

Filled With All Fulness

by Peter Masters

This sermon emphasizes the believer's boldness and access to God through Christ, highlighting the importance of prayer, humility, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life.

Duration: 48:21

Scripture: Ephesians 3:12, Ephesians 3:16-19

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Divine Love"

Description

This sermon delves into the progression in the life of a believer, focusing on the development and advance in the divine life. It emphasizes the blessings of prayer, the access believers have to God through Christ, the importance of boldness and confidence in approaching God, and the continuous strengthening with might by the Spirit in the inner man. The sermon highlights the deep love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, the breadth, length, depth, and height of His love, and the ultimate goal of being filled with all the fullness of God.

Transcript

Our subject is filled with all fullness, and just by way of introduction, in the course of our series of studies in Paul's great letter to the Ephesians, we come to this twelfth verse of chapter three, and the verses before us have a kind of development in them, a picture of progress in the life of the believer. Just to note that in verse twelve we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him, but by verse nineteen, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God, and between those two verses there are all the marks and the indications of development or advance or progress in the divine life. So it's a passage that's so vital and important for all of us, but as we come into it, we should note some of the features of this twelfth verse, in whom, in Christ that is, last mentioned in the previous verse, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

Boldness, and the word boldness, well the Greek word is significant in that it has to do with speech, outspokenness. Boldness, the translation is perfectly correct, it's used for boldness, for courage, but literally it is about outspokenness, and it's very beautiful, the way this word fits. We come into the presence of God as believers in prayer with great forwardness, uninhibited, unimpeded, it's a tremendous blessing of prayer.

The unbeliever cannot do this, but if we've believed in Christ, and we've repented of our sin, and we've yielded our lives and our souls to him, and he's changed us and blessed us and made us his people, then

we have boldness, outspokenness, and nothing can prevent us. Access, which literally means freedom of approach, this is a tremendous blessing for Christian people. Doesn't sin hinder me? May it be that I've sinned against the Lord, and I'm cast down in shame, and I feel how can I approach God? Does this hinder me? Can I still be outspoken? Yes indeed, I will rush into the presence of God.

I will call upon my Father in the name of Jesus Christ. Even my sin does not impede me if I come with repentance, asking for cleansing, because in my mind's eye I see him, the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, hanging there on Calvary's cross, and he bore my sin away, and he took away the punishment so that I could have unrestricted access into the presence of the Father. So always we come boldly, and we cry out for forgiveness, for blessing, for help, whatever our need.

And this is the truth of verse 12. In Christ, because of what he's done, by the faith of him, through his atoning death, we have boldness, outspokenness, and liberty of approach to God our Father. Can our feelings hinder us? It may be that I feel spiritually cold.

It may be that the feeling system is not cooperating, and I do not feel my joy and peace as a believer, and my assurance. Does this mean I cannot pray, because I do not feel his presence or his love? No. I still may come with boldness and call upon him, because if I only pray with my head as a believer, with my intellect, and my feelings won't work, he is still the same, and he hears me, and he receives me, and he blesses me, and I have total liberty of approach to him.

That is what Christ has purchased for me. So even my feelings will not hinder me, and certainly Satan cannot hinder me. And has God changed his heart? Has he become cool toward me? Will he not hear me? Is he going to change his mind, and not keep his promises? Impossible.

So in Christ, trusting in him, and his shed blood, and his having taken the punishment of sin for us, we have freedom of access, and we are outspoken in prayer. Not outspoken in the sense that we are confident, and flippant, and light, because we may be burdened with sin, and repenting, and coming to him for help urgently, but outspoken in the sense that we know we will be heard. It is his promise.

It is what he has accomplished for us, and we trust in Christ. So these are great words for us, in whom in Christ we have boldness, outspokenness, and freedom of approach. With confidence by the faith of him.

Now verse 13, the apostle says, wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. And he is referring back to the first verse, for this cause, for this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, he is a prisoner, he is in Rome, he writes from Rome, it is one of the prison epistles, he is there, really because he was preaching the gospel to Gentiles. But he doesn't want them to be concerned about him, and in this verse 13, wherefore I desire that ye faint not, you don't lose heart, because of my tribulations for you, my punishment, my imprisonment, my difficulties, why when you put them against the blessings and the benefits, what a ministry I've been called to, he's been saying, and Gentiles in so many places have been saved, vast numbers brought to Christ, and they have access into the presence of God, through conversion, which they never had before, and it is the will of God that his messengers should know these distresses, but the gains vastly outweigh any of the distresses.

