

**PAUL'S PRAYER FOR TROUBLED SAINTS**

Ephesians 3:14-21

**Intro:** It has been brought out both in my messages on Ephesians, and the lessons we currently have on this epistle in our Sunday School, that this epistle to the church at Ephesus may have been a circular letter intended for other churches in that same area. And this idea has arisen because in some of the copies of the Greek text of this epistle do not have any reference to Ephesus in chapter 1, verse 1. This may be a true explanation of the omission in some copies, and I am not speaking against that. But I also think that, while Paul does not mention any of the Ephesians in this epistle, yet there are some statements which seem to have specific people in mind. Of course that could apply to other churches as well as to the church at Ephesus.

I am referring to the first words of chapter 3, verse 14, which is where my text for today begins.

“For this cause” should make us ask, “For what cause?” And when we go back to verse 13 we read that Paul had just written, “Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” Fainting suggests the idea of being discouraged, or of being in despair, and possibly of even being so weary that they were inclined to give up. And all of this would have been because of what Paul called, “my tribulations for you.”

His “tribulations” would be a reference to the fact that Paul had suffered much to bring the Gospel to them (as well as to other place), and they had the feeling, apparently, that they were partially responsible for Paul being in prison. It speaks of the fact that they were thankful for Paul, that they loved him very much, and that they did not like the idea of his imprisonment. And so verse 14 begins with, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” And so it would seem that the prayer which followed was Paul’s response to the troubles that the believers in Ephesus were experiencing because of what it had cost him, Paul, to bring the Gospel to them.

Sometimes troubles come along so continuously that it has a very discouraging effect upon us as the people of God. It may have been that the believers in Ephesus had been led to believe that the Christian life would be a life of constant joy and blessing, but Paul’s imprisonment, and

perhaps their own sufferings because of the Gospel, had forced them to see that the Christian life was not all a bed of roses.

I would go so far as to say that verses 13 and 14 of Ephesians 3 are an indication that one major reason Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, as well as to other churches in that area, was because they were inclined to be weary and tired, almost to the point of giving up.

We, the Lord's people, often find ourselves battling discouragement because of our circumstances. Our Lord introduced one of His parables with the words, "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). We all know what this is, don't we?

There is an interesting statement in Daniel's prophecy about a king would arise out of the fourth kingdom, and that things would take place in that kingdom where one special person would arise whose particular purpose was to "wear out the saints of the most High" (Dan. 7:25). Obviously the Devil would be behind all that was predicted. I wonder if this may not be the reason that Paul concluded this epistle with the verses that will be our SS lesson next week: Eph. 6:10-20. God does bring many wonderful blessings into the lives of all of His people, but there are also times of testing, great testing. And we can't stand up against the trials that come our way unless we are learning to "be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10).

Our lives as Christians find a parallel in our country's stand against the terrorists. Life goes on in a fairly normal way for all of us, but we can't forget for a moment that we are at war with deadly enemies. We may get weary of the battle, but we can't afford to give up. We may experience many trials as Christians, but we can't give up, as we might be tempted to do!

I don't think that we can possibly understand how important the Apostle Paul was to those early churches to whom he wrote under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The imprisonment of Paul must have had a devastating effect upon all of them. They would be asking, "What is going to happen to us if anything bad happens to Paul, especially his death! In the final analysis they needed to know that the security and enduring nature of the Church did not rest upon Paul, but it rested upon the ever-living, victorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all dispensable; the Lord Jesus is the indispensable One!

But what lessons are we to learn from this passage? There are many, but I trust that the Lord will enable me to point out some lessons which we can all take away for our encouragement in our own lives. I don't have to claim superior wisdom to know that in all of our lives there is something that is causing us to be discouraged today. That is one reason Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is so important. There are other reasons too, but this is one! We are considering Paul's Prayer for Troubled Saints which is found in his Epistle for Troubled Saints. It is not only his only epistle in which he seeks to encourage us as the people of God, but it is surely an epistle of major importance, designed to life our spirits and to restore our joy in the Lord.

Well, the lesson of first importance in connection with this problem of discouragement and despondency is:

## **I. THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER.**

This is one reason why it is good for us to attend church regularly. It is important for us to be with each other. Sometimes discouragement keeps believers away from church, but we should never let that happen. The "downer" we are, the more import it is for us to be here. Our conversation with each is an important form of ministry. The Lord may encourage you through the words of some hymn that we sing. Hopefully the message from the Word should bring encouragement to us. And often when we are in the depths, it may be that something we say to another person will help them. Remember Malachi 3:16:

16 Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

Letters can be helpful. And they don't have to be long. This was what Paul was doing. He wrote a letter to the church, and how it has blessed the people of God from that day to this.

