



**Series:** Ephesians - Life in Christ

**Date:** September 10, 2023

**Speaker:** Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

**Text:** Ephesians 3 - Experiencing the Power of God

### Introduction

Good Morning Mercy Family! Hey I want to say good morning Providence Rd! Good Morning Mercy Northeast! And for the first time ever let me say GOOD MORNING and happy launch day to MERCY UNION COUNTY!!!

- Thanks to the core group there (many with us from the start). Can't wait to get down there and preach on a Sunday soon.

If you are new with us, let me catch you up and welcome you in. We are one church in three locations and today is Mercy's 8th birthday! We are a 3rd grader now. Pretty exciting. Sometimes we take that for granted. This week though Courtney got into a conversation with someone who knows about church planting but didn't know about us, and when

Courtney told him we moved to Charlotte 8 years ago to plant a church the guy said, "Oh is the church still there?" Yup. Never take it for granted. Happy Birthday!

We are theming this birthday "Launch Day" because we are launching out, taking a bold step of faith, launching into the mission God has called us on as a church. This isn't just the launch of a campus and the launch of new worship gatherings, it's the launch of a new season for Mercy Church. We spent the first half of the year in prayer saying "Speak Lord, Your servant is listening" and now we are taking what we believe is the next step God has called us to. A step to move for the mission. So we started additional services and a whole bunch of you volunteered to serve. Praise God for you!

Hey, I want to take a second and say thank you to those of you who have been serving your church so faithfully. **So if you were already on a serve team (and I recognize some may be out serving so I'll do this again each service) before this weekend will you stand and let us say thank you?** Ok now if you are in the process of joining a ministry team, serving for the first time today or you are going to be soon will you stand WITH them? Praise God.

Many of you are new to Mercy and we say welcome. We are glad you are here. No matter where you are with God we have



a saying around here - we help people take their next step in following Jesus. So, if you are investigating faith or maybe coming back to faith OR, have been walking with Jesus for a long time and you are just new to us...we believe God has a next step for you and we hope we can help you take it.

This is a little longer introduction because it's a big day for us so thanks for the grace. Let me tell you where we are going in our sermons real quick then we'll get into today's passage.

**Next week we will interrupt Ephesians for a 6 week sermon series called "It's Hard to Believe." This is a series of sermons where we address some of the common objections people have to believing in Christianity.** The goal is to partner with you AND to equip you as you have conversations with non-Christians about your faith. So when the subject of **gender identity** comes up - I want you to feel equipped from God's word to lovingly & thoughtfully engage it. Or, when someone says they were **hurt by the church**. Or that it's hard to believe in a **book** written so long ago. We will address 6 common objections and I think it will be a great series to invite non-Christians to. Then, after those 6 weeks, back into Ephesians. Which by the way is where we are today.

Today we are going to look at Ephesians chapter 3. Our main focus will be the back half of the chapter where we will encounter Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church. And God in

His wisdom and mercy put this prayer here for us TODAY and it is powerful. **Paul gets on his knees and asks God to let the church to experience the power of the faith it professes.**

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. 16 I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, 19 and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us — 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. -- Ephesians 3:14-21

We need to hear this prayer and we need to pray this prayer. This is our main idea for today. It's a prayer. Really just me trying to summarize those verses so if you want the full main idea just read those verses. But here's my attempt to summarize this so you can pray it this week for yourself and our church:

**"God let us experience the power of the faith we profess"**



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### Intellectual vs Experiential acknowledgement

