

Part 6: The Impossibility of Jesus' Love

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On April 26th, 1986 reactor number four of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Soviet controlled Ukraine melted down and ushered in one of the greatest nuclear disasters in history.

Recently my wife and I have been reading a book about Chernobyl and what captivated us was the scale of the disaster and the efforts made to try and control it. The problem was that the meltdown had contaminated the air, the soil, the food, the water, the machinery, the clothes and the people. So much so that the Soviets quickly realized that not only did they have an immediate health problem, but they had no way to store or remove the radioactive waste.

Even today dozens of nations, billions of dollars and countless lives have been spent trying to contain the radiation that still poisons the 30 kilometer area around the plant. The first containment unit designed in the 80's was supposed to last for 100 years, but that already failed, and they just now constructed a new container which was rolled over the plant last year, and they are hoping that this unit might last for 100 years.

But the point is that the brightest minds and the most powerful countries in the world still can't figure out how to undo what the meltdown did. The thought of fixing the Chernobyl disaster seems impossible to the modern mind.

And if you've been with us in the book of Ephesians, Paul has outlined the greatest meltdown in human history: we have been corrupted by the radiation of sin. Sin has poisoned our world, it has deadened our hearts, it has disrupted our relationships with each other and it has separated us from the goodness of God himself.

Yet, Paul is holding up something unthinkable: That Jesus can fix what seems unfixable. In a world that has been quarantined apart from God, Paul says in Ephesians 1:10 that in the fullness of time God is going to unite all things in heaven and on earth again in Jesus Christ.

Hearts that have been killed by the poison of sin, are being made alive in Jesus Christ.

Entire societies are being transformed for hollow ghost towns into temples built for a living God, dwelling places where we have peace with others and reconciliation with God. And all of this is done by the powerful love of God.

This passage is perhaps one of my favorite passages in all scripture, and yet it is one of the most humbling passages any preacher could ever preach. In this passage Paul himself reaches his limitations and begins to pray.

Only God, by his Spirit, through the work of Jesus Christ can do what Paul is praying to be done today. Paul is outlining the very undoing of every broken piece of our life and tying it to an eternal satisfaction. And I want you to hear this: only God can give you that experience.

I'm going to spend lots of words today describing the love of God for you in Jesus Christ, but I don't have enough words for this. I cannot convince you that Jesus loves you, but Jesus can.

You might think that there is no way that you can find real peace with God, but Jesus is able to do that for you.

You might think that there is no real sense of hope for you in this world, no real comfort to be grasped, but Jesus is able to give that to you.

You might think that there is no way that you can ever overcome the sin that for decades has ruled your heart, but Jesus can help you do it.

You might think that this life of salvation, this community of the church will never be more than what it is right now, but God can, will and is making something astounding inside of it.

Paul prays because the whole life of Christianity hinges on God's grace to us. And today we see that God desires to be gracious to you because he loves you. Today we are going to look at Paul's prayer in the middle of Ephesians and we are going to look at are the three things that Paul is going to pray for today: **God would establish you in love, Believers would explore the love of Christ, and that Christ and the church would display the glory of God.**

So what I want to do right now is read the whole prayer of Paul, and then we will dive into our first point: **Ephesians 3:14-21.**

Not sure if you noticed the three requests of Paul in this text, but we are going to look at all three of these and we are first going to start with Paul's first prayer request: that **God would establish you in love.** You see according to Paul, it is the power of God to establish us in love.

And Paul opens his prayer by alluding to families. That every family in heaven and on earth, all who are saved by God take the family name of God. In the modern West we don't see this as other countries do. But the family name for Paul is so much more than just a last name.

The family name, the crest of your heritage, brings with it immense privilege or disadvantage. To have a lesser known or disreputable family name meant that you carried the burdens of that name. But to have the name of respect or honor brought you access and privileges. And here Paul is saying that if you are part of God's family, regardless of the name that you have built up, or the name that your parents gave you, you now derive your name from the family of God by Jesus Christ.

The adoption process is finished and it changes your identity.

And in light of this Paul goes on to point out something which should be absolutely staggering to us. Look with me at **Ephesians 3:14-17a.**

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew you needed someone to help you?

