

Today's message is more of a prayer than it is a message. It's a request for God to do something. And so today is more about hearing the prayer, so that we can then know the sort of prayer that we can pray, but also so we can expect to see the prayer answered. I hope when you pray, you look for answers to prayer.

So, because it's a prayer, let's begin with prayer:

Our Heavenly Father,

from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

¹⁶ *We pray that out of Your glorious riches,
You may strengthen us with power
through Your Spirit in our inner being,*

¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.*

And I pray that we, being rooted and established in love,

¹⁸ *may have power, together with all the saints,
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of
Christ,*

¹⁹ *and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—
that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
And help us to understand this.*

Amen.

Last week, we discussed what it means to be a minister of the Gospel. And I hope you haven't forgotten already, but basically, I'm not the only minister here. I am happy to be known as "a minister of the Gospel", when you understand, that you **also**, are a minister of the Gospel.

To be a minister, means that we are servants. We are servants of Christ. And none of us **deserve** to **be** a minister for Christ – none of us **are** good enough – none of us **are** adequate. None of us **are** trained well enough – none of us **are** smart

enough, or special enough to be a minister... It is only by the grace of God, that He makes any of us, a minister.

And we finished off last week, by saying V7 together, And I asked, "Who agrees with this? Who believes this?"

Will you say it with me again?

V⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

So we all said that together, and I think we meant it. And as I finished the message, I asked for one of **you** ministers to volunteer, to pray for us, in response to the message.

And there was a very long silence, And I suspect there were various thoughts going through people's minds:

- Maybe "I'm not confident enough to pray in front of people"
- Maybe "I think I understood the message, but what if I didn't? What if I've got it all muddled up in my head, and I pray for the wrong thing?"
- Maybe "I'll leave that for the spiritual people – I'm more practical".
- Maybe "He's wanting one of the adults to do that – I'm too young."
- Maybe "No way" or "I'm too scared"
- Maybe "Golly, it's been quiet for a long time. I'll count to 30, and if no one else starts by then, then I'll do it: 1... 2.....3.....4"
- Maybe this was going through your head "....." "Why's it all quiet? What are we waiting for?????"

And then Nerina got up – our minister for prayer, and Nerina prayed.

But after that, we had another time of prayer, and I was so pleased that a number of you prayed.... And I hope I don't embarrass him, but Scott prayed something, which is important. We'd all just recognised that we're all ministers, but there was obviously something else needed, for us to make the connection to God's power. For a while, it looked like no one was going to step up and minister to us in prayer...

And I'm a bit deaf, and my memory's not much chop, but I think Scott prayed that God would give us strength to be the ministers that God has called us to be – we need strength Lord – give it to us.... And that prayer, is very much like the prayer that Paul prayed, that we read just now.

It is by God's grace, that He makes us His ministers. And it is by God's **power**, that we can ever be of any use as ministers. And so when Paul prayed for the Ephesians, he prayed that God would grant them strength with power through His spirit.

Now, look at V16. In what way does Paul pray for us to be strengthened?????.... He's not praying for physical strength; he's not praying for mental strength; he's not praying for strength of patience or for psychological strength..... – Although all these forms of strength may follow.... He prays for a strengthening, with the Power of the Holy Spirit, **in our inner being**....

Here. A strengthening of our heart. A strengthening of the inner man – or the inner woman – a strengthening of our inner

being. And I think a few of us realised last week, that we need that.

Paul's prayer, is both Christ centred, and love focused. And that shouldn't surprise us, because the whole message of the cross is Christ centred and love focused. And our calling as ministers, is Christ centred and love focused.

Let me share something with you:

- If I have trouble worshipping, I haven't so much got a worship problem – I've got a love problem. If I'm overflowing with love for God, worship will just happen.
- If I have trouble praying, I haven't so much got a prayer problem – I've got a love problem. If I love God, I'm going to want to spend time with Him, and communicate with Him.
- If I have trouble making time in my day to read God's word – I haven't got a scheduling problem – I've got a love problem. The more I love God, the more I want to know Him and the more I'll love His word.
- If I have trouble with evangelism – I haven't got an evangelism problem – I've got a love problem. If I truly loved my neighbour, and I knew they were going to hell, you wouldn't be able to shut me up – I'd just have to tell them about Jesus and the love and saving grace of God.
- If I have trouble with giving to the poor – I haven't got a generosity problem – I've got a love problem. If I truly loved the poor, could I ever let a child starve to death, while I have more than I need, but not as much as I want?

