

**Ephesians 3: 13-21; "Exceedingly Abundantly Beyond All that We Ask",
A Sermon for the New Year, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 2nd, 2011, in the Morning Service in
preparation for taking the Lord's Supper.**

The Apostle Paul had a great desire for the church at Ephesus and that desire led him to pray. His desire was that the believers at Ephesus would not faint at his tribulations. He did not want to see them paralyzed into inactivity, spiritually, because he was at this difficult point in his own experience in prison. He did not want to see them discouraged or downcast or faint-hearted in the work of the Lord, in the furthering of His kingdom. And if he were here ministering to us this morning in person; he would not have us to be discouraged either. As we come into this New Year, you and I might be tempted to discouragement because we do not see things happening spiritually either in ourselves or in our church, in the way that measures up to our expectations. But let us remember this morning that all good things are of God, and let us not faint. Instead, let us have faith in God. The Apostle Paul and his words here, tell us that we ought to be expectantly praying and looking to God that He would do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think. When we look closely at these verses we find that Paul is also actually preaching to the brethren in Ephesus in his prayers. This is not a good thing to do normally, but because this is an apostolic letter, it is good here. Paul is praying and he is also preaching. And he is saying this. He is saying that God's ability to meet the real spiritual needs of His people always far exceeds their prayers and thoughts toward Him. And so; as Paul's requests for the Ephesians shows forth their needs and ours; I will make them the main points of this sermon. God has exceeding abundant power and ability to meet these 3 real spiritual needs, beyond all that we ask or think.

1st of all - We see that every Christian has the need to be strengthened with power in the inner man. (Verses 14-16)

Paul says in verse 14, that he "bows his knees before the Father from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name...." The whole of the Father's family in heaven and earth are His children who are called by His glorious Name. They are His saints, or holy children, or godly ones. They have His name because they have been changed from the vileness of sin and love of it, to have the highest regard for God. They are called to holiness and to bear the image of God. They have this name of saints because of God's grace extended to them and working in them because of Jesus Christ their Lord. When we come to Christ by faith, we come to be known as Christians before God and men. We bear the name of Christ for the same reason as we bear the name of the Father. We now have Christ's image and His likeness impressed upon our hearts. We now have a name to live eternally. But it is very important that you and I have more than just a name to live unto God and Christ - We must also have the power to live and to do all things to His glory. Our Christianity is not to consist merely in words, but in power. Paul says this in another of his letters, in 1 Corinthians 4: 20. "For the

kingdom of God is not is word but in power.” In other words, it is not enough to call oneself reformed or believe certain doctrines of grace notionally. You and I must be strengthened with might in the inner man. Let me give you an illustration. Let's think about the human body. The body without a skeleton of bones is unable to do much of anything. It may be a great jellyfish but it is not a man. So it is also if the Christian life does not have doctrine. A person becomes a great jellyfish of love, but he is not a person who can make progress in serving God and really helping other people. You can only really do both, in the way that honors God, when you have the doctrine; the truth of the Bible; rightly dividing and applying the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit to every aspect of your life. But let us go further now. The man who has only a skeleton of doctrine and an intellectual knowledge of the Christian life and the Bible; the man who does not have love, who does not have compassion, who has no self-denial, no self-sacrifice, no devotional fire; is only as a skeleton is; a rather frightening caricature of a true Christian. To be more than this we must be strengthened with power in the inner man to become something more than we are by nature. We need Christ's power to become like God and like Christ.

By way of application: Let us remember as we come to the Lord's Supper this morning that God who is our God, through Jesus Christ our Lord; is rich, abundantly rich in grace and glory. That is, as we consider Him by faith, that we will really believe that He is infinite in His ability to bestow all that we need in terms of spiritual strength to do His will in every particular. We need to see and to remember that God is the only One; Christ is the only One; who has righteousness and strength. Let's look at a few verses. Isaiah 45: 24 says, "He shall say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength.'" "To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him." "In the Lord all the descendants of Israel shall be justified, and shall glory." And Psalm 28: 6-9 - "Blessed be the Lord because He has heard the voice of my supplications!" "The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him." "The Lord is their strength, and He is the saving refuge of His anointed." "Save your people, and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them also, and bear them up forever." We should see from these verses that we absolutely must have the Lord's strength to be saved from sin, to face our enemies, to face our afflictions, to overcome the world, and to be holy. A Christian, in himself, simply does not have the power to automatically do this a result of the New Birth. The New Birth is the creation of a new inner man and the gift of the principle of a new spiritual life. But there are varying degrees of spiritual strength among Christians. Their spiritual strength is something that is granted to them in accordance with their prayers and God's holy and wise purpose for them. It is granted to us not only to believe, but also to suffer for Christ's sake. (Philippians 1: 29) Natural strength is for ourselves and this world; spiritual strength is for God and eternal things. Both must come together for the Christian to be useful to God. We must come to love God with all of our

