

A Pastor's Profound Prayer

The bridegroom was starting to panic. They were running out of wine. At the time of Jesus, a wedding celebration could last a week or more as guests would come and go as they were able. Sometime during the celebration, they ran out of wine. How would you feel if they ran out of food at your wedding reception before everyone could fill their plates? Awkward, disappointing, stressful. It is likely that Mary was related to either the bride or groom. It seems she had some inside information that they were running out of wine and she took action to get the problem solved. She went to her first-born son, Jesus, and suggested that he do something about it. Even though Jesus had not yet performed a miracle, she knew that he could.

Jesus told the servants to fill the stone jars used for ceremonial washing with water. Each jar held from 20-30 gallons. Even if we go with the smaller amount of 20 gallons, that is a 120 gallons total. That's a lot! Then Jesus told the servants to take some of the "water" and present it to the caterer. When he tasted it, he was surprised at how good the wine tasted. Jesus' disciples and those servants must have been scratching their heads. It did not make sense. Molecules of H₂O changed into very complex molecules of wine. A miracle! The bridegroom was eager for any wine, but Jesus gave far more than he hoped for or could even imagine. Jesus gave him at least 120 gallons of excellent wine as a wedding present. Amazing!

The Apostle Paul knew that God blesses his people in amazing ways. As we recite in Luther's explanation to the First Article, "[God] provides, clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, spouse and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all I need to keep my body and life." But St. Paul knew that the greatest blessings God gives his people are spiritual – the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. Paul was thinking of such lavish blessings when he wrote a letter to the Christians in the city of Ephesus. There were no problems in Ephesus that Paul needed to address. He wrote to encourage them in their faith and remind them of how amazingly blessed they were. Near the end of chapter 3, he shared a Pastor's Profound Prayer.

Paul began (:14,15), "**For this reason [that they were saved by grace] I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.**" I do not kneel to pray very often, but there are times. When you kneel, you have to swallow your pride. It's a humbling feeling, like a servant bowing before his master. Paul acknowledged that God is the Father of every human being since he brought each person into existence. God is also the spiritual Father of believers. Paul begged God to bless the dear believers in Ephesus.

Paul shared what he prayed for (:16,17), "**I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.**" What strikes me about this prayer is that Paul did not ask God to give them a better job, or perfect health, or lots of money, or even freedom from persecution. He gets to what was most important – their faith. I totally get that. When I pray for you people, of course I pray for things that I know are troubling you – a stressful job, a surgery, chronic pain, some illness, etc. But when I mention your name to God, I am especially thinking of your faith. I pray that the Lord would continue to strengthen your trust in Jesus as your Savior, that you would resist temptations to sin, that you would learn more about the Bible and be touched by the details of God's plan of salvation, that your children would grow up knowing the Lord, that the love of God would overflow in your lives in love to others, especially your family, especially your spouse. I think of Peter's encouragement at the end of 2 Peter, "**grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.**" No matter how many earthly blessings you enjoy, none of them mean a thing if you do not have Jesus as your Savior. As that pithy saying goes, "If you have everything, but Jesus, you have nothing. And if you have nothing, but Jesus, you have everything."

Paul rejoiced that the Ephesians knew Jesus as their Savior. Paul also knew that their faith would be attacked and their faith needed to be strengthened. Paul knew that if you are not moving forward in faith, you are falling backwards. The day you finished your Catechism class and were confirmed dare not be the high-water mark of your life. Like Paul, I rejoice that you know Jesus as your Savior. You know that Jesus paid the penalty for your sins when he died on the cross. You look forward to the glorious splendor of heaven. You believe! Alleluia! You are saved! But like the battery in your cell phone is constantly being drained to keep the phone on, your faith is being drained just by living. The devil is constantly throwing temptations in your way. The world continues to promote immorality in so many ways. Our own sinful nature is constantly

trying to steer us away from Jesus. We make sure to keep our cell phone charged. How much more will we make sure to keep our faith charged.

Faith is only strengthened through the good news of salvation which comes to us through God's Word and the Sacraments. Please tell me that your spiritual life consists of more than just one hour at church. My prayer is that you connect with Jesus through reading devotions, listening to Christian music, reading straight from your Bible, getting to Bible class or Sunday School, and other ways. Eternity is a long time. God, in his amazing grace, gave you faith. We will guard our faith as our most precious possession. We will connect with Jesus day after day after day until, one day, we can say "Thank You" to him face to face in heaven.

Pastor Paul's profound prayer continues (:17-19), "**And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love** [Those are passive verbs, Paul is saying that something was done to us. God rooted and established us in his love.], **may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people** [This is a reference to believers. Another translation would be "saints," people made holy because Jesus' perfect life was transferred to them through faith], **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.**" That's a mouthful. Paul uses four dimensions (side to side, up to down) to underscore the fact that Christ's love is so great that it goes beyond our ability to understand it fully.

I enjoy reading church history. I am fascinated to see how amazingly the Lord used different people and circumstances to keep the gospel going so that not even the gates of hell could prevail against it. He used wars and poverty and famine to move people around so the gospel was spread further. He established empires and nations where the gospel could flourish. I can trace my family ancestry to about 1900. I was blessed to be born into a family tree that knew Jesus from 1900 on. But what about before then? It is highly unlikely that there is a direct line of believers from me to the time of the apostles. It is much more likely that some of my ancestors were unbelievers. At some point in time, one of my ancestors was exposed to the gospel and the Lord placed the miracle of faith in their heart. Who was that? When was that? Where was that? I'm curious to find that out when I get to heaven. That's what I think about when Paul talks about God's love being wide, long, high, deep. The set of circumstances that the Lord lined up so that I would be brought to faith is

absolutely profound and mind-boggling. The same is true for each one of you. Each and every one of you is a walking, talking miracle of God's grace.

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Day when our country remembers his contribution toward ending racism. Dr. King is especially famous for his, "I have a dream" speech. If you have never watched it, you might consider doing that. It's easy to find on YouTube. He was a convincing speaker. His dream for America has not yet occurred. And it never will be because every American is a sinner. The Apostle Paul's greatest dream was that people around the world and across time would have an ever-increasing knowledge of Christ's love for them that would not be complete until their knowledge matched the fullness of God in heaven. You are the realization of Paul's prayer here in Ephesians. You are so ridiculously, lavishly blessed, that not even an eternity will be enough time for us to fully thank our God for all he has done for us. As we sing in one of our hymns,
When we've there then thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

No wonder that Paul simply erupts with praise as he concludes his profound prayer (:20,21), "**Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine** [Even your wildest dream come true is simplistically easy for God who has already done far greater things as he crushed the devil and reversed death through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.], **according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations** [That includes you.], **for ever and ever! Amen.**" Like the bridegroom in Cana, God has blessed you more than you could hope for or imagine. You are God's own dear child. You are saved. Alleluia! Amen.