- If you find that you don't have the strength to be the minister that God has called you to be.... You don't so much have a strength problem, as you do a love problem...

And as Paul prays this prayer for us, I soon realise, "I don't have a shortage of power – I have a shortage of love."

Both the US and Australia are in a pretty big dilemma at the moment. The last few years we've been spending far more than what we've been earning. And our defence budgets have been getting cut. But in the world that we live in, we realise we've got to spend money on defence, otherwise we'll become weak, and vulnerable. And so we have to pull in our belts in other areas, so we can continue to buy jets and helicopters and ships. Because nationally, defence spending gives strength.

Then when it comes down to a personal level, fitness & skills gives strength. And on a psychological level, self-confidence gives strength....

But God's economy is very different to the world's economy. In God's economy, love is the source of strength. Love is the source of power.

Let's look at the cross: Love is the source of the strength that held Christ to the cross. It was never a few 6-inch spikes of iron that held Christ to the cross – as if iron spikes could ever hold down the one who created billions of tonnes of iron ore deposits and gathered them together in various spots on the globe....

Spikes of iron could never hold Christ to the cross... it was love... Love is **not** a source of weakness – love is **the** source of strength.

Let me put it in practical terms for you: You know, that really difficult person you have to deal with, and you go “Lord, give me strength!!!”... you don’t need strength – you need love... Strength can only help you to put up with somebody for a little while longer. But love, like God’s love, endures forever.

As Paul describes Christ living in our inner being – dwelling in our hearts through faith – he’s describing something – he describes it as **being rooted and grounded in love**.

You know, some people make a commitment to Christ out of fear. They come to understand that Christ died for their sins. They don’t want to go to hell, so they confess their sins and receive forgiveness. And they become a disciple of Christ, all out of fear – And they just know in their minds “Well if I don’t follow Jesus, well I’m doomed to hell, aren’t I.”

Some people follow Christ out of duty. “I believe God exists, and it’s my duty to go to church.” It’s my duty, to bring my children up in the Christian faith. It’s my duty to teach Sunday School, or to go to Bible Study, or to lead worship, or pray, or whatever. It’s my duty – that’s just what I have to do – my family’s always done it... God’s done so much for me. Now I owe it to Him to do it back for Him – it’s my duty....

But Paul’s prayer, is something that takes us way beyond fear or duty. His prayer is not that we would be rooted or

grounded in fear or duty, but in love. God wants us to love Him. God wants us to be filled with love, for Him and for others. He wants us to be filled – not with human love, but with perfect love....

And you **might** be here today, out of fear... You might be here out of duty... And you know it... How do we move from fear or duty, to being grounded and rooted in love?????

Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they, with all the saints (that's us), would **have strength to comprehend ... the breadth and length and height and depth** of Christ's love, (not that they would feel it {because feelings come and go}, but they would comprehend it; that they would understand it; that they would know it)... ¹⁹ **and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

To be filled with all the fullness of God, is to be filled with the power of God; it's to be filled with the strength of God; it's to be filled with the gifts of God; with the Spirit of God.... **And** it is to be filled with the **love** of God... and where does it come from???? By knowing God's love..

We love, because God loved us first.

And the better that we can understand and comprehend the love of God, the more that God fills us with His perfect love and His strength.

In John's letters, we find a disciple of Jesus, who's focus is on love. Let me read you some of 1 John 4

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his

brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Do you get what John's saying here? We love, because God loved us first. As we experience the love of God, and draw on the love of God, and as we are filled with the love of God.... You'd be amazed – the power; the motivation; the strength ; the yearnings of the Spirit.... that are produced by love...

I saw a movie the other night – a child went missing. And his mother, driven by love, never gave up.

If your Christian life is driven by fear, or duty, or by anything else, I urge you to turn your heart and your mind, to experience the love of God – to be filled with the love of God.

If as a disciple and minister of Jesus, you feel you lack power or strength, I urge you to turn your heart and your mind, to be filled with the love of God. And filled with love, that's the source of power and strength.

Do you want to get your priorities right? Well become Christ centred, and love focused.

Let's pray

Our Heavenly Father,

from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

¹⁶ *We pray that out of Your glorious riches,*

You may strengthen us with power

through Your Spirit in our inner being,

¹⁷ *so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.*

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to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of
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¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—
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Amen.*