strength. But spiritual strength comes only from God; to be able to bring mind and body and spirit to the place of obedience to His Word.

A 2nd application - We must also learn to strive according to the power which works within us. You see the Apostle Paul exhorting the Colossians to this duty. In Colossians 1: 27 Paul says, "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." "Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily." This is not simply drawing up a set of resolutions for this next year. This is praying for the power and the wisdom and the insight to see what your true goals should be; and then really going about to do what you know to be right according to God's Word, in relation to Him and in relation to other people. This is not worldly wisdom. This is the wisdom of God that must come to you in power, so that Christ is seen in what you do and say, and how you live. Sometimes we look at things outwardly. We look at the size of our congregation. We look at the gifts and abilities of the minister. But we do not remember the power of God. We look at our afflictions and the troubles of our soul and our life, and we moan and we groan over them. But we must not forget that God has a purpose in allowing these things in our lives. We must learn to look to God for the strengthening of our inner man. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask. God has greater things for you to be and to do than you ever dreamed of. But if you are fainting, if you are pinning away; you need very much to receive this truth and act upon it; that all depends upon Him. All the glory goes to God when this is your attitude. It is not the minister who is so great and strong, it is not the congregation which is so large and knowledgeable; it is the exceeding greatness of God's wisdom and power that are needing to be sought and needing to be extolled. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." (2 Corinthians 4: 7) Let us ask our God and our Christ to give us more of this power in this New Year, as we partake of the Lord's Supper in a few minutes.

Now 2ndly- We have another real spiritual need which is mentioned by Paul. We have the need to have Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith.
(Verse 17)

We are not, as Christians, simply influenced by an impersonal power unto holiness. We are strengthened with power in the inner man, in order that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith. We do not seek power for power's sake, but that Christ may dwell in us and be formed in us. We seek and pray for others in the church that Christ may more richly dwell in their hearts as well. Look at Acts 22: 6-11 with me. Here we see the conversion of the Apostle Paul and the Lord's first acts of power toward him. "Now it happened as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me." "And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you

persecuting Me?" "So I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?'" "And He said to me, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'" "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me." "So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?'" "And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'" "And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus." This was an act of the Lord's sovereign power. Saul thought that he was strong in discernment and strong in God's law and he thought that he was zealous for God, but when he was confronted with the vision of God's purpose and a vision of His holy power, he was blind and helpless. But then he came to realize that Jesus is the beginning and the end of the Christian life. The exercise of power led to the Person of Christ. This then, becomes the end of God's purpose and power in your life; that you might know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings; so that you might be conformed to the life and the death of the one who loved you and gave Himself for you. (Philippians 3: 9 and Galatians 2: 20) Our fellowship is with the Father and the Son. But are we cultivating it? Christ dwells in your heart as the Shepherd of your soul. In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2: 3) Having had this blessed encounter with Christ; in conversion to Him by faith; it is more of His presence and blessing of grace and power that you seek. Because this is how God is glorified in you.

