The Church: Our Strength

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Preacher: Jeremy Davis

[0:00] We are going to continue our church series this evening.

We're going to be looking at our strength.! He is praying for strength for those who he knows in Ephesus.
In Acts 19, Paul does mission work and ministry in the city of Ephesus. There are people that come to know Christ and a church is started. And then many years later, Paul finds himself in prison for his faith.
Imprisoned by the Romans. And he writes this letter to his friends. To a church in Ephesus. And the first three chapters, he spends talking about what the gospel is.
What it's all about. What is it that we believe? What do we hold to? And the last three chapters, he is preaching about the way we should live our lives.
[1:13] In chapter 4, it's the unity of the body of Christ. There are leaders over the people. We build one another up in love. We have new life in Christ. And we are to put off the old self.

And we are to put on our new self. Which is righteousness. Christ's righteousness. We are to walk in love and be imitators of God. In chapter 5. And we are to be filled with the spirit.
And we are to spend time together as a body of Christ. Singing hymns and spiritual songs. And submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. And in chapter 5, you see husbands and wives.
And the way that they are to live with one another. And love one another. Children and parents. In chapter 6. Servants and masters. Putting on the full body or the full armor of God.
These are the things that are played out once they are rooted and understand what the gospel is. From the first three chapters. We'll be looking at verses 14 through 21 this evening.
[2:15] And these work like a bridge or a hinge between these two sections. Because Paul realizes what it is that he's teaching. He's laying out a theology. An understanding of the gospel.

And if you look at verse 14. It says, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father. Paul is now going to go in prayer before God for his friends.
For this reason. Paul understands the significance of the gospel. And he wants his people to understand the significance of the gospel. He wants us to understand the significance of the gospel. Paul is always fighting for people to understand and live in the midst of truth. That's the entirety of 2 Timothy in a nutshell. Timothy, go.
Live. Fulfill your ministry. Know the truth that's in you that's always been taught. And live in an abundance of that. And he's saying the same thing here to us. Paul has in mind chapter 1 verse 3.
[3:21] It says, Blessed be God. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who has blessed us in Christ. With every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

We are a people who have been blessed abundantly. He has in mind verses 9 and 10. Make known to us the mystery of his will. According to his purpose. Which he set forth in Christ.
As a plan for the fullness of time. To unite all things to him. On heaven and on earth. So we can trace this all the way back to Genesis chapter 12. Verses 1 and 3.
That God has a plan to unite all things back to himself. Chapter 1 verse 18. Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.
That you may know what is the hope in which he has called you. What are the riches of his glorious inheritance. And all the saints. We have an inheritance.
[4:18] We have something we have received from God the Father. Through Christ Jesus. He has opened our eyes. The eyes of our heart. And enlightened us to that. In chapter 2 verse 8 and 9.

We know these verses well. You have been saved by grace through faith. This is not of your own doing. It is a gift of God. Not a result of work. So no one may boast. The work of our salvation is

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100% God.
It is not of our self. He has these things in mind. As he writes to the people in Ephesus. In chapter 3 and verse 1.
For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ. In verse 2. Paul knows what it is to suffer.
Paul knows what it is to face hardship. Paul knows what it is to face difficulty. And turmoil. He is sitting in a prison cell. And he is praying that the people would have strength.
[5:31] The strength that he has himself from God. That has brought him through these difficult situations. Again in verse 14.

It says I bow my knees before the Father. He is not giving us a prescribed posture of prayer. But this is representing Paul's heart. And his attitude before God.
He is in a position of reverence. Before God the Father. In Psalm 95 and verse 1. It says, In verse 3 it says, For the Lord is great.
And a great king above all gods. In verse 6 it says, O come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before God. Before the Lord our maker.
And Paul is modeling this for us. So what do we see going on? What setting do we see? We see that Paul is in prayer. Or is in prayer in prison.
[6:36] And he is in a posture of prayer and reverence before God. He's praying for his friends. That they would receive strength. That they would know the truth of the gospel.