He didn't think about himself, and what about us dear friends, when we're burdened or grieved or hindered or in difficulty of any kind, what about us? What counts is the work of God, and our witness, and our representing the King of Kings, and the work of our church, and prayer for the messengers, and for all who have opportunities, the Sunday school teachers, everyone, that souls may be saved, that people may be

brought into the Kingdom of God. We have another tragedy in our society today, well it is very sad and very tragic, but isn't it equally sad that the world has no answer to it, no gospel to proclaim, cannot speak about eternal life, and union with God, and a walk with God that will deliver people from despair and distress, and awful experiences. Oh friends, we have these things, and we have these blessings, we're not to be selfishly bowed down over much, by the way things affect us, but our minds and hearts are on the Kingdom, and the winning of souls, and here's the example of the Apostle, verse 13, wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

But verse 14, for this cause, see verse 1, for this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, and he's about to say, I pray for you, but he doesn't say it, and we have all those 13 verses of wonderful instruction and material by way of digression, and then verse 14, he returns to the point, for this cause, for this reason, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for this reason, well the reason's been given in the second chapter, for this reason, what's the reason that Paul prays, because the Ephesians have been saved, because they've been predestinated unto eternal life, that's what he's been saying, and in the course of time the Spirit of God has come, and illuminated them, and shown them the truth, and drawn them to Jesus Christ, and because now they're saved, for this cause, for this reason, I pray for you, says the Apostle, and how he prays, verse 14, I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I bow my knees, oh friends, does that mean that we must always kneel when we pray?

No, because in the prayers of the New Testament, different postures are suggested, and here the Apostle Paul certainly is kneeling as he prays, there is no specific position for prayer taught in the New Testament, but it is important whatever posture we take up, and however we prepare ourselves for prayer, that it is consistent with these things, humility, because kneeling is humble, humility is our approach before God, reverence is vital, kneeling is reverent, so are certain other postures, but this is the important thing, what is represented, reverence is vital, dependence upon God is vital too, and submission to God, all those things should characterize our prayers, humility, reverence, dependence, and submission to his will, and to his ways, and the Apostle here kneels in prayer,

let's look at verse 15, I want to come to the progression in a moment, but verse 15, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, for this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, there are some modern translations that put it this way, of whom every family, and that's ridiculous, that is total mistranslation, and why they do it we cannot fathom, but the majority and the traditional translation which is absolutely demanded by the context, and vital, is of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, and let's just draw a nugget of blessing from this, before we proceed, the whole family in heaven and earth, this is talking about people, people already in heaven, and people still on earth, who love the Lord, who are in the

family of the King of Kings, saved people, we are one great family, we are the family of Almighty God, the Heavenly Father, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth are named, this is a role, a list, a family, the list Paul has taught, the role goes back before time, to the electing love of God, the role consists of Jews and Gentiles, absolutely equal if saved in the mind and in the heart of God, this role unites heaven and earth, the true church on earth, those who are saved, and the people of God in heaven, all in the family, all equally loved, isn't it astonishing that we can say this, that you and me, we are loved by God the Father of the family, just as much as the Apostle Paul was loved, can you think of that, when you consider what he did, when you consider all that he bore,

when you consider his unending constant labour of love for souls at great cost, and yet there is no difference whatever between the extent of the love of God for you and for me, as for someone like the Apostle, or any other martyr, isn't it tremendous, we are children in the one great family of people redeemed by Christ in heaven and in earth, equally secure, equally loved, equally heard, the prayers of the Apostle were heard on high, and our prayers are heard on high, and there are things that happen on earth, and people are saved, and we are blessed, because of our prayers, and there are people in heaven you know, whose prayers are still being answered, the prayers that is they prayed on earth, there are people who have gone to heaven, and when they prayed on earth, they prayed that the

metropolitan tabernacle would continue, perhaps they prayed until Christ would come again, and that people would be blessed, and successive generations would be brought in, they prayed those prayers on earth, and their prayers are still being answered, there are people yet unsaved, and their parents have gone to heaven, as saved people, and their prayers for their offspring have not yet been answered, so we are linked, just as our prayers are being answered, so their prayers, prayed when they were still on earth, are still to be answered in many cases, we are one family, and we will, God will hold open time until all the redeemed are brought in, and only then, when the role of the elect is completely won, will Christ come, and all those saints who are with Christ in heaven, will come with

