

Ephesians 3: 12-15; “I Bow My Knees to the Father”, Message # 22 in a series entitled – “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 28th, 2024, in the Morning Worship Service.

We are told here that the reason that Paul bowed his knees to the Father, the reason that he was praying for these Ephesian believers was so that they would not lose heart at his tribulations. He was concerned that they might lose heart because of the things that he was going through on their behalf, on account of his preaching the gospel to them. These tribulations, he says, were for their glory. In other words, these tribulations that Paul was going through were actually intended by God to help establish the greater excellence and exercise of their faith in God. He wanted them to see that his own sufferings were linked to the sufferings of Christ.

Listen to how Paul words this over in Colossians 1: 24 – “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.” It was not that anything was lacking in the sufferings of Christ to accomplish our redemption. It was that in the application and outworking of salvation, that he as an apostle would do what he could do, in his ministry to churches, to suffer for Christ’s sake, so that the faith of these believers would become stronger.

These trials and tribulations which Paul went through were intended by God to help them to persevere in their faith, so that they would become stronger Christians. Paul knew that they would better be able to glorify God in the way that they would live their lives to Christ, based upon what they saw Paul going through. So, we should understand from this, that we who are stronger in the faith, more mature in our faith, able to suffer more for our faith, are intended by God, to be an example to other Christians, to encourage and strengthen their faith.

We will be a help, and an encouragement to other Christians around us who are not as strong in faith as we are. How can we do this? Let me show you two ways that Paul would do this. 1st of all – By reminding them specifically of the access that they have to Christ, by faith. (verses 12 & 13) And 2nd – By reminding them specifically of the Father’s adoptive love. (verses 14 & 15) Then, in my next message to you, I will speak to you of the importance of Christ’s dwelling in your heart by faith, and of your coming to understand how great His love is for you, the Christian.

But 1st of all – If you are a strong Christian, you will remind others of the access that they personally have, to Christ, by faith.

Verse 12 says – “In Christ we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart (King James – that ye faint not) at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” Paul is saying that it is because we have boldness and access to Christ Himself in prayer, that we, by exercising faith in Him, during those times that you see your pastor or others going through tribulations, you will not lose heart; that you will not become discouraged at such times. Why? Because of Your bold access to Christ.

The words “boldness” and “access” have reference to your being bold to approach God to bring up the concerns that you have. You are bold to bring them up in prayer to God, believing that God is there for you, for Christ’s sake. He is there for you to hear you in regard to your sadness, your discouragement, your disappointment, and your fears. The fear that something awful might happen, or is happening to that person who you love, in Christ.

First let’s look at the reality of this access to God, by having faith in Christ, in all of our trials. Look over at Romans chapter 5, verses 1-5. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith in to this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.” “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”

I hope that you can see here that it is because you have been justified by faith in Christ, that you have access to God. You can boldly avail yourself of that access, because you know that you have His ear. He loves you because of Christ, and so you are confident that He will hear every concern that you bring to Him in prayer. It is because Christ has died for you, and for that fellow-believer, that you know that you can be confident that He will bring them grace which will be sufficient to sustain them. In whatever great trial that they are going through. You can even glory in tribulation, that is, yours or the other Christians who are suffering for Christ's sake.

This is because you realize that God has a good purpose in these sufferings. The good purpose is that the experience of these various pressures, and stresses, and frustrations, and disappointments, by His grace, causes you to repeatedly seek for wisdom and strength from Christ to be sustained in your soul and spirit. And He will give this greater grace. Your perseverance in seeking and finding Christ's help. And you are learning to seek to know God's will and to walk in His ways. And so you pray to know how to do what is right, over time.

And you know according to God's word that this will produce proven character in you. Part of your proven character is that you now see that all trials and tribulations which come to you are ordained for your good. You understand that trials have been ordained for you, for this purpose; that you will be caused to see that all of your strength to do what is right and to glorify God in whatever situation that you are in, comes to you from Christ Himself. In Philippians 1: 29 Paul says that it has been granted to you, not only to believe but also to suffer for His name's sake.

You stand in Christ's grace, and you rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. You come to understand that God has this great ability to sustain your soul, and renew your strength. He has this great ability to work in your mind and heart, and to satisfy you continually with the truth of His word and the presence of His Spirit in the midst of these difficulties. You come to realize that God is building faith in you. He is building many good qualities into your life, by the working of His Spirit in your mind, and your heart.

Being bold to bring up all matters of concern to you, in prayer, to God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit, this is the right thing to do. It glorifies God. When you are troubled about what another Christian is going through, for Christ's sake, and you bring it to Jesus, you should remember that He went through many sufferings on your behalf. And if they know Christ, He has suffered to help them as well. Even those people who do not know, you should pray for them that they might come to know Him, in and through any difficult situation that they are going through.

For those who know God, He is working all things together for their good, and yours as well. And God's good purpose is to conform you and your brethren to the image of Christ. And so, when you see and hear what wicked people are saying and doing to the Christian person or leader that you love, remember that you do have access to Christ by faith. Turn with me over to Acts chapter 19, and you will see one of the tribulations that Paul was going through, that the Ephesian believers might be tempted to lose heart at.

Acts chapter 19, verses 8-10 – “And Paul went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.” “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, Paul departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” “And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” You can see here that Paul was very diligent in his calling, of preaching and teaching concerning the kingdom of God to both Jews and Greeks.

