

The Cosmic Christ

by David McElrea

The sermon emphasizes the importance of being filled with God's fullness and being strengthened in our hearts so that we can comprehend God's love and be a beacon of God's kingdom.

Duration: 19:59

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 3:4, Ephesians 3:14-21

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the book of Ephesians, specifically focusing on chapters one to three and chapters four to six. The first three chapters highlight the cosmic and dynamic nature of the church, with angels and heavenly beings recognizing the glory and wisdom of God through the church. The last three chapters show what this looks like in practical terms, emphasizing the importance of walking in truth, loving one another, and turning away from darkness. The speaker emphasizes that our daily lives and interactions are a reflection of God's kingdom, and that Jesus is not just a spiritual bandaid for our individual troubles, but the one who restores and unites all things under his will.

Transcript

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated.

Well, our text this morning is going to be from our epistle reading, Ephesians chapter three, verses four, 14 through 21. This is one of the greatest prayers recorded in Holy Scripture, and it is actually the hinge upon which the book of Ephesians turns. In chapters one to three, just as a reminder, Paul gives us an incredible overview of the cosmic dimensions of our salvation, a salvation that is wrought in eternity past and will be fulfilled and completed in eternity future, a salvation that embraces not only Jew but Gentile, that encompasses all of creation.

Now, it's worth remembering this, and this is why it's such a wonderful book. Often our default is to look at Jesus as a spiritual band-aid for whatever troubles we're going through. Yes, we know that he's our Savior.

We know that he died for our sins, but often we limit it to what he is doing for us as individuals, whereas Paul reminds us through the Holy Spirit that God's eternal purposes have always been to gather up, to unite all things together around and under Christ. Christ himself is not only the origin of creation and its Redeemer. He is the one who restores it, all things being lined up in harmony with his will.

It's a magnificent image he gives us. It's an image of Christ drawing the church up into the heavenly realms, seating us with him at the right hand of the Father. It's an image of God filling all things through his church.

We see angels and archangels and even principalities and powers who are beholding what God is doing in and through the church and recognizing the glory and the wisdom of God. That's the first three chapters. Cosmic, dynamic, just incredible.

The last three chapters, chapters four through six, answer the question, well, what does this look like on the ground? Because that is a little bit daunting. It's a bit bracing and, well, it's hard to get our heads around the first three chapters in a way. Chapters four through six show us what it looks like.

It looks like a church that is walking in the way of truth, a church that loves its members, not just in word, but in deed. It looks like a people who are turning away from works of darkness and who are embracing and walking in the way of light, in purity, in humility before God and with each other. It looks like husbands and wives walking in step, loving one another.

It looks like children and parents in healthy relationship, relationships that honor God. It looks like Christians in the workplace showing forth God's kingdom there in the way that they relate to one another, both in management, if you like, and also as employees. What it says is that through the church, through our daily lives, not just through our coming together to worship, but through our daily worship of honoring one another, of honoring those we meet with day by day and doing the mundane, everyday things there, our lives are transformed into beacons of God's kingdom.

The world is watching. Angels are watching and easy, right? No, and to top it off in Ephesians six, we find that there are forces, spiritual forces of darkness that are doing everything they can to stop us from fulfilling this call from being who God has made us to be. So that brings us to today's prayer, to today's prayer.

Ephesians three, verses 14 to 21. Very aptly, Paul prays that God would strengthen his church, right? What a calling we have. It's huge.

It reaches from heaven to earth. It encompasses every part of our human existence, and Paul prays for us with that in mind. It's not a prayer to make us feel daunted.

It's a prayer to encourage us, though, to build up our faith. The first thing I'd like you to notice is that this prayer, which Kerry read for us earlier and we'll look at again in a moment in parts, this prayer is very different from the prayers we often pray. Often, I don't know how it is with you, outside of liturgical prayer, we have times of intercession, but often our prayer defaults to, Lord, I pray that you would help me.

Get that job that I was looking for. Father, I pray that that raise I've been hoping for, it would come through. Pray that you would help me feel well.