him, and we will all receive our resurrection bodies together, they will not be perfected without us, they rejoice in glory now, but they await the resurrection body with us, one family, Jew, Gentile, those in heaven, those on earth, all equally loved, all equally blessed, and the apostle brings this in, I bow my knees unto the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, now listen to this, verse 16, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, let's call it stage one of the great blessing, on the way to knowing all the fullness of God, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, look at

this term, the riches of his glory, there is a blessing for us, all the strength of God is poured out and made available to us for our sanctification and our improvement, all the divine perfections, the riches of his glory, his power, the infinite power of God is stood by to help you and me, I'll apply this in a moment, the infinite knowledge of God, who best knows how to assist us and empower us and enable us, his wisdom, the holiness of God, his power, the infinite power of God is stood by to impart holiness to us, the love of God is stood by to bless us and to impart love to us, these are amazing things, the happiness of God, happiness is an infinite eternal attribute of God and his mighty happiness is stood by to be imparted in measure and to us and to bless us, look at the term, I

cannot overstate it, according to the riches of his glory, now dear friends, all this power is available to strengthen us with might by his spirit in the inner man, which means the mind and the affections, the inner man can be strengthened, let me put it in this way, does this mean that sanctification and advance in the Christian life is an automatic process, God will do it, he will just pour out mighty power and everything will just happen for me, well no, that's not what the apostle is implying, look for just a moment at chapter 6 and verse 10, finally my brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, but the Greek indicates this, finally my brethren you be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, there is something for us to do and the mighty power of God will

be with us as we seek to do it, we are saved people, it is not the way to be saved, you can only be saved by grace, only by coming as a helpless lost sinner and doing nothing towards your salvation, but repenting

of your sin and yielding your life to God, but once you are saved, how to walk as a Christian, there is much for us to do, but as we do it, the mighty power of God is ours to help us and enable us, so in chapter 6 and verse 11 the apostle says, put on the whole armour of God, verse 12, for we wrestle, you need to wrestle, you've got an effort to make, let me go back to chapter 3 and this amazing 16th verse, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, I give you a feeble illustration, in the flats where I live and in the garage, there are two ladies, I know it's

ladies have these contraptions, I've seen them riding them, have very beautiful electric motorised bicycles, they are very smart ones, not like the things they used to make years ago, they are not mopeds, you don't just sit on them and go, and do it all for you, these ladies have to pedal, and they are very cultured ladies, and they pedal elegantly along, but I know how it's supposed to be, you go up a hill, and instead of having to pedal terribly hard, the machine takes over and comes in and gives you assistance, you stop pedalling, the machine will stop, you've got to do something, but as you do it, instead of puffing and panting and heaving up that hill, in comes the assistance, I think it's a wonderful illustration of this verse, we have got to act and strive for holiness, but listen

to the encouragement, verse 16, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, all his mighty attributes, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in your mind, and in your affections and your feelings, what strength, what power is this magnificent, dear friends, many of you know about this, and you've proved this through many years, let me speak to the young, to young believers, you come to pray, and sometimes it's very distressing, and your mind thinks of anything but prayer, and things don't go well, things that have engaged your attention, or excited you through the day, or interest you, in fact they all flood into your mind because it's time to pray, and they're tremendous distractions, and you beat them aside, and as you come to pray, suddenly you're overwhelmed by

tiredness, and that hinders you from praying, and there's one distraction and another, so you don't pray, you've found the Lord, you've trusted in him, you've given him your life, you've been born again by the power of the spirit, and now you haven't prayed, and it happens the next day, and you begin to wonder, the devil comes and whispers in your ear, are you saved at all, look at you, and you think I'm never going to keep this up, this is hopeless, I find devotion so unattractive, you say to yourself, I find it such a discipline, and I get washed away, listen friends, look at this verse, all the mighty power of God is with you, even if you forget to ask for his help, if you just but get on your knees, and push aside the distractions, and call upon his name, and begin to worship him, use

a list if it helps you, and refer to it, pray for the people you need to pray for, thank him for all that he's done, call upon him, as you do it, like that bicycle, the blessing of God comes, and you begin to realise you're in his presence, and you find your voice, and your prayer takes flight, and you're in the presence of your God, and day after day, if you will only make it a discipline, and become a creature of habit, and call upon your Lord and Saviour, he will bless you, in will come that engine of divine power, that's what the apostle prays for, that as you live for him, you may know this tremendous privilege, the undivided infinite power of God by his Spirit, your secret indwelling divine guest, will strengthen you, and help you, and speed you forward, that's the Christian life,