Right out of the gate there are a couple of groups I want to address. See, God gave us intellectual reasoning AND God gave us emotions. And yet because of a lot of historical things I don't have time to get into, those two things were separated in a lot of places in the church world. And so if you come in here today with a church background... that's not all of you but I recognize here in the south that's a good bit of you. It is likely that you come from a background that majored more on EITHER the intellectual side of faith or the experiential side of faith. Knowing God or Experiencing God. And because of sin and fear these camps often look at each other skeptically. Well, the reality is God never intended for these two to be separated. And today in Paul's prayer you will see a prayer for knowledge and experience. I'll go ahead and warn you. If you come from the more intellectual side, this may be uncomfortable for you. That's good. If you are always comfortable in church something is wrong. Now my pentecostal brothers and sisters may be like FINALLY. LET'S GO. But I want to remind you that this prayer comes on the heels of some of the richest theology anywhere in scripture. **We are not abandoning intellectual reasoning today, we are building upon it.** And those of you with no church background - Congratulations you will have an easier time with this than probably anybody else. Ha!

**Context:** 2.5 chapters about who we are in Christ. All theology w/ no real action steps other than believe. But chapter 4 starts with I URGE YOU TO WALK. To DO. **Knowing comes first, doing comes second. We walk FROM security in Christ not to gain it. We walk FROM acceptance by God not to earn it.** But then we do LIVE out our faith. God changes us, our priorities, our worldview and everything. That's chapters 4-6. And in between knowing God and living for God Paul drops this prayer that we would experience the POWER of GOD. **He prays for God to change them before he calls them to go change the world.**

And I think the reason our lives don't change and we don't impact the world around us is we MISS that **critical bridge between knowing God and living for God. It is experiencing the power of God.**

Our faith is not SIMPLY a set of facts to acknowledge. It is the invitation to a relationship with the one true GOD of the universe! And when a person encounters the fullness of **that** God, it should CHANGE everything about us. It should move us like nothing else. Not just move us intellectually OR emotionally but move us experientially - head & heart - in such a way that our lives are permanently different than before. And I confess it's going to be somewhat difficult to explain today but when we



do experience the power of our faith we will change. That's what Paul prays here. In fact here's how this prayer develops.

**When the church experiences the power of the faith it professes:**

- 1) Individual lives will be transformed the fullness of God
- 2) The Church will pray bigger prayers
- 3) The glory of God will resound into the church of tomorrow

Verses 14-19 are really about how we will be transformed. That's the individual experience. Then the last 2 verses talk about the Church praying bigger prayers and the glory of God resounding into the church of tomorrow

**Vs 14-19 - Individual lives will be transformed by experiencing the fullness of God.**

Let's get into this prayer. I want to start in verse 14 and quickly pivot back to the first 13 verses and I'll explain why.

**14 For this reason I kneel before the Father**

This is the second time Paul has said 'for this reason' in chapter 3. See chapter 3 opens with the same phrase but then Paul takes a 12 verse detour to make sure they know God is the one who put him on assignment to tell them this, that they remember the miracle it is that they, gentiles, have boldness & confident access to GOD.

**12 In him we have boldness and confident access through faith in him. -- Ephesians 3:12**

Paul is about to pray for them and he says, 'Listen, you have access to pray these same kind of big bold prayers.' And I need you to know that. Because when you leave today I want you to PRAY BOLDLY. I want you to pray for a gospel awakening in your own life that is carried to your family, to your apartment complex, neighborhood, to our community and all the way to Pakistan and Kabul and Mumbai and Pyongyang. YOU HAVE THE ACCESS, through faith in Christ, to go to the one who can make *that* happen.

**14 For this reason I kneel before the Father 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.**

Every family. This echoes back to chapter 2. Not just every Jewish family. EVERY family. Every person is made in the image of God and is named by God. He knows you. He claims you. What a thought. Even if no one in your family has no knowledge of God, God knows you. And He's put you here today in His divine plan so you can know Him. So you can meet Him. It's awesome. In fact this is one of the things that gives us confidence as we train up and send out missionaries to the most unreached peoples in the world. We, Mercy Church, are sending people to places where it is illegal to be a Christian. And to other places where the name of Jesus has not been uttered. Why? Because we believe we all are made in the



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image of God and are meant to know God through His son Jesus Christ. And we know that at the end of all days every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil 2.10-11).

