

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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For This Reason I Pray

PART

4

TITLE

That We Would Be Strengthened

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 3:14-21



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It is good to see you. If you have a Bible, if you want to turn with me to Ephesians chapter three. And if you're just wondering, "What just happened?" I didn't think there was a video this hour, and so I started talking beforehand, but we'll just keep going. But if you don't have a Bible in your hand, there's lots of Bibles in the chairs near you. And if you don't have one at home, take that as a gift.

Let me say a quick welcome to all of those who call Providence home, as well as those of you who are guests. We're really glad that you're here. If you're online, we also welcome you. As you turn to Ephesians chapter three, I want to share just a few words of encouragement and reminder as we approach the next election, which is just I guess a week and a half away.

And so I'm 49 years old, so I've seen several of these and I've been a pastor here for almost 25 years so I've seen us respond to several of these. And let me encourage you on three different areas. First, let me encourage you to remember that Jesus Christ is the everlasting Lord of all things. The New Testament says that Jesus Christ is the head of all rule and authority.

So if you can think about a nation like America, and it's like we all live in a sandbox and in that sandbox there's opportunity there, there's movement, there's things to do, there's things to gain, and there's borders. And every few years we vote of who's going to lead us inside of this sandbox. But what you need to remember is this, is this sandbox is located on a beach, and that beach extends forever in all directions, and Jesus Christ is the king of the beach. All the sand in the borders outside of the borders He is Lord.

The second thing I would encourage you to remember is you need only to fear Jesus Christ. You need only to fear the king over all things. You see, The Bible tells us so very clearly to fear Him alone. At both sides in any election, they pedal the fear of loss. And the reason they pedal the fear of loss is because the fear of loss mobilizes people and produces a lot of money. But let me remind you about something, the only loss we cannot endure is the loss of God's love, and in Jesus Christ that is impossible, that you are loved and you'll be loved, and He is the king.

And the third thing I want to remind you is to vote your conscience before God. It matters how we vote. It matters that we vote. And the reason is because it's not always the heaviest way to say, "This is the reason is because we're going to make a difference." Some of us would feel like, "Wait a minute, I'm just one vote." The reason it ultimately matters is because we live our life in view of God and He has given us in this country an unusual stewardship called freedom, the ability to participate. Not everyone has that. And the Bible says that to those who He has been made a steward, it's required that they be found faithful. And so it's important for us to vote. It's important because as stewards of freedom, we will answer to God.

Keep this in mind, you do not answer to anyone else about how you voted, but you will answer to God. And the Bible tells us that He instituted government with specific purposes, that He is the one who said, "This is what government is supposed to do. They are to commend what I say is good. They are to punish what I say

is evil and they are to protect the weak.” He goes on and He tells us what He loves in His Word as it relates to country, as it relates to communities and cultures, He tells us that He hates lawlessness, and He loves the respect of authority. That He hates sin, and yet He loves godliness.

He loves the sanctity of human life. He loves honesty. He loves justice, mercy and humility. He loves personal responsibility. He loves the family unit that He designed. He loves the poor. He loves the immigrant. And you will find no human being, including yourself, who loves all that He loves as perfectly as He loves them. And so what we have to do is use wisdom, and we try to identify the character and convictions of the people who are running for office. And we try to say, “God, which one imperfectly, but maybe more persistently is trying to align themselves to you?”

Our faith must inform how we participate in the political arena and not the other way around. And so I encourage you to participate, and I encourage you to participate in such a way that you go to bed the night of the election, and you sleep well because Jesus Christ is Lord.

So let me pray. Father in heaven, we bow before you and ask that you would be gracious to us. Even now, we pray for our leaders locally, within the state, within the nation that you would bless, that you would protect, that you would provide, that you would care for them. For those who, and you only know, those who genuinely align themselves with your plan, who genuinely regard the authority of Jesus Christ over all things who are already leaders, we ask that you would protect them, that you would protect their heart. And if they’re running, our hope is that is that you would give them favor.

We pray for those who publicly disregard you, who publicly disregard Christ, who publicly disregard, adamantly disregard the things that we know that your word says that you love. And God, we do not pray for their doom, we pray for mercy. We pray for salvation, not simply for the betterment of the culture, but God, for their own soul. Just as you met Paul on that road, as He was breathing out murderous thoughts towards other believers, far from you, not loving Jesus, you appeared to Him and saved Him. We pray for our leaders around this country who don’t have a personal relationship with Christ, that you would bring them and cause them to be born again to a new and living hope.