As a new believer or an old believer in Jesus Christ you realize that you are crucified with Christ; nevertheless you live, yet not you but Christ lives in you. He is your strength and your song and has become your salvation. You realize that righteousness does not come by the law; that is by your trying to do and keep the works of the Law by your own determination and resolve. Righteousness comes by faith in Christ. You realize that the grace to live godly comes from the living Christ Himself who loved you and gave Himself for you. You realize that even as the branch abides in the vine you must also abide in Him: Speaking to Him, asking Him, your Living Risen Lord, "What should I do today Lord?" "How can I serve You, and love You, in my heart that is dead without You?" You realize more and more that sin grieves His Holy heart and minimizes your perception of His holy presence. You will, therefore, more and more hate it; for it leaves you feeling that you've lost your soul's great lover when you commit sin, even in your heart. Especially in your heart, for it is there that He is. It is there that He sees and comprehends what you really are. As we come down front, now, to partake of the communion, let us ask Christ to dwell in our hearts so that we know His presence and power. Let us remember that we are coming to the Table to show Christ our love. Let us remember the words of John 14: 23 – Jesus says, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our home with him." Christ's home is your heart, O believer. See that you keep it clean by confession of sin and the sincere intention to keep His Word.

3rdly- For you and all the saints to comprehend how great is the love of Christ towards us. (Verse 18-21)

Oh beloved this is the greatest motivating factor in our all of our faith and all of our obedience unto God. That "you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." How great is His love for sinners, that He would have such mercy upon them, to make them alive, when they are dead, and it is totally their own fault in their sins. Think of the breadth of Christ's love. His love goes as wide as the 4 directions of the compass in this sinful fallen world. "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of the nations..." Christ was lifted up on the cross with His arms outstretched that "He might draw all men to Himself." The Son of God did not travail and die the cursed death for just a few persons, those who are doctrinally correct and outwardly correct in their obedience. He died so that an innumerable multitude of people might come to have "truth in their inmost being." He died so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, having Him right there with us in our hearts showing us the power and strength of His love to help us come to that point. Ask yourself now, "Is this what I am experiencing?" Is my love becoming as broad as His?

Think of the length of Christ's love. Christ's love did not suddenly begin when man came upon the scene, but it is as long as the ages of eternity past. His love was with us long before we were converted, and it bears with us long now that we are. His love is patient. His love is kind. His love sympathizes with the believer when he fails and falls into sin; when He knows that it is our desire to live consistent in godliness. His love picks the believer back up and sets Him on the path of righteousness after He has cleansed him from his sins. His love rejoices when a believer is victorious over temptation and besetting sins; knowing that His grace has made all the difference. He loved to give it, and He loved to establish that obedience to the glory of His Father. Dear believer, have you come to this?

Think of the depth of Christ's love -- That Christ would willingly and freely give up the glories of heaven and fellowship with the Father from all eternity; that He would lay aside His Royal garments and privileges and condescend to take upon Himself all of your sins and all of your sorrows related to your sins. He came to render in your place, a most perfect obedience in God's sight. Every shade of the meaning of every holy commandment, He considered and kept, and kept from the right motives perfectly. This He did for you if you believe in Him. What depth of love it is that leads to suffering for another after your own obedience is established; and not just suffering briefly, or suffering in passing, but suffering the very equivalent of the eternal wrath of the God the Father Almighty for the sins which would most certainly have consigned you, the sinful and unworthy one, to remain outside the pearly gates of heaven begging to come in for all of eternity. God the Father would have been just, yes indeed He would have been pleased to

leave you there in that awful position between begging and cursing for all of eternity were it not that He was pleased to bruise the Lord Jesus in your place. But the Lord Jesus loved you so much that He could not bear to leave you there. The love of God the Father was so great and so deep that when He sent His only Begotten Son to die for your sins, that the Lord Jesus would not come down from the cross until He had made full satisfaction to God's justice for your sins, O believer. He would not dismiss His spirit until He had suffered just enough and more than enough to save you. That -- is the depth of His love.

And what of the height of Christ's love? If Christ's love has reached down and descended down to take upon Himself the depths of our sins, will He not also, since He is raised from the dead to sit on high at the right hand of the Father, also raise us up to glory; to be with Him forever? I am sure that it will be so for each one who believes in Him. Will He not do "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think? Will He not raise us up above all the troubles and sorrows of this life and give us eternal life? Will He not lift us up from the gates of death and bring us to a place which will be very far beyond what any of us could ask or think; that is the heights of heaven? As we have a New Year to serve our God and our Christ, let us remember to pray that we would see more of God's ability to meet all the spiritual needs of His people and to know more of the love of Jesus Christ. Let us partake of this Supper with this in mind.