

# **TRUSTING IN HIS POWER**

*SERIES: FINDING YOUR PLACE IN THE STORY*

**By Danny Hall**

We've been studying the book of Ephesians, which tells the amazing story of what God is doing in history: rescuing the people he created to love him and be in fellowship with him. Humanity got caught up in sinfulness and was alienated from him and in bondage. But God is rescuing his people and calling them out for his glory, to be in relationship with him and with each other.

We've seen Paul unfolding this in the early chapters of the book of Ephesians.

You'll recall that much of the first half of the book is prayer. The entire first chapter is a prayer. The latter part of chapter 3, which we're going to look at in this message, is also a prayer. When Paul tries to explain the grandeur and greatness of what God is doing in history, his heart is immediately moved toward prayer. And he closes out this first half of the book, before he starts talking about the practical application of these great truths, with perhaps one of the greatest prayers in all of the Scriptures.

In this prayer Paul talks a lot about the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, when we think about the power of the Holy Spirit, we often think about spiritual gifts, about being divinely enabled to do the things that God wants us to do. Sometimes we think about miraculous things that God might do through the power of the Holy Spirit, and Paul from time to time in his writings talks about those things. But when he prays this prayer in Ephesians 3, I would argue that he takes us to a

deeper dimension of our spiritual walk with the Lord. He highlights some things about the work of the Holy Spirit that are important for us to understand.

## **The ministry of the Holy Spirit**

Let's start with verses 14-16:

**For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole 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....**

When he says, "For this reason," he is looking back to this whole grand and glorious story he's been telling, this wonderful mystery, that from the beginning of time God's grand intention was always to rescue people from every nation, tribe, and tongue, Jew and Gentile alike. And the unfolding of God's plan was always directed toward raising up from every nation, tribe, and tongue a people for his own glory, who would be united across all human-made boundaries. God was going to tear down boundaries that divided races, genders, generations, and nations; and he was going to call a people into relationship with himself and with each other to display his greatness to the whole world.

Because of this, Paul prays that we would be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Now, this power that is available to us flows out of the very riches of God. God is not an anemic, impotent god

who cannot supply. He is the God of glorious, infinite riches, and so Paul prays that out of the overflow of those riches God would strengthen us.

It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives that becomes the divine enablement that he's talking about here. And Paul says this takes place in our inner being. As we saw in Paul's prayer in chapter 1, he is interested not just in helping us at the circumstantial level of life, which is where we often park ourselves, and even where we pray (and there's nothing wrong with that; we all have times when the issues in our lives are overwhelming, and we want people to pray for us). But in Paul's prayers in Ephesians, he takes us below that level and says God is doing something deep within us. The power of the Holy Spirit is at work in our inner being, at the core of who we are, at the level of our eternal soul. Paul prays that our inner being will be transformed by the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. What a wonderful prayer!

There is a specific purpose for this transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

## **The presence and love of Christ**

Verses 17-19:

**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 saints, 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.**

There are two parallel things that Paul prays will flow out of the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. (This parallelism isn't easy to see in the NIV.) One is that Christ will dwell in our hearts through faith, and the other is that we will grasp the love of Christ.

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to make Christ real in our lives. We often speak of Christ as being “in our hearts.” Sometimes we use that language with people who are coming to faith: “You just need to invite Jesus to come into your heart.” What does that mean? Sometimes that's code for accepting God's gracious gift of salvation. And we know that the Scriptures talk about Christ's being in our lives, so we pray that. But is he really there? Paul prays that the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our inner being will make us realize that Christ really is present in our lives.

Paul completes this idea with that little term “through faith.” Why does he add that? Because, to be honest, sometimes it doesn't feel as if Jesus is in our lives. Let me offer you a contrast. I have a good friend named Kelly. We've done a lot of fun things together over the years. Kelly is flesh and blood, and I hear him, see him, talk to him. I know immediately whether Kelly is present or not. But with Christ, it's a little harder to grasp, because it's a spiritual relationship that doesn't have a flesh-and-blood connection to it. There have been very precious times when I've realized that Christ really is in my life, and I've been assured of his presence. But a lot of the time I don't really *feel* that Christ is in my life. It's a work of the Holy Spirit not only to help us sense

Christ's presence, but to help us trust that he's there even when we don't sense it. Through faith we believe in the incredible reality that Christ is alive in us.

That's the first purpose for Paul's prayer that the power of the Holy Spirit would be unleashed in our lives. The second purpose is for the Holy Spirit to help us grasp the incredible love of God in our lives. Notice how Paul just pours phrase upon phrase here: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, 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." He talks about this incredible love in all these different ways.