I pray that, Lord, you'd give me a parking spot, right? And it's not wrong to bring all of our requests to God. But the thing is, we don't pray for enough. Our prayers are too, they lack ambition.

God wants so much more for us than just to smooth over our lives. He wants us to enter into the fullness of what he has called us into, what he's called us to be. And that's how Paul prays for us.

And it's a great guide for us as we pray day by day. Paul's going to the heart of it all. He is praying that the Ephesians and us as well, we could say, will have a genuine experience of God's presence and love in their innermost being.

He's praying for real inner change. Now, why is he praying for this? He's praying this prayer because we need changed hearts, all of us. Not just once upon a time, but day by day.

We need this constant inner renewal of our hearts, our souls, our minds. And Paul is praying that God would make this so. You see, our hearts are neither deep enough, nor clean enough, nor, in fact, big enough to encompass God's presence.

Paul is praying because he knows only God can do what he's asking to have done. Only God can do it. Now, the prayer itself, we're going to look at it as three petitions.

Three petitions. Firstly, Paul prays that the power of God would strengthen the Ephesians' hearts so that Christ may dwell in them. Secondly, that they would be strengthened so that they might know and grasp the love of Christ.

And thirdly, that they would be filled with the fullness of God. So, we're going to look at the first petition now. Paul writes, for this reason I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Now, before I go any farther, notice that the prayer is not that God would answer from his power, but that he would answer according to his power. How powerful is he? In accordance with that much power, Paul is praying.

So, it's a wonderful prayer, but it raises right off the bat a rather interesting question. Why is Paul praying for something that Christians are supposed to already have? Doesn't scripture teach us that we are not only in Christ, but that he is in us? And yes, it does. And yes, he is.

But we need to understand that Christ's indwelling is, again, not just a sort of a one-time thing. It's a matter of degrees. The word dwell, in verse 17, speaks of more than his mere presence in our hearts.

It carries the sense of full occupancy. Now, what do I mean? Sometimes we have guests in our home. And when they come, we want them to feel very much at home.

We'll often set aside the downstairs for their use. They're welcome to come upstairs, you know, make use of the kitchen, the living room, whatever. At the same time, though, and this may be the case for you, I imagine it is, there's kind of an unspoken agreement that there are some areas of the house that are a little bit private.

The master bedroom, you know, and so on. So, there are areas that we reserve a little bit, at least, for ourselves. Now, the problem is, when we start dealing with God, is we often treat him as though he's a guest.

Yes, he indwells us. But, you know, there are certain rooms that are kind of off limits. Perhaps we just don't really want him in there, because we want to keep control of those rooms.

Maybe we're a little bit ashamed of those rooms in our hearts. But for whatever reason, he's there, but he's there still. We're treating him as though he was a guest.

Rather than the Lord of the manor. Well, that's not how Christian life works. When Christ comes in, he doesn't come in as a guest to go only where you'll allow him.

He comes to reign over your heart and mine. He comes to live out his life in our lives as master and as Lord. Now, that's where faith and the strengthening of God's Spirit comes into play.

The indwelling of Christ is so wonderful, it is so glorious, and it can be so overwhelming that our hearts can't actually take it. We need God to strengthen our hearts. We need him to come in and soften them, to make them tender, to enable them to expand to the degree that they can actually contain the glory of Christ within us.

Because that is what we were made for. To be the dwelling place of Christ by his Spirit. Isn't that amazing? So, Paul prays that God would strengthen our hearts.

And in the second petition, he says that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength again to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Well, how broad then is Christ's love for us? Well, it's wide enough to encompass you and me and even the worst offender. Paul knows this with a deep sense of his own ill standing before God, before he was called.

He had been a persecutor of the church. He had tried to drive it out of existence. And yet, he met this incredible grace of God that would actually encompass him, not only forgive him, but call him to the ministry of the apostolate, to send him out and use him for the glory of God's kingdom.

