

Pause For Prayer

This is the day. That was the thought that kept running through Bob's mind. This was the day his daughter, Cindy would be married. This was the answer to so many prayers. This was the day he knew that Cindy would be on her own and wouldn't be living with them forever. This was the day she would be leaving them forever. This was the day her husband would watch over. This was the day. And, as all of these details piled up in his brain, there was one thing he did. There was only one thing he *could* do. He said "Thank you, LORD. Thank you LORD for this day—for all it means and all it brings."

Have you ever been in Bob's shoes. Here, I'm not talking about giving away your daughter's hand in marriage. I mean, have you ever made a list of all the wonderful things your Father in heaven has done for you? And when the enormity and extravagance of that list overwhelms you, the only thing you can do is pause to prayer?

This morning, in these words to the Ephesians, that's where Paul is at. We read: *"For this reason I kneel before the Father"*¹. Overwhelmed with awe and joy, Paul kneels before God and prays to him. But his action makes us ask a question: why? Why was Paul moved to pray? Paul was amazed that the Gentiles were included into God's kingdom—not as second-class citizens. No, instead they had the same status as their fellow believing Jews, just as they had the same Savior. As Paul ponders this amazing fact, he bows before our Father in prayer.

Now, for us reading this letter almost 2000 years later, it amazes us *that* he paused to pray. But, what amazes us even more is *what* he prayed. The content of his prayer has given all the Christians who followed him meat to chew on up until this very day. There are many parts and details in his prayer. And if we analyzed all of them, we'd be here for several hours. So, for our time this morning, we will focus our thoughts. Paul prays: *"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. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ"*²

Paul prays that they would understand. Understand *what*? He prays that they would understand how big the love of Christ is. And take note here! The love of Christ is not the love that he or anyone else had for Christ. No, the love of Christ is the great, gracious love that Christ had for *them*. That's his prayer. That's it. He prays that they would thoroughly map out and explore how wide, long, high and deep this great love from Christ to them is.

When I think of this verse I think of Archeology. In Montana there is an area where there were many dinosaurs discovered. One day it was an area that kid rode their ATV's over and deer grazed on. The next day the area was all roped off. And many Archeologists carefully measured out and dug out each cubic inch of that land because they didn't want to miss anything. And that's Paul's prayer. Not that they would explore dirt, but that they would dig up, ponder and begin to understand how much and how deeply Jesus loved them.

Now, if you take a step back, this is a strange prayer. Paul is asking God what is impossible for humans to know. It is impossible for the Ephesians back then and us now to know the full measure of Christ's love for us. Why would Paul do that? Why would he pray for what is impossible for us to know? We have a sinful nature. And this sinful nature will always keep us from knowing *all* of God's love toward us. We find the answer in the next verse: *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*³

How could Paul pray for the impossible? Because what is impossible for us is entirely possible for God. And notice the beautiful way Paul expresses this truth. Our Father can do far more than we can ask for. And he can do far more than we can even imagine. And if you want an example of this truth all you have to do is look to our gospel for this day. Mary prays to her son and her Savior. She says: *"They have no more wine"*⁴. Shortly before this Jesus was anointed to be their Messiah—their Prophet, Priest and King. She was waiting to see him display his

¹(Ephesians 3:14 NIV)

²(Ephesians 3:16–18 NIV)

³(Ephesians 3:20–21 NIV)

⁴(John 2:3 NIV)

power and reveal to the world who he truly was. And her prayer is both bold and simple. She lets Jesus know about a problem. She doesn't nag him by also telling him how he should fix the problem. She simply tell him about the problem and then steps away.

What is Jesus' response to his mother's prayer? He lets her know that their relationship has changed. He has not just grown up to be a man. He has grown up to be the Messiah. So, he tells her that the time is not right. But, then shortly after that the time *was* right. And Jesus did more than Mary could have asked for and far more than she could have imagined. He turned the water into wine.

On his daughter's wedding day, Bob paused for prayer. In Cana, on that wedding day, Mary paused for prayer. Paul, when he is overcome by awe and joy, paused for prayer. What about you? When do *you* pause for prayer? Questions like that humble us, don't they? Even more than that, they don't just humble us; they *humiliate* us. For, far too often our prayers are shallow—if we even pray at all. Far too often the people and problems of this world soak up so much of our time and attention. But, when do you pause? When do you pause to lift up your eyes above this world and all its petty problems and concerns? When do you pray like Mary, simply letting God know that there are really, truly problems and letting him carry the ball from there? When do you pray like Paul, filled with awe and rapture that not just it is true that Christ loves us, but he loves us so truly and deeply that we can never stop discovering how wide and long, how high and deep his love for us is.

In all of this we see our sin. But in all of this we also see our Savior. We see a love that is big enough to forgive us even when we forget to pause to pray. It is a love which brings us back to his word and shows us his great love for us. It shows us the depth of our sin. It shows us the cost of our sin. It shows us the price he lovingly paid to take away our sin. And then finally, through his Holy Spirit he moves us to pause. He moves us to do what we are powerless to do by ourselves. He moves us to pray. He moves us to pray like Mary who trusted that her son was smarter, wiser and more powerful than she was. He was the one who could take care of her problems and the problems at that wedding. He moves us to pray like Paul. Paul goes out of his way to pray for what was impossible because he knows that God has this wonderful track-record of giving more than we ask for and can imagine.

So then, my brothers, remember! Remember to pause to pray. For Christ's love is *profuse*. And his power is *profound*. Amen.