We have some instruments that Paul didn't have. We have telephones and now we can communicate with each other with our computers. If we love each other we are going to want to help each other, and, on the other hand, there are going to be times in all of our lives when we are looking to others for help. This business of encouragement is not just one way

traffic. Sometimes we give; perhaps more often we receive.

But this epistle of Paul tells us another very important way we can minister to each other. It is:

## **II. BY PRAYER.**

This is the most important way. Start with your own family. We all have other people who are on our hearts, most likely other relatives, and don't forget your church family. The Lord will burden our hearts concerning those He wants us to pray for. But notice that Paul addressed his prayer to "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then he went on to say about Them, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." So, while Paul was praying here for the Ephesian believers, his burden extended to all of the family of God.

However, our text this morning contains Paul's prayer for the believers at Ephesus, and so it teaches us what we need to pray about as we pray for those who know the Lord. Even our posture in prayer is important. If your situation is such that you can kneel when you pray, you ought to do it. There is something about humbling ourselves with our bodies before the Lord that does something to our praying. It helps us to remember Who we are speaking to when we pray, how unworthy we are for such a privilege, and how dependent we are upon our heavenly Father when we pray.

And have you noticed that in Paul's prayer here in Ephesians 3 he mentioned the Holy Spirit in verse 16, Christ in verses 17, 18, and into the first part of verse 19, culminating "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

But what right did Paul have, or do I have, or do you have to pray that God would grant us "according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man"? What right did Paul have, or do I have, or do you have, that Christ may dwell in their hearts, or my heart, or your heart, by faith? And what can be a greater cure for discouragement than to spend time meditating on the love of Christ which has come to us from God Himself? And what right do we have to expect that we can actually be filled with all the fulness of God? Not even the Apostle Paul would have come up with such ideas about the Christian life if God had not taught him what it means to be in the family of God. And

it shows, too, that Paul was praying that the truth that he had taught them during the time he had been with them, would take hold of their lives and draw them continuously into lives of closer fellowship with God the Holy Spirit, with the Lord Jesus Christ, and with God Himself. What Paul said about the love of Christ in verse 19, that it “passeth knowledge,” is true of all that has to do with our relationship with the Holy Spirit, with our Lord Jesus, and with God Himself.

The Christian life is basically not seeking more and more blessings from God, but it is learning to profit from and to enjoy what we already have in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The basic problem we are having when we get discouraged, is not what is going on in our circumstances, but what is *not* going on in our hearts.

Let me ask you a question, and I am directing my question to myself as well as to you: How time have you given this past week to even thinking about the Holy Spirit? Do you know that He came to live in you the moment you were saved? You can ignore Him. You can grieve Him. You can quench Him? But He has come to abide in you forever. And He is there to strengthen you so that you can do what God wants you to do, and so you can become what God wants you to be. You and I can't live in this world unless we are trusting the Holy Spirit for His enabling power.

Do we remember that Christ also is living in us? “By faith” do we really believe this, and are we being comforted by the very fact that Christ loves us and God loves us? Have you ever stopped to consider the fourfold character of God's love – its breadth, its length, its depth, and its height? You can never fully understand the love of God, but as you learn more and more about it, miraculously you are being filled with the fulness of God.

Now when we live the way we ought to live, the way the Lord has ordained that we should live, then our prayer to God for help will become:

### **III. PRAISE TO GOD.**

As we walk with the God, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, and by Christ Who is our life, then you and I will live with the praise of God in our hearts which Paul expressed in the last two verses of chapter 3.

In our Tuesday class we have been going through that passage in which the Lord taught that we are the branches, and that He is the true Vine. And among the wonderful things that the Lord told His disciples on the eve of His death, He expressed this very simple, yet most profound, truth with these words in John 15:4-5:

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

It is when we realize our own helplessness that we turn to God in prayer, and there we learn He can not only meet the great needs that we bring to Him, but He answers (and note how with every word Paul went higher and higher) “exceeding, abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” This is not theory, but the absolute truth of the Word of God.

**Concl:** What Paul was seeking to get the Ephesians to understand, and to get us to understand, is that our trials, and the way the trials of those we love affect us, are to show us that without our Lord, we can do nothing.

It is important that we pray for ourselves, and it is important that we pray for each other. But it is just as important that we pray the right prayer. This is where our Bibles are so important. When discouragements come along, either for ourselves, or for those we love, we need to pray, and we need to pray like Paul had learned to pray, dwelling not on what we need to do for God, but on what the Members of the Godhead are prepared to do for us.

May we join the chorus that we will all sing to God throughout all eternity, but let us begin to sing it now:

Unto Him be glory  
in the church  
by Christ Jesus  
throughout all ages,  
world without end.  
Amen.