That is how broad it is to encompass all of us. How long is his love? Well, again, from the beginning of Ephesians, we see that if we want to talk in length, as far as chronology, from the very, even before the foundations of this earth, from eternity past, God looked down every possible future and saw you. He chose you, and he sent his son to die for you, and he poured out his spirit into your heart.

And looking down through to eternity future, the Spirit himself is a seal guaranteeing you of the inheritance that he's called you to, an inheritance to share with Christ, reigning over all of creation to the glory of God the Father. That's how long it is. How high is it then? Well, remember again that Christ lifted us up and seated us by his side at the Father's throne.

If you belong to Jesus, you have been raised up to the heights of heaven, to the highest place that you can be. How deep is it? Jesus came down from heaven to the cross for our sakes, and there he experienced the very depths of suffering and of darkness, again, so that he might lift us up. Brothers and sisters, this is the love that anchors us.

This is the love that is able to lift us out of our self-absorption, our fear. As we know and as we experience this love, we are set free to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We're set free to love our neighbors as ourselves because we know what love is.

And as much as we meditate on this love, as much as we sound it out in this age, we're never going to come to the end of it. Actually, even in eternity, we'll never be able to sound it out completely. We can never exhaust it because it goes on forever.

And the third petition, finally. Paul prays all of these prayers, really, with this final petition in mind. Verse 19, he prays that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Listen to it again, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Not some of the fullness of God, but all of it. What does that look like? Well, on the one hand, we could compare it to other characters, characteristics, if you like, or dominant forces in our hearts.

If we're filled with anger, it means we're controlled by it. It shapes our thinking, our emotions, and finally, it shapes our character. We become angry people.

If we're filled with lust, we're ruled by lust. It shapes how we view the world, how we view other people or things. If we're filled with self-pity, that will also shape us and put its mark on our character.

All of these things dominate us. They change us. God wants us to be filled with His fullness, filled with Him.

And He's the only one who is able to actually overwhelm all of these other things that would control us. It means that, but it means much more as well. God's presence is more than an attitude.

It's more than thinking about Him. It is God Himself indwelling us. God Himself filling us with His own life, His own goodness, His own power.

And we need that. We need God to pervade us. We need Him to permeate our lives because, again, this is what we were made for.

And it is as God does this that we begin to shine as lights in this world. It's where we become who we were made to be again. Now, the only thing that gets in the way of this is our unwillingness to ask.

Now, it might seem like it's quite a lot to ask. It might seem like it's almost more than we could imagine or think. Paul is way ahead of us.

Notice how he ends his prayer in verse 20. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever. You cannot out-ask God when it comes to things like this.

He is inviting us to ask Him because this is His will for us. And we know that whatever we ask according to His will, He will answer. God wants us to be rooted in the love of Jesus Christ.

He wants us to know His love. He wants us to be strengthened in our hearts. And He wants to fill our hearts both as individuals and as His church.

Without this experience of Christ's life within us, without this experience of fullness, our faith inevitably begins to dry up or out. It becomes a bit of a barren landscape for us. Instead of joyfully serving Him, it becomes a duty.

It becomes tiresome. It becomes a great weight upon our shoulders. But that is not what Jesus has called us to.

Remember, His yoke is easy, His burden is light. What was His yoke and His burden? It was love for the Father. It was obeying His Father and doing His Father's will out of sheer love and joy.

This is what we're called into, to embrace this whole life of discipleship, this whole life of being witnesses for God's kingdom and for Christ out of this sense of joy and love and from the overflow of our own hearts as God fills us. So, God says to us, come be filled. Paul prays that we would be filled.

And can I invite you over these weeks, make this your prayer day by day. Pray it for yourself. Pray it for your brothers and sisters here in St. Matthew's and for the church around the world.

What would it be like? What would this world be like if we all prayed that prayer? God has chosen us to be the earthly body of His Son. He has chosen us to be filled with all of His fullness so that through us He might fill the earth with His glory. And as He shows forth His glory in us, again angels will fall down to worship Him, demons will despair, and God will be glorified in His church.

Amen. Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26924.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/david-mcelrea/the-cosmic-christ/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net