We pray that you would help us to be faithful and we pray, God, that your will would be done. And so now we pray that as we look at this passage, this prayer that was prayed first for a church in Ephesus, placed in the scripture to communicate prayers that you have for us, we would ask, God, that you would allow us to experience the full weight of what is available, the full weight of your power in our heart that’s working through your Holy Spirit. And so would you galvanize within our own heart a deeper conviction for your lordship over our life, and would you change us from the inside out? We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

We’re in a series called For This Reason I Pray, looking at four different prayers that Paul prayed for other people. Each time there was a reason. And in Ephesians three, the reason that he prays is that we would be

strengthened. Paul knew that the Christian's heart, he knew that our heart was like a seed. You know, hold a seed in your hand and that seed it feels common, it can feel dirty, it can feel defiled, it can feel lifeless, common, powerless. Sometimes that's how we feel in our own heart. It feels like it's drab and apathetic, and there's no life, and there's no zeal.

And we hear of all that's available for us in Jesus Christ, and we're like, "It doesn't feel like there's a fire in my belly." Sometimes that's how the heart feels, but this is what we know is that because the Holy Spirit lives in us, that seed, that heart, our heart is packed with capacity and that's why he prays. Verse 14, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Now, Paul is in a prison cell and from this prison excluded and far away from all religious buildings, from all religious services, from all religious priests, he tells us in verse 14 that He dropped to his knees in that prison cell and suddenly because of Jesus Christ and the access that he received, he was before the Father. And this freedom, this freedom to pray directly to God, to literally talk directly to Him, and to have an audience with our creator, it's the birthright of every single Christian, every single person who has put their faith in trust in Christ. And he tells us that He bowed His knees.

It's important to understand that there's a lot of different people that prayed in the Bible, and they didn't all pray with the same posture, and that God heard all of those prayers. When you read the Old Testament, you find Abraham and it says there that he stood and prayed. We find David, and it says that he sat down and he prayed. We find Jesus Himself in the garden and it says that He fell on His face and prayed. And God the Father heard all of those prayers. Paul bowed.

And one of the things that we know about every posture is it's representative of something of how we feel. Sometimes the most appropriate way to pray standing up. Sometimes the most appropriate way to pray maybe it's not the deepest prayer, maybe you're moving from one meeting to another one, conference room to another, and you're simply walking and you're saying, "God, would you help me? Would you grant me wisdom again in this next meeting?"

But then there are other times when it calls for a different posture, what's happening around us is different. And when you come to the idea of bowing, it represents a number of things that can represent humility. It's not about me, I'm too weak. I need help. But ultimately what it means, what it represents is burden. I have something that's just standing, it just doesn't feel right. I have to get on my knees, I have to kneel against my

bed. I have to, I just have to kneel. There's times when you feel heavy enough you just have to kneel.

And Paul, in chapter one, we studied his first prayer a month ago, if you remember, and he didn't bow. But now in chapter three, he does. So we have to ask the question, what's he burdened about? What's the big thing on his mind that he prays about? Why is he praying this? And we don't have to guess. What's on his mind is the glory of Jesus Christ in the church and let me show you how I believe that's true.

He actually starts this prayer in verse one. If you notice in verse one, He says, "For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you gentiles." And then there's a dash. And he goes, "You know what? That assumes you know something and you may not know it, so let me tell you." And all of a sudden he literally teaches from verse three all the way down to verse 13, interrupts his prayer. Now, what happened before that? See, he's teaching and he goes, "All right, for this reason I pray."

Well, in chapter two, he's teaching that Jesus Christ when He rose from the dead after dying for our sin, He made a way to literally eliminate the hostility between God and man, and between man and man. So that man and God, but also Jews and Gentiles, different skin color, different economic backgrounds, different education, male, female, young, old, that everybody could come to faith in Jesus Christ and be part of a family.

He has that on his mind and so he says, "For this reason I pray." Wait a minute, that assumes you know something. Why did he do that? And he goes back into it in order to get the verse 10 and there He finds these words, "So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might be made known." He is burdened because he wants Jesus Christ glorified in the church. What he's saying is that the reason that the world would look into a church and see people from all different diverse backgrounds all coming together in order to worship Jesus Christ, He says, "This is a dynamic picture of the wisdom of God," and then he says, "All right, now you're ready."

And he goes to verse 14 and he says, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father and then," he is going to pray for four specific things. They stack on each other like blocks, they all begin with the word that. I'm praying that, in order that. And then what he does is he ends his prayer and he says to him, "Be glory in the church." These people are oppressed, they're under bad leaders, they're under a bad emperor. They're under people who are leading them, who are not aligned with the worship of Jesus Christ.