I remember right after Sarah and I had our first child, and I was walking down this very steep old stairwell we had in our home at the time. And as I was walking down, I slipped and I fell with all my body weight right onto my tailbone and clattered off the walls down to the concrete floor below.

And it was one of those brutal encounters where you just feel sick to your stomach. I had really thought that I broke my tailbone. And I began to cry out for help. The reality at this moment was that there were two people upstairs, but I would have been vastly disappointed if there appearing at the top of the stairs was my newborn son.

He had no power to help me. What I was hoping to see was my wife, who would be able to give me some sort of help. But to be honest what would have been even better than my wife (who was still recovering from child-birth) would be one of my strong friends who could come and help carry me up the stairs, or a doctor who could assure me that I wasn't in that moment going to die.

We understand that when we feel helpless, there are specific people who have the capacity to actually do something, and we paint in our mind the picture of what their aid might look like.

And did you see what Paul just did? Here we have this newly created church in Ephesus, buffeted by culture, weak in influence, facing the imprisonment of their closest friend and now Paul begins to invoke the help of the big guns: For your I pray, says Paul, that God himself would, out of the riches of his glory, by the power of his Holy Spirit, in the deepest core of who you are, by Jesus Christ himself...

Now fill in the blank. Think of the need you have in your life right now? The fears or apprehensions that you wrestle with, and fill in what you would expect such raw power to accomplish for you. Here Paul is praying that the whole effort of the Trinity would work in specific, powerful, and personal ways to strengthen you. And what would you imagine that strength to look like?

We'd probably expect some Samson-like power right? We want to be strengthened to destroy the hordes of haters who surround us. We want an experience like Elijah where the problems in our life are consumed by fire from above. We want, like the 5,000 hungry souls, to have what little we possess to be multiplied to abundant satisfaction. We want something miraculous.

Because, just like the containment of Chernobyl, we know it is going to take a miracle.

But did you see the miracle that Paul prayed for? Look with me again: **Ephesians 3:14-17**. The miracle of God for your strength and deliverance is that Jesus would dwell in your heart through faith.

This might seem so inconsequential compared to what it is you are going through right now, but there is nothing more miraculous, more powerful, or more astounding than a person whose center of affection is faith in Jesus Christ.

This is what Paul had already been pointing out in chapter two right? The disaster of the soul is that you were dead in your sins, you were following the prince of the power of the air, you were enslaved to your sinful desires, you were by nature children of wrath, there was a diving wall of hostility between you and God which brought pain into your relationships with others and just damnation between you and God.

But faith changes all of that. Faith seals shut the radioactive center of sin. And the miracle of this miracle is that faith in Jesus Christ is something only God can bring to bear.

Did you see that? It was God who has the ability to grant it to you. It is the Holy Spirit who takes it deep into your heart to be cherished by you, and it is Jesus who dwells in your hearth by faith.

Faith is, most certainly, a decision you make to believe, but behind our experience is the grace of God which enabled us to hear, repent and believe the gospel by faith. That's what grace is. If we really believe that salvation is by grace through faith, then we need to really come to grips with the reality that we did not believe because we read a good book. We did not believe because we heard a good sermon. We did not believe because we ran into the right evidence. We did not believe because we went through a hard trial.

We believed because God desired to overcome the deadness of your heart, by putting Christ to death for your sins, and striking your heart to believe by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing more marvelous than the faith that God gives to his beloved.

If you are not a believer in here today, I want you to hear this: Jesus has undone the curse of sin and the miracle solution you need is faith in Jesus. And if you believe, you have in your faith the very sign of God himself. That he has not left you. He has not turned a deaf ear to you. He has not found you to be unworthy. Instead by grace he has changed your heart and established you in him.

And it gets even more marvelous. Why did God do it? Why did God establish us to have faith in Jesus Christ? Did you see what it resulted to? Look at the last part of **Ephesians 3:17**. That we would be rooted and established in love.

