

How Great is God's Love

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3: 4-21

Introduction

A few years ago, I had the privilege of coming to Canada for a holiday. It was to be a time of refreshment and refocus as I prepared to take up a new appointment at International Headquarters. The friends I stayed with took me to Niagara Falls. It was a glorious summer's day and the falls were spectacular. As I stood at the railing watching the water cascade over the falls, I became quite mesmerized by the volume of the water and the impact it had both as it travelled down the falls and as it hit the water at the bottom. The rays of sunshine on the water added a new dimension as rainbows were formed and the colours were enriched. I stood there singing over and over in my mind the song:

How deep the father's love for us, how vast beyond all measure
That he should give his only Son to make a wretch his treasure
How great the pain of searing loss, the father turns his face away
As wounds which mar the chosen One, bring many sons to glory.

The longer I lingered there, the more certain the truth of these words became. My life is anchored in God's love. God's love is not a superficial thing that makes me feel good. God's love is life-changing and life-bringing every day.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul speaks very clearly about this truth in his prayer to the people of Ephesus. He prays this prayer for them:

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I

pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

What a great prayer for Paul to pray. So much encouragement is contained in this prayer.

1. Encouragement to Dwell

Paul desires that people would know the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us and enables us to live the Christian life. But for the Holy Spirit to empower us, we need to open our lives to him. We need to feed our own spirit with the Word of God. We need to engage in prayer and worship, clean living and walk with God in loving obedience. These are the catalysts that God can and will use to empower our lives. These will enable us to deepen our spiritual life and enable Christ to dwell in our hearts.

I like Paul's expression here – that Christ may dwell in our hearts. When I think of the word dwell, it speaks to me of settling down or feeling at home. Paul, therefore, is praying for a deeper experience between God and his people. Paul yearns for Christ to settle down and feel at home in their hearts. This same yearning applies to us. Paul is not talking about us having a surface relationship, but an ever-deepening fellowship with God. May we each today have that same desire for God to dwell in our hearts.

2. Encouragement to be Rooted

Paul then speaks of the need to be rooted and established in love. One of the things I am appreciating in Canada is the beautiful scenery and the parks found here in London. How different this country would be if there were no trees! There would be no maple syrup for a start – tragedy! Yet for these trees to exist, there needs to be a good root structure. If a tree is to grow well, its roots must go deep into the soil to enable both nourishment and stability. It is similar for us in our spiritual relationship with God. Our spiritual roots need to be deep so that we too can receive the nourishment and stability that we need. This nourishment comes from God himself and as we grow in him the roots will go deeper and deeper as we become more grounded in him. His presence and influence in our lives will become more

and more. This is what will sustain us in those times when we experience difficulties and challenges as well as energizing us in our service and living for God.

3. Encouragement to Grasp

So Paul yearns that Christ would dwell in our hearts and also that we would be rooted and established in love. But he then prays one further desire for us – that we may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Note that Paul did not pray that we (the saints) might comprehend the love of Christ itself, but rather, the dimensions of it! Rather than just being caught up in a celebration of Christ's wondrous love for us, the Holy Spirit urges Paul to talk about dimensions – the range and extent of Christ's love. So often we have limited this verse to describe the immenseness of the character of God, rather than the all-inclusiveness of the outreach – the purpose of God's love.

How wide – breadth: no doubt this was firstly intended for the Jewish believers who were slow to realize that the message reached also to the Gentiles. This dimension demonstrates that Christ's love extends to all, in every age, in every place, in every province, in every country. It is a love which embraces the whole family of God. Christ's love is all inclusive.

And long – length: we would perhaps in a human sense, logically put depth next. But the Holy Spirit says; first God's love is for everyone, and second God's love is forever! This is the eternal dimension of God's love. Christ's love is endless.

And deep – depth: the depth of Christ's love for us is seen so clearly in the suffering and price he paid for us in the giving of his life that we might have salvation. Christ's love is fathomless.

And high – height: the height of Christ's love for us is seen both in our present privilege of being his children and in our future inheritance of living with him.

What a prayer! What a purpose – to comprehend the dimension of the love of Christ and to know this love which surpasses knowledge. This is a purpose that we all share. To know God's love in our lives and to then share it with others.

Paul's knowledge anchored him in his faith and life. But it was his relationship with God that empowered him. It is because of this that Paul was able to spread the love of God to people in so many places. We

share that same responsibility and purpose. We need to be anchored in God, allowing his love to be the foundation of our lives, and empowered by God to make that love known – to inspire and enable others to be transformed by the love of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

So let me bless you today with the words of Paul. Sharing the verses again but based on The Voice translation:

“Father. Out of your honorable and glorious riches, strengthen us, your people. Fill our souls with the power of your spirit so that through faith the Anointed One will reside in our hearts. May love be the rich soil where our lives take root. May it be the bedrock where our lives are founded so that together with all of your people we will have the power to understand that the love of the anointed is infinitely long, wide, high and deep, surpassing everything anyone previously experienced. God, may your fullness flood through our entire beings.”