

To the Saints at Kossuth Street . . . A Church is Faithful

Ephesians 3:14-21 January 23, 2011

Intro. One of the most life transforming questions that can ever be asked and answered is the simple request, 'teach me to pray.' The passage of scripture that we study this morning begins with sort of an awkward moment. We walk in on the Apostle while he is on his knees, bowing before God in prayer. If we are not careful we would immediately excuse ourselves for interrupting and walk away without learning the essential lessons of dependent prayer. A faithful church prays. A faithful church has an acute sense of need that the power necessary to glorify God is available only through believing prayer. This example or model prayer should both demolish long embraced selfish patterns and shape our practice of prayer so that our praying is effective in connecting us with God's power.

As incredibly strange to our ears as it sounds, the effective, faithful and successful church will be known by its dependence on God expressed in prayer of all kinds. I believe that we may have come to some agreement or at least some fresh awareness that while churches and many followers of Christ want to measure effectiveness by programs, buildings, numbers and innovation; God is concerned with faithfulness. Faithfulness to being servants of the gospel. Faithfulness to revealing to people the wisdom of God displayed in Jesus Christ. Faithfulness to preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. The scriptures teach us this morning that this faithfulness is not possible in our own strength. The church must connect to the power and strength that God supplies.

Verse 13 of chapter 3 helps us understand that a key issue being addressed in this text is the weariness of God's people. Energy levels seem to be down all around us. On the one hand the church is assigned stewardship and responsibility for a supernatural task, while on the other hand it appears that we are as tired, overworked and stressed out as we have ever been. Bringing to light the wisdom of God in our world is an impossible job in our own strength. Without God's enabling strength, it is out of our reach to be servants of the gospel. So, the Apostle teaches us to pray for power.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Request #1	Life Transforming Power	14-17
Request #2	Love Comprehending Power	18-19
	Confirmation of Purpose and Praise	20-21

How is your energy level in your battle with bitterness, living with contentment, being joyful in all things, telling the truth with love, bearing patiently with others, forgiving those who sin against you, loving those who hurt you, saying no to your flesh and talking in ways that build others up? Let's be renewed in our thinking about being the people of God connected to the power of God through believing prayer.

Let's understand prayer for power through a series of questions answered in this text:

What do we need from God?

he may grant you to be strengthened with power 16

A significant problem we face is humbly acknowledging that we are not sufficient by ourselves to be the people of God for his glory. Our weariness, discouragement and lack of energy toward God and others is a symptom of our self sufficiency. God desires to empower us to do his work and be his people. Your greatest need is to be strengthened by God's power in the course of your daily life.

Cmp. Eph. 1:16 – 19

2Thess. 1:11-12

Life transforming power from God

Where is this power from God experienced?*in your inner being*

16

The 'inner being' is your heart; the hub of a person's being; the foundation for all understanding and will. It is mentioned in 1:18 as 'the eyes of your heart.'

Your heart/inner being gets weary/needs strength for battle on two fronts:

- The afflictions of your outer man, your body. 2Cor.4:16-18
- The war with sin that dwells in you. Romans 7:21-25

A key/secret to life transformation is keeping the inner man strong!

John 15

How is this power from God experienced?*through his Spirit*

16

The agent that is responsible to dispense or give out this power from God is the Holy Spirit. Submission to and cooperation with the Spirit is the way to be connected with the power from God.

Luke 4:14 – Jesus

Acts 1:8 - power

Romans 15:13

1Thess. 1:5

Insensitivity to the Spirit and how he helps the believer is certain to produce low energy.

What is the purpose of this power from God?*that Christ may dwell in your hearts*

7

'Dwell' is an unusual term that in this case means 'to make your heart his home.' The prayer is for the necessary power of God to allow Christ to settle down inside us and live out his life. It is transformation from the inside out.

Illustration of house needing renovation.

Gal. 4:19 – Christ being formed in you

E 4:17 ff

Col. 3:5-17

Transformational power required to actually live like Jesus Christ

Through faith . . . Gal. 2:20 . . . one aspect of that active faith is acute sense of need of power through prayer.

What are sources of this power from God?

Both the source and the lavish supply of power are to not only assure us that God is able but also to motivate us to run to him for help regularly and often.

- The Father's heart. he is the cosmic King & Ruler possessing all dignity and authority; the creator and sustainer of all things . . . He is our Father, 1:17; 2:18; 3:12; Matt.6:31-33; 7:7-11
- Riches of his Glory. Lavish supply. Phil. 4:19 Eph. 1:18

Summary

A faithful church is motivated to pray by an acute sense of need.

A faithful church prays.

A faithful church prays for life transformational power to become more like Christ.

Jesus parable of persistent widow . . . Lk. 18 . . . *nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*

Take Aways

As we come to celebrate our union with Jesus Christ at the Table of the Lord . . .

- Examine your heart for evidence of self reliance . . . you do not feel a need for power from God.
- Repent/Confess your sin of neglecting to pray as commanded by God.
- Acknowledge in a fresh way your dependence on God to live like Christ.
- Ask God for strength in your inner man to live a transformed life.
- Consider and commit to better choices regarding prayer personally and corporately.

Study Questions

1. Read Eph. 3:1-21 as a group. Develop a summary statement of the message of 3:1-13 that explains, helps you understand what is meant in verse 14 by 'for this reason.' It may sound like . . . 'because such and such is true, I pray the following for you.' This answers the question of what motivates/drives Paul and us to pray in this manner?

2. What are the specific things that you would like to see happen in your life or others that you cannot do on your own? For example, are you able to be kind to others on your own, in your own power? Check Galatians 5:22,23; Eph. 4:17-32 and Col. 3:5-17 for ideas if you need them.

3. In 3:17 the experience of Christ making his home in your heart concludes with the terms 'through faith.' Is that your faith? What does that faith look like? What are you doing because God told you to even though it may not make sense nor can you see results (one definition of faith). Gal.2:20; See John 15:1-11 What 2 acts of faith does Jesus unite in verse 7 of John 15?

4. What is the relationship between posture in prayer and heart attitude? What other ways can humility, intensity and urgency be expressed in prayer other than posture? Review Ezra's prayer in 9:5 – 15 and consider the relationship between his posture v5 and his content 6ff. Consider Matt. 26:36-39ff; Luke 22:41; John 17:1. How important is posture, knowing that it is easily abused (Matt.6:1)?

5. Share with the group how you plan to change your approach to prayer as a result of this study and ask them to pray for you that you would be strengthened in your inner man. Start using the new prayer vocab you are learning with your group!