And that they would live that truth. That it would impact them deeply. So deep that it comes out of them in every part of their life.
In the way that they live. In the way that they share the gospel. In the way they have relationships with people around them. In their friendships. In the churches. Even in their work.
In every way that they would represent Christ well. I've got four things for you this evening. Number one. We see that Paul's theology leads him to prayer.
Paul's theology leads him to prayer. Again verse 14. For this reason I bow my knees before the father. From whom every family in heaven and earth is named.
[7:37] Behind this prayer stands what God has accomplished. All throughout chapters 1 through 3. That God has made spiritually dead people alive. He has reconciled both the Jew and the Gentile.

He has built for himself in them a dwelling place. A people for himself. And Paul's response to that truth is to bow before the father. And to ask him to work in the lives of the people in the church.
And as we read through this prayer. You're going to notice that Paul does not pray for himself. But where is Paul? Again he's in prison. And I hate to say it.
But if I go to prison. I'm probably going to be praying for myself. Because that sounds terrifying. But Paul knows better. He's praying for the people.
Because he has seen for himself. The strength that is gained as he goes to God in prayer. As he humbles himself before him.
[8:39] Paul is modeling the way that Jesus has instructed us to pray. We see this in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, 9 through 11. We see that Jesus prays our Father in heaven.

He says give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts. As we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation.
But deliver us from evil. And if that sounds familiar. It's because it's from Pastor Michael's book. Pray then like this. And he says in that book. That there is a focus on community.
That prayer is something that we do. With the mindset of a family. And a congregation. Our salvation is personal. But we are absolutely saved. Into a family.
And while it is appropriate. For us to pray for our own needs. Jesus teaches us to desire. To pray with others in mind. What a great model of friendship for us.
[9:41] What a great model of love for others. This is exactly what Paul does here. He prays for the church. He prays for his friends.

Paul's theology of the church has led him to pray for the church. And so should ours. So often we approach church convinced that it is all about us.
We go and we find a Sunday school class that suits our needs. We find a church that the worship is to our liking. We find a church that we like the teacher who's there.
And we rarely go about looking for a church. Thinking what can I do to invest and sacrifice for others? How can I do ministry for others?

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And instead of walking into the church building wondering how am I going to be filled up today? What if we walked in wondering how can I fill somebody else up? How can I do ministry for someone else? How can I encourage them and build them up?
[10:40] Bear their burdens? What is your understanding of the church? Where does your theology lead you? Paul's theology leads him to pray before God for other people.

Does your theology lead you to do the same thing? It should. That's the model that we receive. Paul knows that the Lord strengthens him, builds him up to face difficult circumstances.
In verse 15, we see that the church, like all those who have called upon the name of the Lord, is dependent on God's work to save them.
He recognizes this. And he prays that they would have strength. Paul demonstrates this throughout his life.
And he will write about this firsthand in 2 Timothy 4, verses 16 and 17. He says, Paul's theology, He understands that God strengthens him.
[12:08] That even at his trial, when he's going to be sentenced to death, he can endure. He can be, he can persevere through that.

And he knows it's not for him. And so that all the Gentiles might hear the gospel proclaimed. We are strengthened as we bow ourself before God in prayer.
We are strengthened as others bow and pray for us. And we can strengthen others as we pray for them. And that strength allows us to endure.
A strength that comes from God. That we receive when we humble ourselves before God. The means of God. The means of which is through prayer.
Secondly, Paul prays that God would strengthen the church. Verses 16 and 17. Verse 16 says, Paul's first request for the church is that they would be strengthened.
[13:17] Paul knows and he recognizes that the strength can only come from God. Paul doesn't use just a normal Greek verb here for strengthen. This verb actually shows up three other times in the New Testament.

In Luke 1 verse 80, John the Baptist, as he's growing up and maturing, is strengthened. Luke 2 verse 40, Jesus, as he is growing, it says that he became strong, filled with wisdom.
And the favor of God was upon him. And 1 Corinthians 16 and 13, be watchful, stand firm in the faith. Act like men. Be strong.
So we could say as we look at this verb and trace it throughout the New Testament. That Paul wants them to be strong and strengthened no matter what it is that they may be called to do. Like John the Baptist who had a short ministry, the forerunner of Christ.
And then imprisoned and beheaded. That we would be strengthened. And like Christ, that we would be like him. In the way that he lived his life.
[14:20] And obviously we're far from Jesus and we can't be perfect. But we are to live in a Christ likeness. That we would be strengthened like Christ is strengthened. And that God's favor would be on us.