Paul prays to the God who KNOWS and LOVES every person. To the God who has the power to answer his prayer and prays.

Then Paul prays for them to **experience the power of the faith they profess** and here's what it looks like to experience God, not just know about Him. Ya'll what he's praying for is for Christians to experience the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit God has given them. I'm going to highlight a couple of promises for us as we unpack this power.

**16 I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit,**

He starts by praying for power from the Spirit of God to give them deep internal strength. Strength not just of the body, but of the soul. He's praying that deep down in the center of their being God the Holy Spirit would send that power, the power that brought Jesus out of the grave, and THAT power would supply them strength to face whatever was coming at them.

**When we experience the power of our faith, we have inner strength no circumstance can shake.**

Paul doesn't pray for their circumstances to get easier. He doesn't. That's the beauty of this prayer. It is available for the church for all times. It's for you and I.

When life knocks you...Do you experience inner strength? And as a result peace? I'm telling you this isn't a small thing. Half of all Americans are experiencing anxiety right now at diagnosable levels.

And into that God offers us his very presence. Says I am quite literally Immanuel, God with you. And I want you to write it down and take note of it as a fact. Paul is praying God would let them experience something they already have. I want you to write verse 16 as a promise for you to take to the Lord when you pray this prayer from Ephesians 3.

**The Holy Spirit dwelling in me supplies soul strengthening power.**

And remember, this is something you already have. I have heard the power of God available to us in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit likened to an inheritance. Let's say your great aunt dies and leaves you 20 million dollars. You are now rich. Now you are a 3rd grade teacher on a 3rd grade teacher salary and you have student loans. Now let's say she leaves you that money but you NEVER draw from it. So you continue to barely make ends meet, eating ramen noodles and what not. You know the money is there, it's yours, it's available, but you don't



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touch it. We would all say - you are crazy. If such wealth is available to you why would you not draw on it? Put that wealth to work in a way that impacts your life and others.

And yet, Christian - this is the way so many of us operate when it comes to the power of God available to us through his holy spirit. We walk around with immeasurable power and rarely think to draw from it. And Paul is praying God would wake them up and unleash this wealth of power in their lives.

**17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love,**

Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. This is a continuation of how he talked about the church in chapter two. That the church is the dwelling place of God. Well now he's praying for each of them to **experience** the power of "Christ in you." And the means by which we experience the power of Christ dwelling in us is our continuing faith. The dwelling of Christ in our hearts (another word for inner being) and the exercise of faith are both ongoing. So when I get up in the morning and open up his word and read it, that is not an academic exercise, it is a FAITH exercise. TO say Jesus today I KNOW you are with me so help me walk WITH you. And the evidence will be that we are rooted and firmly established in love.

That's two images. A tree's roots and a building's foundation. **The Love of Christ is the fruit of Christ dwelling in our hearts.** this is another promise for us:

**Christ's love is strong enough to be the foundation for every part of my life.**

That's how strong it is. His love is strong enough to help you forgive, to help you fight temptation, to help you parent, to help you be a spouse, to help you be a friend, an employee. As we walk by faith. And when we root ourselves in Christ's love...look what he prays next:

**18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, 19 and to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

To know the love of God that...well, we already know. And yet, we can never fully know. So that we can be filled with the fullness of God that we are already filled with. He's praying for them to get something they already have and yet don't have. What's going on? Here's what I think. Paul is talking about the difference between professing faith and experiencing the power of God. The difference between intellectual acknowledgment and life altering experience.



Because it is entirely possible for Christians to live out a phony inauthentic faith. Because what we know in principle we do not experience in our hearts. And Paul is praying for them to *experience* the real thing. And admittedly experience is hard to explain. Blaise Pascal explained this experiencing God so well. Pascal was a philosopher. An intellectual. And a professing Christian. And God in his kindness let him experience his power. One night he made a journal entry of when he experienced the fullness of God and sewed it into his coat so it could be close to his heart the rest of his life.