God labors for your faith because he loves you. We saw that back in **Ephesians 2:4-5**. We do not establish ourselves as lovable before God, God establishes us in his love by faith in the work of Jesus. Anyone can love someone when it is easy, but God loved us when it was hard.

The gospel is the good news of God's love for you in Jesus Christ. And this is what our faith joins us to. And this is Paul's first request. But as you can tell in the grammar of this prayer, this request flows into another. **Ephesians 3:17-19**.

The three requests of Paul create a sandwich of subjects. Paul opens by praying that God would do something, and he closes by praying that God would do something. But in the middle he prays that those who have been saved by faith would do something.

In other words salvation is 100% the work of God in our hearts to bring us to faith, but inside the life of faith Paul prays that we would do something. And what is that something?

That we would have the strength to comprehend more and more the love of Jesus and to be filled more and more with the holiness of God himself. This is Paul's second request: **Believers would explore the love of Christ**.

This is natural if we really understand what Paul just said. If the thing that brought us into God's love was the glory of God, working through the Spirit of God, so that the son of God might dwell in our hearts by faith, then we really have stumbled across something astounding here.

Wouldn't we want to know more of this distant lover who bridged heaven and earth to save us? And Paul uses a spatial analogy to show the expanse of Jesus' love for us.

He wants us to know how wide Jesus' love for us is, how far did it extend to reach you and how far does it extend to those around you. He wants you to know the length of it, does it ever end? Will stretch into my future?

He wants you to know the height of it, where will it take me, how high can it carry me? And he wants you to know the depth of it. Will it stay with me in the dark? In the depths of my sin? In the trials of my life?

God wants you to have the confidence in the love of Jesus. Not blind confidence. Not wishful thinking. But confidence that stems from a heart of faith which sees what Jesus has done for you, and confidence which experientially enjoys what Jesus has won for you.

I want you to think of the language that Paul is using here and think of the exciting terms of exploration he is using. Does that describe the experience you are having in your life? If not this could mean two things.

First it could mean that you haven't yet been grounded in this love. Could it be that you still see the miracle of God as something other than faith in Jesus Christ? Could it be that you still hold onto hope that your greatest problem can be solved by something other than Jesus? You cannot explore God's love, if you are still outside of his love. But what a joy that here Paul is praying that God would change your heart and bring you in by faith in Jesus Christ.

The other option is that you haven't understood the implications of Jesus' love. Often it is easy to see what Jesus has done for us without seeing what Jesus has won for us. What Jesus has done for us is died for our sins and provided for us his righteousness. But what Jesus has won for us is a life of loving communion with him.

This theme of Christ love for his church is going to be developed by Paul as the basis of our marriages to one another. So a marriage illustration is fitting here. The moment of faith in Jesus is just like the moment you share your vows at a wedding: love is established. No one doubts it.

Just yesterday Jesse Pfau and Ellie Spire, two people from our church were married. They are just as married as anyone who has been married 50 years in here today. They have been established on the same ground.

But if you were to ask a couple who has been married 50 years about the love that they share, they would be able to communicate more of it. Why? It's not because they were more established, it's that they have explored it more.

They lived years of knowing that love through trial and hardship, celebration and joy. There is an experience of love that comes as we love that comes as we live out the relationship which has been established by grace.

If the only love you can point to about your spouse is the love you shared on your wedding day, you are neglecting the vast experience of marriage. If we only see what Jesus has done for us, without seeing what he has won for us, we will always face disappointment in our experience of Jesus' love.

And Paul says it is going to take strength to do this. It doesn't happen easily. It doesn't come at once. In fact this is why Paul says it must be done "with all the saints." We saw last week that it takes the whole church to display the manifold wisdom of God, in the same way it takes the whole church to attempt to understand and experience the love of Jesus.

This is what our membership covenant commits us to: we are committed to being helped by others and helping others experience and understand this wonderfully vast love and to see how it changes us in all circumstances by filling us more and more with the fullness of God.

There is great love to be experienced together as we put off sin, wrestle with loss, and deal with obstacles. And every time you think, that through triumph or trial, you might run into the edge of Jesus love for you, you will find it unending.

