that is an expense for airlines, they want to keep it as low as possible. They make it hard to claim the miles and they don't rejoice when people take them up on it. Not God. He is full of joy when sinners take him up on his mercy. Have you ever experienced that?

IV. The Fullness of God

As a result of knowing and experiencing this love of God, Paul prays that they will be filled with all the fullness of God. All of God's qualities that can be shared by us will be shared by us. We will never be omnipresent or infinite, but we can be loving, holy, truthful, joyful, kind, and a whole host of other qualities. Paul prays that we might be filled with these things. When something is full, it means that there is no room for anything else. Until we are filled with the fullness of God, we have empty places in the heart. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden, a place where they had experienced the fullness of God. Ever since then, the human race has been homesick for Eden. We have been trying to get back to paradise, to the place where we can walk with God. We get back there as the Holy Spirit comes to the dark places of the inner man and we repent of those sins, as we take hold of Jesus by faith and experience the love of God. Then we experience fullness.

CONCLUSION:

Our passage concludes with this wonderful doxology. Paul praises God for his ability to answer prayers like the one he has prayed. Notice the seven stages of God's answering of our prayers. First, he is able to do on our behalf. Next, he is able to do what we ask of him. He hears our prayers. Third, he is not limited only to what we verbalize. Even if we just think something or desire something that pleases him, God is able to do it. Fourth, he is able to do all that we ask or think. Fifth, he is able to do more than all we ask or think. There are gifts in God's storehouse that are beyond our ability even to imagine. That's okay, God is able to give them without our having to know to ask for them. Sixth, he is able to do more abundantly than all we ask or imagine. Finally, he does "*far* more abundantly" than all we ask or imagine.

In light of this, would you consider asking God to give you his power that you might know deep in your heart the love of God? Ask him to do for you in accordance with the words of Aaron's benediction. "The Lord make his face to shine upon you." What is a shining face? When we speak of someone's face "beaming," we mean that he is smiling. When we come to God with a broken heart after the Holy Spirit shows us our sin, his face beams as he welcomes us. May that be your experience, in accordance with Paul's prayer!