“The year of grace 1654, Monday, 23 November . From about half past ten at night until about half past midnight,

(New Slide) FIRE. GOD of Abraham, GOD of Isaac, GOD of Jacob not of the philosophers and of the learned. Certitude. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace. GOD of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Your GOD will be my God. Forgetfulness of the world and of everything, except GOD. He is only found by the ways taught in the Gospel. Grandeur of the human soul. Righteous Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you. Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.

As best as I can talk about it, that’s what experiencing the fullness of God is like. So what is this? What are we praying for?

**Spiritual Sensitivity to gospel truth.**<sup>1</sup> So keep yourself grounded in the gospel truth. The firm foundation of your faith. And go to God with an open heart. Lord, today let me experience your power in my life. **AND WHEN THAT HAPPENS** - I think God will start to answer the last part of this prayer. I told you at the start of the sermon there were 3 parts to this prayer. First, individuals would be transformed by experiencing the power of the faith they profess. You often hear me refer to that as something different: a gospel awakening. That’s what it is. And it’s what I believe, what our church believes, the people of the Charlotte area need. And awakening always starts in the church. Watch as this prayer starts to invite us, the church, to pray bigger prayers

20 Now to him who is able to do above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us —

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT? DO YOU BELIEVE HE CAN DO MORE THAN YOU CAN **IMAGINE** HIM DOING? **Our view of God is revealed in the size of our prayers.** Do you believe God can heal your marriage? Do you believe God can save your child? Do you believe God can heal a sickness? I’m not saying we can manipulate him to do any of those but do you believe he is

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<sup>1</sup> This wording comes from Tim Keller’s sermon ‘The Power of the Spirit’ preached from this passage at Redeemer Presbyterian Church.



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ABLE? And that if He doesn't it isn't because of a lack of power or of love but because His ways are higher than our ways. I **think the church is filled with power skeptics**. And I'm often one. I just don't think He really will. But the power is already in us. And He is able. And the truth of scripture convicts me. And brings me here to you today with fresh hope.

Do we believe God can bring an awakening here in the bible belt? Here in this area where lets be real - Some of the largest church facilities I have ever SEEN. And YET, since 2016 church attendance in the Charlotte area - That's Mecklenburg County and Union County and the other counties immediately surrounding Charlotte - Church attendance as a percentage of the population has dropped 12%. That's several hundred thousand people. We are not gaining ground. But - the church is here. Which means the wealth of the power of God that WORKS IN US IS HERE. I often liken this area to a dormant volcano. I believe there is immense power available and we just gotta ask God to bring it to life. To bring the fire. And I promise it will start right here in us. Do we want God to move IN US. **A gospel awakening in the community always starts with a gospel awakening in the church.**

And by the way - It's happening. Let me give you some hope here it IS happening. Some of you are in here today and you aren't a Christian. Heard a story this week about somebody

invited to Church because a friend was getting baptized and that was their first time ever in a church. Which by the way we are so honored by. If that's you today, I just want to stop and say hey thank you for trusting us enough to come and sit in here. We are honored by that. And it will be over soon. It's weird to be at church if you've never been here so we get that and are grateful and just want you to know the God we've come to know. Anyway y'all I'm telling you God is not only saving people he is waking up alot of believers too. I'm seeing fresh steps of faith by people who've known him a long time. PRAISE GOD! Let's PRAY SOME BIG PRAYERS worthy of our God. And then the third thing Paul prays - and invites us to pray. Is for God to get glory in our day in a way that resounds to future generations.

**21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. -- Ephesians 3:1-21**

May our children and their children believe and walk in God's power because of how he moved in our day. **God let us experience your power.** Let us experience the power of the faith we profess. And let it start with me.

Resurrection Power → Communion **COMMUNION**