He could have prayed a number of things for them that would've been incredibly meaningful to them, but ultimately his burden was this, I am praying that Jesus Christ would be glorified in your church. So what are the four things that he prays? First, that God would strengthen our inner being, that He would strengthen our inner being. Remember, he is likening our heart to like a seed that's common and it requires power outside of ourselves for that seed to sprout and bear fruit. And so he says in verse 16, "That according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened." Now with what? "With power." Through whom? Who can give us the power that is needed through the Holy Spirit and where is that power needed most? In our

inner being, in our heart.

Everything flows from the heart. If it comes out of you, it was in you. If you said it, it was in you. If you did it, it was in you. All of these false confessions, this is, "I said it and did it, but that's not who I am." It's exactly who you are. It may not be who you want to be. And because of the grace of God, we can say, "That came out of me, that's not who I want to be and therefore I can grow so that that is not who I am," but that came out of you.

This morning when I was driving here, I was convicted deeply of my own personal sin. When I'm driving to church on Sunday morning, I kind of have the text in mind. And so I was praying through each point in my own life. And I remember there that the very last thing that came out of my mouth last night, the very last thing my wife heard from me before we went to bed was not a prayer, it was complaining. It was complaining ultimately, if I'm to be totally honest, about the human race of which I am apart.

If there's grumbling or thanksgiving, if there's fear or peace, if there's pride or humility, if there's sin or righteousness, it's in you first. The battle is won in the inner being and yet each one of us are inclined. We have this disposition to hide the inner being and work on the outer being, the outer man or how I typically describe it, our front of stage. We all have one. Our life has two curtains. We have one curtain that we anticipate going up. People are going to come, they're going to look, they're going to see so I got to get this place ready. I got to get my stuff in order because we're going to raise the curtain.

People are going to see what I look like, they're going to see how I sing, they're going to see what I do. They're going to see all this stuff and so let's get us all in order. But then there's always another curtain and we hope it never moves because there's all kinds of junk behind the other curtain. Now, one of the things you can be absolutely assured of is that in the stage of your life, what is behind curtain number two will evidence itself. When you are frightened, when you are anxious, when you are angry, when you are provoked, it just sticks this little head out from that curtain and says, "I'm here." It comes out in attitudes and words. It comes out in complaining and grumbling. It comes out because it's in us.

Years ago I was at my parents' house, a house that they no longer have, and there was a little thing on the wall we're looking, we're like, "That's weird," and it turned out to be termites. It's just in one little area of the house. And we could have said, "You know what? Let's just put some putty over it and paint it. We don't have to look at it." But that would be utterly foolish, wouldn't it? Because you know that what's happening is there's an erosion from the inside and it's going to evidence itself on the outside.

Jesus warned of the same thing in our own personal life. In Matthew chapter 23, he looks at real people that we despise and yet many times we emulate. They said, "Woe to you, Pharisees" and then this is why. He goes, "For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they're full of greed and self-indulgence." First, clean the inside of the cup and the plate that the outside also may be clean." This is exactly what he's praying,

that we would be strengthened by the spirit and are inner being, the inside. And this is so important. You know why?

Maybe one more example. In 2007, in 2007 down in South America, there was this busted underground sewage line that was secretly eroding the limestone underneath a poor neighborhood until suddenly in an instant 35 meters wide, 100 meters deep, there was a sinkhole taking five human beings who happen to be standing on top. This is what Paul is praying to avoid, that each one of us have within ourselves everything needed to ruin every good thing around us in about five minutes. And if we do not address the inner man, then Christ's glory in the church is jeopardized by scandal in our life, and the people who are closest to us are at risk.

And so for the glory of Christ, he prays for our heart. Upon this prayer, he stacks another, and that is that Christ would live peacefully in our heart. He prays that the Holy Spirit would strengthen us in our inner being and then he tells us why, and he adds another prayer request. He says, "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Now in chapter one, he's already said, "I know that you're Christians. I know that Christ is in you through the Holy Spirit. You've already placed your faith in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is dwelling, living in your heart, sealing you for the day of redemption. You're saved." So why does he pray that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith as though he's not there?

In this prayer, he's not praying that he would begin to dwell, it's that he would dwell comfortably. The word dwell, it's two Greek words that are glued together. Kato means down, oikeo it means to live or dwell in a home. In other words, as the Holy Spirit of God strengthens our inner being, Christ settles down in our heart. You look at this picture of a lake, I saw this, I just typed in peace, and this is what came up and I'm like, "I'm going to go with that." And don't they just look peaceful? I mean, I literally, I looked at it and I'm like, "Man, I could see myself totally taking a nap in that boat right there. It would be so nice."

