

## MADE NEW: A New Prayer<sup>i</sup> Ephesians 3:14-21

### INTRODUCTION:

We do want to say a special welcome to those of you that are guests with us this morning. We are so glad that you are here. My name is Chris Wigley, I'm one of the pastors here at Trinity. If you are a guest, we'd love to get to connect with. You can provide information to us by texting the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mount Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you send that keyword, a link will be sent back to you and that will take you to a form that is less than a minute to fill out. When you click "submit," it notifies me, and I always look forward to following up with our guests each week.

If text messaging isn't your thing, please swing by our information center located in the fellowship area, right out these doors in the lobby. We have a gift there for you just as a way of saying thank you for being our guest today. Again, we are thrilled you have chosen to worship with us today.

### SERIES OVERVIEW:

We are in the middle of a teaching series we have entitled Made New. We are studying the New Testament book of Ephesians and the major theme that Paul teaches about is being made new in Christ. We've looked at how we have a new identity, a new focus, a new life in Jesus, that we belong to a new body of believers, and that we discover a new plan in Christ. Today we are going to look at a new prayer.

So, I want to invite you to grab your bibles and turn with me in your New Testament to the book of Ephesians. We are going to be in chapter 3 this morning and work our way through verses 14-21 today.

### OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Power of Bended Knee – Birds<sup>ii</sup>

Do we happen to have any bird watchers in the room with us? Any one fascinated by birds? They are fascinating creatures. Especially hummingbirds. How in the world does a hummingbird flap it's wings so fast? Did you know they can flap their wings as fast at 80 times a second?! That's crazy.

Now, one question I have always had about birds is how do they sleep? Have you ever wondered how a bird can sleep on a perch without falling off? No?

Just me? How in the world do they do that? Well, I read an article this week that explained that birds can sleep on a perch because of a tendon in their legs.

Birds have what are called flexor tendons, which run from their leg muscles to their toes, and behind their legs. And as a bird bends its knees to perch, the flexor tendon is pulled and that results in the bird curling their toes around the branch or whatever. It is known as the perching reflex, and it prevents the bird from falling off the perch. Now, in order for the bird to fly off, it first has to straighten its knees and ankles in order to be able to release its claws. In other words, the bird has power to not fall when it's on its knees.

Similarly, when we bow our knees in prayer, we can find a strength that is greater than human strength. And in our passage of study this morning, Paul does just that. He prays. And like the disciples learned in watching Jesus, Paul attaches spiritual power to the discipline of prayer. It was in observing the power and prayer life of Jesus that prompted the disciples to ask Jesus to teach them to pray.

Remember that Ephesians can be broken into two sections; the first three chapters are theological in nature and the last three are practical teachings. But in between the two sections of this book is a powerful prayer.

### MESSAGE:

We are going to learn 4 things in looking at Paul's prayer for the Ephesians this morning. We will see how Paul prays with humility, he prays for supernatural strength, he prays for understanding, and he also prays with great expectation. That will be our outline this morning as we take a look at this powerful passage. Let's first examine how Paul models for us to...

#### 1) Pray with Humility

Let's look together at verses 14 and 15. *<sup>14</sup>For this reason I **bow my knees** before the **Father**, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.* Notice the posture Paul takes in his prayer. He kneels, a posture of humility.

Now, remember where Paul is when he prays this prayer. We learned last week that he is in prison. More than likely, Paul is chained to a Roman soldier as he is in his jail cell. As if being in prison in the first century wasn't humiliating enough, Paul gets down on his knees, and bows before God. When we pray, we should always do so in humility before God.

There are many instances of Biblical characters kneeling in a prayer. Solomon, Ezra, and Daniel are Old Testament examples. Stephen, Peter and even Jesus, in the New Testament, all kneeled in prayer. People often came to Jesus and bowed down before Him.<sup>iii</sup> The half-brother of Jesus, James, was known as “Camel Knees,” because of his frequency in kneeling in prayer.<sup>iv</sup> But kneeling isn’t the only prescribed posture for prayer in the Bible. When he was praying on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Bible says that Abraham **stood** before God. When David prayed about building the Temple in 1 Chronicles 17, he went in and **sat** before The Lord. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, before His crucifixion, he **fell on His face** and prayed.

My point in mentioning those occurrences is to say that I don’t think Paul is suggesting that because he bowed his knees in prayer here that all believers should do the same. I think he was trying to communicate a couple of things by saying this. First that he was humbling himself before The Lord, in a dirty jail cell, understanding his position before God. And secondly, that Paul was communicating the intensity of his prayer for the Church, God’s people.

The point being that we need not worry so much about our posture as much as we need to be concerned about our hearts when it comes to prayer. We should posture our hearts in humility when we pray. You can pray with your eyes open or closed. You can pray standing or sitting. You can pray when you’re driving. Now, I would recommend not closing your eyes if you are going to do that. I like prayer walking. The point is that we are to pray, but it is a matter of the heart, not bodily position. But humility is the necessary posture for our hearts.