how can we despair, when we know that he is with us, in such power, read the scripture, pray to him every day, hear the word, not just once a week, come in as often as you can, hear his word, publicly proclaimed, and he will lift your soul, you're about to react badly to something, at college, at work, something aggravating, hold yourself in check, you will not have to do it all together with your own strength, because

as you say, I represent Jesus Christ, I am not going to react in an unsavoury way, God will help you, all the divine power is available to assist you, and you will check your words, do you lose your temper, pray to God for help, and when the moment comes, when you might just lose hold of your temper, in an awful or a disgusting way, take yourself in hand, if the devil says

you're not going to succeed, this provocation is too great, your temper is too volatile, ignore him, because as you check your words, and hold yourself in, even if you've forgotten to pray specifically for help, because you seek to honour him and control yourself, the infinite power of God is on your side, and later on you'll be saying to yourself, I have controlled these sins, I have been mightily blessed, but before you get proud, remember, he has been with you, he has helped you to overcome, he has done it, this is the Christian life, and this is what the apostle is referring to, are you tempted, you've got the catalogue open, I want the biggest and the best, devoting your time, beginning to revel in things, beginning to be covetous, pull yourself away, so much time is enough for your

home, so much to smarten up, but don't give it your life or your mind, and as you refrain from things that may have been a sore temptation before you were saved, you have this benefit with you, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, and you prove him, are you nervous about mounting a witness, do you shy away, be bold, he will see you through, he will help you, that's the meaning of these glorious terms, and come back again and again and read this, I may be a feeble believer in Jesus Christ, but I read these words and how can I possibly fail to try when I read them that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, now look at verse

seventeen, now and only now that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, when we are trying, when we are living the life and praying for help, and he is giving it to us, then comes the privilege of verse seventeen, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith it's the next step, Christ will not dwell in our hearts by faith, so that we rejoice in him and know his nearness, if we are not attempting to ride the bike dear friends, and make the effort and obey his commandments, so we get started and then what does this mean that Christ may dwell in your hearts, well there are two aspects to this, the first Christ dwells in the hearts by his spirit of every believer, but you may not know he is there, but he possesses you, you are his, by the Holy

Spirit the indwelling guest of every believer, but that may not be something you are aware of, but you see there is another aspect to the indwelling of Christ, and it's different, he not only indwells as your owner by the Holy Spirit, but I hope he indwells as your conscious, conscious on your part, owner and Lord, the dream, the vision of your life, the object of all you do, put it another way, a covetous man has money in his heart, he dreams about money, he thinks about money, he plans to get money, it's money dwells in his heart, in his imagination, in his mind, it's what excites him, now here is the sense of Christ's indwelling which is referred to here by faith, the Christian believer by contrast, Christ dwells in his heart, Christ fills his imagination, Christ is the end point of my

life, the point to which I move, Christ and his ministry in the world and what he does for souls, Christ and serving him and knowing more of him and proving his love and his power, this engages my attention, fills my mind, this is my vision, what I think of, what I love, oh says Paul, if you are living the life and you are seeking to serve him, you have his mighty power to help you and then he becomes the chief focus of your interest and your desire and whatever you look at in life, it's connection with Christ is what matters, now that Christ may dwell in your heart, fire your imagination, occupy your feelings, fill your plans and your

hopes, that's the way, that's what we want, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted like a tree and grounded like a building in

love, there is the mature tree with deep, deep roots and the tornado comes and cannot tear it from the ground, there is the building of secure foundation and the flood comes and cannot reduce it to rubble and sweep it away, oh if Christ engages all our hearts, not our homes, constantly dreaming for better, that's the worldling, not entertainments, not making an idol of sports or entertainments or trivial celebrities, that's the world, not being hooked on earthly things and concerns, my lot in life, my comforts, my promotion, what people think of me, Christ is all to me, that's what's being spoken of here, well nothing, I won't allow him to be taken away from me, yes I need something new, how much thought am I going to give to it, too much thought so that it becomes everything and Christ

is taken away, the tree uprooted by the tornado, the building not properly foundationed, torn away by the flood water, no, says the apostle, live the life, get on the bicycle, pedal those pedals, keep your heart, keep, check your tendency to sin, keep your devotions and let Christ enter your heart, follow his interests, follow the kingdom of God, make your church and his service everything to you, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able, verse 18, to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, what remarkable words these are, let me tell you about the translation in verse 18, may be able to comprehend with all saints, well literally you could translate it, may be able to appropriate or seize,