But then ultimately because I'm a part of human nature, I have three amazing sons, but they're all boys, and they're all boy. And so I could just imagine myself being in that boat, and I could just imagine them jumping in the water and just rocking that boat just because we have fun together. If you can imagine that, you can imagine ultimately what he is praying, and it's this. He's asking this question of us to ask ourselves, "Is Jesus comfortable in you? Is He at rest or is He wrangled?"

You say, "Well, how would I know?" Well, when you have the Holy Spirit living in your heart, we look that He convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment, which means that when we sin, He tightens the screws of guilt and shame, and you know it. When you do what is right, He convicts us of righteousness, he confirms His pleasure that we're doing what is right. So let me ask you, was Jesus really comfortable on your last date? Was He really comfortable the last hour that you spent on social media? Was He really comfortable in the conversations that you had yesterday or sometime with your kids or your family, your husband, or your wife? Was He comfortable? Was He comfortable when you submitted your last timesheet at work?

Was He comfortable when you submitted your taxes? Was He comfortable? You see, as we yield to the Holy Spirit's overhaul, our heart becomes more hospitable to Him and this is what He wants. John chapter 14 says, "If anyone loves me," this is Jesus speaking, "He will keep my word and my Father will love Him, and we will come to Him and make our home with Him." Upon this prayer, he adds a third and that is that we would comprehend Christ's love. So he begins, "May the Holy Spirit strengthen your inner being to make you the kind of person that Christ dwells within comfortably."

And then he adds verse 17, "That you being rooted and grounded in love." Now, he starts here and then he's going to say, "May have strength," but let's just talk about being rooted and grounded. The Bible often uses a metaphor to describe the Christian life; one of them is a tree, the other is a building. And so he describes both foundations. If you view your life as a Christian as a tree that's planted by streams of water, it needs a root system, and that root system, what he's saying is this. The tree of the Christian only grows when its roots dip deep down into a particular love.

If you view yourself instead as a building, and you have to choose, "Am I going to build on a ground? It's going to be sandy ground or it's going to be the rock." I have to choose a foundation, I have to choose a ground on which I build my life. If you view your life as a building, he says, "All right, then it needs to be grounded in this particular love." And what is this love? He says, "That you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." It's Christ's love. It's not our love for each other. First and foremost, it's His love for us.

You see, one thing about love, you simply cannot understand it by definition. You only understand it by experience. If I have to explain to you what it feels like to be loved by God, then it is likely that you've never felt it. It's an experiential, relational knowledge. It's not just categories of the brain. He's praying that we comprehend, lay hold of the love that surpasses knowledge. We already know it's beyond our ability to know all of it. It's like you going on the ocean, you're dropping a bucket into the ocean, and it sinks to the bottom, and then you pronounce to the world, "I've got the ocean in my bucket."

You do, but it extends from the bucket in every direction in unimaginable ways. You can know the love of God, the real love of God, and yet from you it extends in eternal ways. That's why he uses these words. He's like, "Let me just try to explain." He says there's breadth. What would Ephesians, his own letter, what he's already written, tell us about the breadth of God's love? In chapter two he says, it's broad enough to include every kind of person, all peoples. How about length? In Ephesians chapter one verse four, it says that this love began before the foundation of the world for you, and it extends all the way to eternity. That's long.

How about it's height? In Ephesians 2:6 it says, it is this love that actually takes us up and seats us in heaven. It goes all the way up there. Well, what about depth? Ephesians 2:4-5 says that His love is so deep that it's deeper than your worst sin. And when you know this love, you share this love. And on this, he stacks one last prayer,

and that is that we would be filled with godliness. So watch what's happening. Remember he's stacking them up. "All right, God, by your spirit, strengthen their inner being so that Christ can dwell comfortably and help them to comprehend, lay hold to your vast, unimaginable, eternal love for them." Why? "That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

The second prayer that we looked at, we looked at this idea of being filled. The word filled, it means to be completely engulfed like a glass of milk. When something is completely engulfed, it takes all the space. There's no crevices that are left behind that the milk doesn't absorb, and completely take over. But not only that, everything that was once in the glass is pushed out, in this case, air. And what he's praying is this, is that we would be filled with all the fullness of Christ. Well, what is the fullness of Christ cautions to? It says that in hymns, the fullness of deity. So what he is talking about here is godliness.

What will characterize our lives if we're filled? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And what's the end of all of this? "To him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask." We've asked all kinds of things this month and he's asked for four things and He says he can do even more than what we've asked. But not only that, but we could even imagine that we should ask. "According to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church."