And we see this point further when Paul says who it is that he is praying to. He says, “*I bow my knees [I take the position of humility] before the **Father**,<sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.*” In chapter 1 we talked about who it is that hears our prayers, Almighty God.

But here, in this acknowledgement, Paul is saying that God is the father of every family in heaven and on earth. And there are a couple of different views that are presented here. In one sense, to be the father of something is to be the originator. For example, James Madison is known as the Father of our nation’s constitution. That is to say that he was a major contributor, an originator. So, to say that God is Father of every family is to say that God is the overarching

Father of everyone because He is our Creator, and all human beings bear the image of God.<sup>v</sup> So, God is Father in that way.

But we also understand Father from a relational aspect. God is Father in the sense that he is the Lord of those who have come to faith in The Son, Jesus. And by placing faith in Jesus, we are a part of the Family of God.<sup>vi</sup> I think it is very possible that Paul is referencing both views here as both views are true. But again, the point is made that Paul recognizes God as Father, supreme, ultimate, and he takes a position of humility before God. Jesus taught us the same position. In what is known as The Lord’s Prayer, where Jesus taught the disciples how to pray, He says that we are to address God as, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed [or holy] be Your name.” We address God as Father to remind us of the truth that He both encourages us to boldly approach the throne of grace, but to do so in reverence and humility.

We are to pray with humility. Secondly, we are to...

## 2) Pray for Supernatural Strength.

Once he has taken a posture of humility, Paul prays for supernatural strength. Look with me at verses 16 and 17 of Ephesians 3. *<sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be **strengthened with power** through his Spirit in your **inner being**, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may **dwell** in your hearts through faith—that you, being **rooted and grounded** in love...*

Paul prays for the Ephesian believers. He asked God that they would be strengthened with power. And that the strength granted to the Ephesian believers would be according to the riches of His glory.<sup>vii</sup> Which, the riches of God’s glory are limitless, inexhaustible. So, Paul is praying for an inexhaustible strength that is not of their own but is supernatural. Because notice where this strength comes from. Verse 16. Through His Spirit. The Holy Spirit **is** the power of God at work in us. If there is one thing that Paul knew, it was his need for strength outside his own abilities. So, he prays that for these believers.

A couple things that I want us to grab ahold of here. First, Paul attaches supernatural strength, power, with prayer. God’s strength, His power, is made available to us, but it is never detached from praying. Listen, beloved, the strength you and I need for what we often face cannot be found in our own strength. We are in need of supernatural strength often.

You know, there is a common misinterpretation of Scripture. I have heard people say that God won't give them more than they can handle. The problem with that is that it isn't biblical. Most people, when saying that are referencing 1 Corinthians 10:13 which says, *"**13**No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."* That verse says nothing about carrying more than you can handle.

Listen, I am confident that there are times that The Lord allows us to walk through things that are beyond our ability to carry them so that He can carry them for us. I know many of you are walking through something that requires supernatural strength to endure. God is the source of that strength. And He desires to give that to you according to His inexhaustible riches!

The second thing I want to make note of here is to notice who Paul is praying for. He's not asking for supernatural strength just for himself. He's praying that others would have that kind of strength. This blows me away. I read one commentator this week that points out that, "Almost every prayer of Paul's that is recorded in Scripture was for the spiritual welfare of others. Even when he was persecuted, imprisoned, and in need of many things... he prayed primarily for fellow believers that they might be spiritually protected and strengthened."<sup>viii</sup> Isn't that amazing.

To this point, I was confronted with a question. If every one of my prayers were answered, who would benefit? In other words, is the subject of my prayers more for me or for others? This is a sobering question that I think challenges us all. Paul prayed that the Ephesians believers would be strengthened with power, by the Spirit, in their inner being.

Notice what happens as a result of that strengthening. Two things. Verse 17. ***17**so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love...*" The word translated as, "dwell," means to be exactly at home, or to settle down as a permanent resident.<sup>ix</sup> The result of the Spirit's working is that Christ is at home in our hearts. Notice the Trinity at work in Paul's prayer here. He prays to The Father, that the Spirit might strengthen the believers, so that Christ can be at home in their hearts. That means that whatever you face, wherever you go, you don't go alone. The fullness of God,

Himself, is with you, walking through it with you. Isn't that amazing? And that's where supernatural strength comes from.

And this also results, Paul says, in us being rooted and grounded. Rooted carrying the idea of a tree's roots twisting itself around each other and rocks and deep within soil so as to not be uprooted. Grounded meaning to lay a foundation, firmly established. In other words, the result of supernatural strength in our life is the very presence of God with us and the ability to be firmly planted and established, enduring life's storms.

We are to pray with humility and to pray for strength. Thirdly, we should...

### 3) Pray for Understanding.

When I say understanding, I mean that would we understand, or have the right perspective. Look what Paul says in verses 18 and 19 of Ephesians 3. ***18**may have strength to comprehend [or know, or understand] with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, **19**and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* What are we to know and understand? What perspective are we to have? We are to understand and see things through the lens of the love of Christ.