However, it says that even though he spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading some, there were others who were hardened under the preaching and they did not believe. And they even spoke evil of the Way of being a Christian before the multitude, so that Paul had to withdraw the disciples from them and set up a school for them in the school of Tyrannus. This is the kind of thing that is discouraging to disciples sometimes; the Way of being a Christian being spoken evil of. And there are many people who do this because their hearts are hard to the truth. They are insensitive, dull,

and critical of both God's word, and His people. And there may therefore be a temptation to question God's leading, and His providential care over the life of your beloved pastor, or your dear sainted friend, or loved one. But this should not be the case. And it will not be the case if you will bring all to Christ in prayer.

Paul knew that all of his trials related to his ministry had been ordained by God, and therefore the last time that he saw his dear Ephesian brethren, he gave them the same kind of counsel as is written here in our text. Acts chapter 20: 22-25 – “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.” “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.”

What an unusual phrase that is – “I am going bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem”. Paul knew the Holy Spirit's working in such a powerful way, leading him to go to Jerusalem to preach there, that it was something that he was looking forward to; to finish his race with joy. In other words, he was saying that whether it was by life, or whether it was by death, he would glorify God in his body. That's the thing that we need to pursue with our prayers for other people. We want all our brethren to testify of the grace of God; not only to save, but that it will also be sufficient for his people in difficult times.

And verses 32-38 – “So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” This is what we should be praying for and encouraging in others; their testimony to the grace of God, for the grace of God is sufficient for His saints. “I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.” “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.” “I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak.” “And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.” “Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more.” “And they accompanied him to the ship.”

So you see here, that Paul does see the reality of what's taking place with him. This was the last time that he would see the elders of Ephesus. He tells them that the grace of God would be sufficient to build them up and give them an inheritance among those being sanctified. Paul knew that the word of God's grace would be enough for them, even if he could not be with them. And so he knelt down and prayed with them all. You can see here that Paul was commending them to God knowing that God and the word of His grace were all that they would need so that they would not lose heart. The same will be true for you.

We need to remember that we have boldness of access to God through faith in Christ. And so, we must learn to commit to God in prayer, those things which are too difficult for us. It is enough, dear Christian, that you have boldness of access, that you have God's ear, and that He will receive all of your requests for help for yourself and for those who are your leaders.

2nd – If you are a strong Christian, you will remind other believers specifically of the Father's Adoptive Love. (verses 14 and 15)

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Paul will now seal the knowledge that he has given to them, with his own prayer for them. Even though we do not have enough time to go through the whole prayer, yet I would have you think with me about Paul's reference here to God's adoptive love. He bows his knees to the Father. Paul poses this not only as knowledge but as a prayer. Your understanding of knowledge and theology should lead you to prayer, not only for yourself, but for your dear brethren that you know and love. You ought to be regularly praying for the other saints in your church. Your prayer will be that God will equip them in the way of difficulties, trials and

temptations, and still have the strength and moral courage to go on. Let's think about God's adoptive love. Paul bows his knees to the Father so that God's people will understand their need to pray for other saints around them.

A Christian ought often to think of God as their Father; to meditate upon the great truth that when they became a Christian, they were adopted into the family of God. Yes, it is true that God is the Father of all men in terms of their having been created by Him. Malachi 2: 10 – "Have we not all one Father?" "Has not one God created us?" But in the verse of our text, Paul is speaking of God being the Father from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. Since this is the case we can only conclude that he is speaking of believers, since not all men who have died have gone to heaven.

What does this phrase mean then, that the whole family in heaven and earth is named from the Father? It means that since we have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ, and since we have been born from above, born again, and have a new nature, that we are spiritually the God the Father's children. Since the Father is holy, through the Lord Jesus Christ we are called His holy children, His holy ones. He has adopted us into His family, and sees us and knows us to be His own children because of our faith in His dear Son.

Now, this whole family of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are found in heaven and earth. All of us have been adopted into His family, and all of us ought to rejoice greatly that we all have the privileges of firstborn sons. Ephesians 1: 5 – "Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." So, adoption is a legal action by which a person takes into his family a child not his own, with the purpose of treating him as his own, and giving him all the privileges of his own natural born son. (Cruden)

In our case, God the Father has purposed to adopt us according to the good pleasure of His will, and not for anything in us that He sees in us as desirable, as to why He should make us His son or daughter spiritually speaking. It is simply because He has loved you with an everlasting love and He has sovereignly chosen to have saving mercy upon you. But again, He does this for Jesus' sake alone. We are predestined to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself. And it will be the glory, the excellence and beauty and power of His grace, that He will receive all the glory; all the praise from us His people.

Let me ask you whether you see the Father as your Father who loves you for Jesus' sake? Because He truly does. Are you asking for things which are according to His will? As you pray, do you think of the Father as well able to give good gifts to His children? Think about Luke 11: 9 – "So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." "If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?" "Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."

In Matthew 7: 11 it says – "Your Father who is in heaven will give good things to those who ask." Remember, dear Christian that in Christ Jesus your Lord, you have boldness and access with confidence, as you trust in Him. And remember that the Father Himself loves you. And He is intending on giving you many good gifts, in terms of the things that He orders for your life. This will include sufferings. But the apostle could say in 2nd Corinthians 12: 10 – "Therefore I take pleasure (I am well content) with infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." "For when I am weak, I am strong." Let us learn by Christ's grace to, in this way, fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, and to find the joy that Christ will bring to us, in doing so.