the Greek word is more in that direction, you may be able to get hold of, now our translators have gone for the word comprehend, tipping it much more to the understanding and they're absolutely right, they've got it perfectly, oh friends this is another stage, if you live for Christ and you fight your sin and you learn the scripture and worship him with all your heart and then you're not only strengthened with might to do that but you find Christ becomes your vision and all your interest, well then you begin to comprehend more and more his amazing love and his work and what he's done for you, verse 18 may be able to comprehend, to embrace, to grasp, with all saints, no elitism here, you know in all the charismatic movement fuss there are people who love to be considered especially gifted,

especially this, Christian life isn't like that, no says the apostle, coming to the stage where you grasp the love of Christ is for all of us, even the youngest, may be able to grasp with all other saints, it's open to every one of us, what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ, which passive knowledge I've hardly left myself enough time to deal with it, the breadth of the love of Christ, it is so broad, he loves save Jews, he loves save Gentiles, he loves the young, he loves the old, he loves people no matter what their abilities, he loves all his people equally, the breadth of the love of Christ, he loved us enough to die for us, to save us, to bring us to heaven, love in salvation, love in keeping care, he keeps us, he loves us enough to

discipline us when we need it, he loves us so much he has great patience towards us, in all our wanderings and all our falls, he loves us in the plans he makes for us, he loves us in giving us all equal opportunities of instrumentality in his service to other souls, the breadth of his love, the length of his love, the duration of it, he loves us as young believers, he carries the lambs in his arms, he loves us as we fail, he loves all his people so richly and so constantly, he loves the church through the running centuries of time, the length, the duration of the love of Christ for his people, his love is unfading, his love is unending, we ever learn the riches of his love and its everlasting, it will carry us through death and into eternity, and the depth of the love of Christ, how

deep, whoever would have imagined that he would come down from heaven to the depths of humiliation and the indescribable agonies of Calvary for creatures like us, we cannot understand the depths of his love, that he would take the eternal weight of punishment for his people, the depths of his love, he loves me when I abandon him and brings me back, he loves me in the depths of human experience and grief, whatever, the love of Christ is there for his people, and the height of his love we can learn so much, the measure of his kindness, the heights of his affection, the affection of Christ for each one of his people, one day to be felt when we go to glory, we shall be staggered and amazed at the realization of the affection of Christ, I know he has pity for me, I understand in a way that he

loves me, but I'll never know until then the depths of his affection for an unworthy creature, the transforming power of the love of Christ, the towering height of his love, and then at death the height of his love will operate and I shall be instantly made pure as pure, and one day receive a resurrection body all through the mighty love of Christ.

We have just a few moments to close, verse 19, and to know, to know it more and more, the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Of course we know the love of Christ from his work, from how much he did for us, and his sacrifice on Calvary, we know the love of Christ when at times we're aware of it, when he somehow infuses a realization into our hearts and lifts up the soul and blesses us and gives us joy and peace in believing, but what's this, these remarkable words, to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

As we close friends, let me suggest some things to you. How can the love of Christ be known which passes knowledge? Well it passeth knowledge first briefly in the sense that it's beyond our expectation. We say with a queen of old the half was not told me.

I never realized how much I would be supported. I never realized how much I would be forgiven. I never realized how gently I'd be brought back from foolish wonderings.

I never realized the half of his constant attentive love and care for his people. It passeth knowledge because at times we are upheld beyond any conceivable measure and you won't have been long in the Christian life before you've had this experience that you could not have done something and you could not have gone through something as you did without the strengthening and the enabling given to you by God in answer to prayer. Upheld beyond measure sometimes.

It passeth knowledge. It passeth knowledge in that it's only known to save people. We cannot explain it to others.

It's an experience only had by those who walk with the Lord. The love of Christ which fills and blesses and sustains and empowers. It passeth knowledge because it cannot be entirely known on earth.

We can know so much but the day is coming when our realization of the love of Christ will be so magnified in glory and we shall register it and measure it and know it. It passeth knowledge because there's always more to tell on earth. And every believer can say what I'm now about to say.

That there are aspects of the love of Christ which I could tell you today which I couldn't have told you last year. It passeth knowledge. It's constantly being discovered and explored and we shall explore it for all eternity and in conclusion then we shall be to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

The second part of verse 19 that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. That surely refers back to verse 16 that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory. That power that will be behind you as you strive.

That ye might be filled verse 19 with all the fullness of God. He will impart to you just something of his own mighty attributes. These are amazing things.

So dear friends get on that powered bicycle, resist temptation, serve the Lord, order your priorities and go to prayer, take in hand your besetting sins and as you do so, stage 1, stage 2, stage 3, you'll prove the Lord and know his goodness and his mighty love.

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