Paul uses words to describe the love of Christ. Breadth, length, height and depth. These are all terms of measurement, and they measure in all directions. To Paul, the love of Christ wasn't an abstract concept, but rather it was real, substantial, and measurable. While the love of Christ is limitless, it is very real.

The breadth, the width of Christ's love is wide enough to cover my sin and shame. And not just my sin, but God so loved the world in this way. The length of Christ's love goes on forever so as to provide grace for my sin, past, present, and future. The depth of Christ's love can be measured in His willingness to leave heaven and come to earth and die a sinner's death, and be buried in my place. The height of Christ's love is shown in the resurrection and the certainty that He will lift me to where I am seated with Him in the heavenlies.

I read a commentator this week that said, "God's love is wide enough to include every person, long enough to last through all eternity, deep enough to reach the worst sinner, and high enough to take us to heaven."<sup>x</sup> Do you know the love of Christ?

We are to pray with humility, pray for supernatural strength, and for understanding. Finally, we are to...

#### 4) Pray with Great Expectation.

Paul closes his prayer with a doxology. Ephesians 3, verses 20 and 21. *<sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do **far more abundantly** than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.* The phrase, “far more abundantly,” literally translated is, “above all things to do exceedingly.” It is actually a repetition of the same word. Beyond. Now to Him, God the Father, who is able to do beyond what is already beyond more than we ask or think.

Just as the love of Christ is beyond understanding, so also is God’s activity is beyond thought. We should pray with great expectation because we pray to a God does not fit the limitations of our thoughts. Do you believe that? And look what’s more. The end of verse 20. *According to the power at work within us.* This power and strength is already at work in us through the work of the Holy Spirit!

One last thought. Verse 20 says that the powerful work of the Spirit, God’s glory, should be made evident in the Church. The church meaning the collection of all saved believers, the family of God, should clearly reflect His glory.<sup>xi</sup> When we, the Church, understand God’s eternal purpose, we will be led to pray with great expectation of God’s moving. We will order our lives around the truths of His Word. And that will result in generations, forever and ever, seeing and responding to the glory of Jesus.

We are to pray with humility, pray for supernatural strength and understanding, and we are to pray with great expectation from a great God.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

I’m going to invite Jared and the team to come lead us in a time of response. Do you know the love of Jesus? [Present Gospel]

I’m going to pray, we will stand and sing, but let’s all respond to Jesus. [PRAY]

## ENDNOTES:

---

<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation for this message: John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians*, Moody Press: Chicago, 1986; Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1996; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, Word Books: Dallas, 1990; Vance Pitman, "A Praying Church (parts 1 & 2)," sermons preached at Hope Church Las Vegas on February 24, and March 3, 2019, accessed online: [https://hopechurchlv.com/message\\_passages/ephesians/page/3/](https://hopechurchlv.com/message_passages/ephesians/page/3/); Jack Graham, "Much More: The Strength We Need," sermon preached at Prestonwood Baptist Church on March 8, 2020, accessed online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77j1a2p5Vl>; Michael Youssef, "Discover Your Treasure House: Discover Its Qualifications," published by Leading The Way, April 14, 2013, accessed online: <https://www.ltw.org/watch/teaching/series/discover-your-treasure-house/part-4>; Michael Gossett, "Ephesians Living in Christ: Power in Christ," sermon preached at Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, TX, February 13, 2022, accessed online: <https://www.qabc.org/episode/power-in-christ/>; Dr. Joel Davis, January Bible Study: Ephesians 3:1-21; Chip Ingram "Unstuck: Overcoming the Pain of Your Past," published by Living on the Edge, accessed online: <https://livingontheedge.org/broadcast-series/unstuck/>; Skip Heitzig, "Ephesians 3:14-21," message taught at Calvary Church Albuquerque, July 30, 2003, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/118/sermon/1633>; Jonathan Pokluda, "For the Love of God," message preached at Watermark Church, May 8, 2012, accessed online: <https://www.watermark.org/message/2049-for-the-love-of-god>.

<sup>ii</sup> Illustration from A Treasury of Bible Illustrations, accessed online: <https://www.lakewaybaptist.org/the-power-of-the-bended-knee>.

<sup>iii</sup> Enduring Word Commentary, "Ephesians 3 – The Revealing of God's Mystery," accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ephesians-3>.

<sup>iv</sup> Matt Erickson, "Old Camel Knees: A Brief Reflection on the Remarkable Prayer Life of James the Just," published by Renovate, August 29, 2019, accessed online: <https://mwerickson.com/2019/08/29/old-camel-knees-a-brief-reflection-on-the-remarkable-prayer-life-of-james-the-just>.

<sup>v</sup> This view is taken by Klyne Snodgrass.

<sup>vi</sup> John MacArthur and others takes this view.

<sup>vii</sup> Enduring Word Commentary.

<sup>viii</sup> MacArthur, page 102.

<sup>ix</sup> Strong's Concordance, 2730. Katoikeó.

<sup>x</sup> Enduring Word Commentary.

<sup>xi</sup> Bible Ref, <https://www.bibleref.com/Ephesians/3/Ephesians-3-21.html>.