He says first of all that we're rooted and established in love. We begin our journey with God in a love relationship with him. But Paul understands that as wonderful and beautiful and amazing as this transforming encounter with Christ is, there's so much more to it! So he prays that we will grasp it ever more deeply. Perhaps you've heard sermons on this in which people say there's no height that we can reach to escape God's love, and there's no sin or depth where we can go to escape God's love. I think Paul is simply saying that God's love for us is immeasurable. There is no way to humanly comprehend the scope of it. But his prayer is that we'll grasp it through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

He uses an amazing phrase: "that you may know this love of Christ that surpasses knowledge," or that you may know the unknowable love of God. It's our lifelong quest as believers to just

grasp more and more how much God loves us. Paul wants that to be an ever-richer and ever-deeper experience, even though he knows God's love is inexhaustible.

The result, he says, is that we will be filled to the fullness of God. Our relationship with God, his presence in our life, our sense of the full measure of who God is in his greatness, will be unleashed.

Why is our need to understand God's love for us so important to Paul? Well, think about it. God is asking us to trust him with our whole lives. In an old hymn called *Have Thine Own Way* (1), there's a line that says, "Hold o'er my being absolute sway!" What does that mean? It means we're asking God to have absolute, complete control over every single area of our lives. How in the world would we ever be able to trust God enough to do that if we didn't believe God loved us?

I would argue, and I think Paul's prayer supports this, that one of the reasons we hold back from God is that we don't really believe he loves us completely. Oh, we know God loves us and Christ died for us. But do we have an overwhelming sense that God unconditionally, beyond our wildest imagination, loves us, and in everything he does in our lives he has nothing but our best interests at heart, and he wants to bring us into the glory of his salvation story if we will just yield every single area of our lives to him?

In subsequent messages Steve Zeisler is going to be leading us through some of the practical applications of this in the later chapters of Ephesians. Paul talks about marriage in chapter 5, and

he uses an absolutely radical word: “submit.” Our skin crawls at that word, doesn’t it? We hate that word. It has connotations of being controlled and humiliated, of losing our identity. And in truth, why in the world would you want to submit to someone, unless you believed that person loved you unconditionally? That’s why Paul says marriage is a reflection of God’s love, a testimony to the beauty and the mystery of Christ and his relationship with his people.

In the same way, God says, “When you trust me with your life, you’re trusting in my love.” And Paul understands that unless the Spirit of God does a work in our hearts to help us grasp ever more deeply just how much God loves us, we won’t be able to trust him. We won’t be able to step out in faith. We won’t be able to do the things he’s called us to do, because we’re holding back out of fear or insecurity. We’re just not sure what might happen to us if we really let go and let God have control of our lives. But if we understand more and more how much God loves us, then it becomes easier to trust him day by day.

Paul ends this whole section with one of the most beautiful benedictions, if you will, in all of Scripture. It flows out of this incredible story of what God has done, Paul’s absolute wonder at how much God loves us, and his prayer that we’ll really grasp that.

## **How much can God do?**

Verses 20-21:

**Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,  
according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the  
church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!  
Amen.**

What is Paul saying? When we come to believe that there is a grand scope to what God is doing in history to rescue us, and that he is inviting us to be a part of it so that our personal stories get caught up in his great story, and that part of that story is that Christ himself is present in our lives, and it flows out of the immeasurably great love of God for us; and we step forward in faith, there is absolutely nothing that you can imagine that God can't do. What would happen if we so trusted God's love for us and the presence of Christ in our lives that we said, "God, I'll do anything you want"? Imagine for a moment what God might do! Paul says he can do even more than that.

In my own experience there are so many areas of my life where somehow I just don't really believe God is going to do anything. I keep wondering why I don't get past these things. I've been walking as a Christian for over thirty years, and I've been doing ministry for almost that long— you'd think by now I'd have it all figured out and I'd be able to trust God. Yet I struggle with it, just as you do, and it's very difficult day by day.

Paul is saying, "Believe in the presence of Christ and the wonder of God's love, and step out in faith and trust him for the unimaginable—that he can actually change us, that he can actually use us to his glory." What will happen as all of this unfolds, he says, is that it will lead to the glory of



God in the church and in Christ, and the whole earth will be filled with his glory! Here we are again, part of that grand and glorious story. You see, the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed in our inner being gives us understanding and transforms us into the kind of people who can trust, and it is trusting that God's resources are enough and his love is enough that sets us free.

We often think about power as a force. But in Paul's prayer he sees the power of the Holy Spirit as that which brings insight and clarity into the truth of who God is and what God wants.

Certainly God will enable you to serve him, give you strength and power and gifts for all those things. But at the foundation, what he gives us in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is insight into the truth of Christ in our lives and of God's unending love for us.

As we deepen in our understanding of all this, our ability to trust God and act in faith will grow. And this is the assurance that we have entered into the great story of God himself. May God through his Holy Spirit help us to grasp this great truth!

## Notes

1. Cecil F. Alexander, *Have Thine Own Way*.

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Catalog No. 4984

Ephesians 3:14-21

Fifth Message

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April 2, 2006

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