You might think that this is impossible. Maybe you have been a Christian for most of your life and you feel like you cannot understand God's love more than you already do. Or maybe you think that this idea of experiencing God's love is something only for those who are young and zealous, remember that God is able to do this in you.

He really is. In fact look at how Paul begins to close his prayer: **Ephesians 3:20**.

Now there is something so phenomenally powerful behind the simple statement that God is able. Paul says "to him who is able."

Don't we often overlook that? That our God is able? In the Old Testament this is the point that the prophets make all the time. The Israelites are following false idols and praying to those idols to deliver them, but the prophet says those idols can be cut down and burned to cook your food with. They aren't able to save you. They can't do anything.

Or think of the god of Missoula who promises joy, satisfaction and the experience of the divine: the adventure of nature. There have been people in our church who have broken a bone, or been unable to do engage in these activities which promise us so much. And in those moments as you sit in your hospital bed looking out at the mountains, they are not able to do anything for you.

They can't come to you. They can't help you. But God is able. He is able to come to you in your weakness, to be beside you in your pain. And not only is he able he is able, but able to do far more than you can ask or think.

For our building fund I have gone to people who are believers and asked them to make large donations to the church. And there is always this tension in my heart when I do this. What I ask them for is based off what I think they can give. My request might be lower than what I think they might be able to provide. Because I know that while some might be able to give more than I ask, all of them have a limit to what they can actually give.

But God is not only able to do all that we ask, but we can't even think up something which he is unable to provide. There is no limit to the grace that God desires to give you. You can't think of something so outrageous that God is unwilling to give. But how and where does he give it to us?

This is what we see in closing. Paul's final request: **That Christ and the Church would display the glory of God.**

Look with me at **Ephesians 3:20-21.**

Now this might seem like a bait and switch. Paul is talking about the love Jesus has for us, he is showing how God is able to grant to us all that we ask, but then he doesn't pray about love and he doesn't ask for our benefit, he asks for God's glory in Jesus and in the church.

But that's because what lies behind our desire for love and our need for salvation is the desire for glory. That's what Adam and Eve wanted in the garden. They wanted to have the same glory as God. But what they failed to realize is that they had something better already. God had already shared his glory with them. The lie of glory is that we need our own.

We really are most satisfied by the glory of someone else. If we are honest there really is no rest in living for your own glory because there is always the fear of losing it. But sharing in someone else's glory brings liberty. There are limitless numbers of high quality, professional pictures of celebrities and athletes on the internet. And yet when you see one in real life, you flock to pull out your janky cell phone and snap a poorly framed and blurred selfie of you and the famous person distant in the background. Why?

We know that a picture with them doesn't make us into the celebrity. But it does provide us the ability to share in the glory of the celebrity. It allows us to for a moment be afforded the relational familiarity with their glory.

Brothers and sisters. It is impossible for you or for anyone else to grant for you such a soul satisfying and world solving experience like that. But God has.

When I do weddings I generally begin with what is called a declaration of intent. In this moment the husband and the wife both declare to each other and to those in attendance their intention to enter into marriage and uphold their covenant.

This passage here is God declaration of intent for all of human history. God will be glorified through a redeemed church and his redeemer Jesus Christ.

This is the wonderful truth of Paul's prayer here, this is the encouragement he wants to give to us as a church. That as we are rooted in love in the gospel, as we together explore and experience the love of the gospel as the church, God will be glorified in the church and in Christ Jesus.

There is finally and ultimately no doubt about it. Which means that all of our efforts individually and corporately matter eternally. There is no wasted movement in the life of the church.

Brothers and sisters do you see that in our salvation Jesus has undone the impossible in your life. He has saved you from the power of sin by his love and he has bound you to that which is eternally satisfying: the glory of God.

You might have mountains of outrageous needs in your life. But it is here in the gospel of Jesus that you have the promise that God can work it out for his glory. It is only the magnitude of mercy that

establishes you in a love like this. It is only the depth of the Jesus' love for you that can envelop the whole of your life. It is only the glory of God which can bring the security of eternal satisfaction.

God has given us this in the gospel. God wants you to know it, and he wants his church to embody it. So we pray, as Paul prays that this might be done here in our midst.