So let me close. We're going to have the opportunity to actually observe three people get baptized here in just a few minutes, so get you heart ready for that. We're going to celebrate, which means we're going to make some noise. But before we do that, I want to give you three real simple applications that are true of these verses, but also of all the prayers that we have prayed, the first is this. Let me encourage you to pursue the health of your inner being, to pray for it and then pursue it. The only way that I've ever known to pursue the health of my inner being is to fill it with good things, and to drown it out like the milk that's poured in, and all of a sudden it just takes up all the space.

Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ in you richly." I'll be honest with you, for people who genuinely like fast, easy, and famous, working on the inner heart is slow, hard, and obscure. But what I've found in 33 years of trying to walk with the Lord is that as I fortify in my heart the Word of God each day and try to yield my heart to Him, you already know I'm not perfect because I've already confessed sin driving to church this morning. What I find is this, is that when I do that, my heart gets stronger, my life is less grievous to His spirit. My roots go deeper into His love for me and my desire to love others become stronger. And so for Christ's glory in honor, I urge you to obey His Word, and fill your heart with His Word.

Second, let me encourage you to protect your prayers, to protect your prayers. We all protect what we love and what we value, and yet there's some things we protect and value that we don't assume need protecting. One of the things you do not have to protect is Christ's ability to give you access to the Father. You cannot affect that. Well, what then do I need to protect when it comes to my prayers? Your desire to pray. Peter says in 1 Peter 4:7 he says, "Be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers." When we are de-

filed or distracted, we don't want to pray and therefore we're not praying, and therefore we've not protected our praying.

Self-controlled means I'm going to prioritize the important over the urgent. I want to lose weight, I want 10 Oreos. One's important, one's urgent. Self-control will choose one over the other. And in doing so, of course, I talked about Oreos, he's talking about sin. When our heart is defiled, we don't feel like praying. Sober-minded, literally it means know your drink. What is it that you drink that so intoxicates your mind that you don't want to pray?

Some of us, we wake up in the morning, we're like, "Okay, I want to pray, but I got to get these three things done. If I could get them done, if I could do my work first, then I'll really be able to pray." What happens is you do those three things and three more things pop up, and sometimes we never pray. And so he is saying, "Be self-controlled so you're not defiled. Be sober-minded so you're not distracted so that you can pray," and the reason is because Satan. He does not fear busy churches. He doesn't fear organized churches. He doesn't fear wealthy churches or even gifted churches. He only fears praying churches. And this is why the Apostle Paul says, "Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the scheme of the devil." How do you put it on? Praying at all times in the Spirit for your good and the glory of Christ, protect your desire to pray.

And finally, continue praying for one another. Every prayer that we have studied was a prayer for someone else, that someone else might know the love of God, the will of God, that their love might abound, and that hear that their inner being might be strengthened. The baton is now in our hands. There's power when we pray for others. And so in your life group, in your families or your small group, those that you're serving with, talk to one another and be praying for one another.

Years and years and years ago at the beginning of Providence's history, there was a ministry called The Upper Room that was built and it's still in existence today. It's where people, and it could be you today, it's where people literally volunteer one hour a week to come and they pray for prayer request from the church family and from missionaries around the whole world. Today, there's 90 people who come to this building, and they pray for an hour, and there are 30 slots left. Could that be you? Right after this service, there's a meeting in Prisms. If you want information about the prayer ministry and learning how to pray for one another, you could attend that. But let me just encourage you for the good of your soul and the glory of Christ, I urge you to keep praying for one another.

Let me close with a word to those who do not have a relationship with Christ. Everything that we have read was written from a Christian to a church of Christians. And you may look at that and go, "Well, this doesn't apply to me," but I want you to know it can. You don't have to live on the outside. You don't have to live outside the family. You can put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ by simply admitting, acknowledging I am a sinner and there's nothing I can do to pay the price for my own sin, but I believe in Jesus Christ that He died

for my sin. He rose from the dead, and I confess Him as the Lord of my life.

And the Bible says He will forgive you and adopt you into His family. And these very prayers, this very Holy Spirit begins to live in your heart changing you from the inside out. Would you put your faith and trust in Him? So before we do anything else, I want to give you an opportunity, just a few moments of silence to pray. If you've never prayed to receive Christ, you can use this time to do that. But if you have, let me just encourage you to take a moment to pray over or two things maybe that you've just heard. You take that time now.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for all that you've made available. And Jesus, thank you for giving us the access to come. Holy Spirit, thank you for giving us the power and pushing us to pray. We pray, God, that you would address us from the inside out, make us a place that is hospitable and comfortable to you. Help us to know your love in deeper ways, and help us to be filled with Christlike character that, Jesus, you would be glorified in our life individually and collectively as a church. We pray all of this in Christ's name. Amen.



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