And then in the same way 1 Corinthians speaks to in verse 16. That we would be strengthened at all times. That we would be watchful and ready at all times. This is the kind of strength that Paul is praying for the church.
Paul wants the people to be strong in Christ likeness. And stand firm in their faith. But he knows that they cannot achieve this on their own.
Paul asks that God would strengthen them according to his riches. We see that in verse 16. And what are God's riches? Well they're limitless. That's an incredible statement to me.
According to his riches. This is an unknown amount. This is never ending. It also ties back to Ephesians 1 verses 7 and 9.
[15:20] In him we have redemption through his blood. The forgiveness of our trespasses.
According to the riches of his grace. Which he lavished upon us.

In all wisdom and insight. Making known to us the mystery of his will. According to his purpose.
Which he set forth in Christ. That which we did not deserve.
The truth of the gospel. Salvation through Christ has been lavished upon us. So Paul's not asking again for salvation. He's asking that for those of us who know Christ.
That we've been given this great inheritance. That we would now live in light of it. MacArthur says that Paul wants them to live lives that correspond to the spiritual wealth.

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That they have in Christ. We've been given a great deposit. And we should live our life in light of that. The way that we go about life in the workplace.
[16:26] The way that we raise our families. The way we interact with our spouses. The way that we go about friendships. It should all be in light of what Christ has done for us.

The way that we go about difficulties in life. And hardships in life. Should be done according to what Christ has done in us.
Paul mentions three qualifiers. With power. Through his spirit. And in your inner being. God has the power to change people.
And the spirit of God is the agent of that change. The aim is not just the circumstances of our outward life. But that the inner man would be changed.
In 2 Corinthians 4.16. Paul writes. Though our outer self is wasting away. Our inner self is being renewed day by day.
[17:28] That happens so that we won't lose heart. Like I said. The second half of this book of Ephesians. Is all about Christian living.

And Paul knows the limitations of humanity. He knows that we can't muster this strength on our own. Paul is asking that God would give the church.
The strength to live in Christ likeness. No matter what it is that they may face. Paul is sitting in prison. Not because he robbed a bank. Not because he murdered somebody.
He is sitting in prison because of his faith. Why would we not expect the same? Why would the readers of this letter not expect the same? They could find themselves in a difficult circumstance. Not because they have done anything criminal. But because of the faith that they proclaim. And Paul is asking that they would be strengthened. Ready for whatever it is that they may face.
[18:30] Things are good in the U.S. right now. But we don't know when persecution may come. And how will you respond when that day arrives?

Are you ready to be arrested for your faith? It's happened in Canada in recent days.
Why would it not happen to us here? Why would we not face friendships that break things off? Because they don't like the faith that we hold to. Why would we not expect to lose a job?
Or to be turned down in an interview? Because of the faith that we hold. Why would we not face persecution? Are we prepared and ready?
Are we strengthened? Paul knows what the people are up against. So he prays in verse 17.
[19:28] That Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. R.C. Sproul says that Paul is praying that Christ would permeate the very depth of their being.

That Christ would not be perforary. But that he would be the very center of the believer's life. He wouldn't just be a thing that's added.
But he would be the very center of everything that these believers do. And that should be our prayer for one another here as well.
As Joey opened up this morning, he talked about his love for this church. And I share that love and appreciation for this church. And our prayer for one another would be that Christ would dwell in our hearts fully.
That we would live out the gospel truths everywhere that we go. We'd build one another up in faith. That we would encourage one another in all of life.
[20:41] Paul is praying the way that we ought to be praying. He is praying that Christ would rule in the hearts and the minds of the people. And direct their lives and their ministry. Paul prays that they would have more than just physical energy or confidence.

Or being productive. He's praying that the spirit of God would truly strengthen the believers. So that Christ shapes everything about their life.
Their priorities and their thinkings. Their desires and their conduct. I hope that's our prayer for one another as well. Thirdly, the result of Paul's prayer.
We see the results of Paul's prayer. Verse 17. That you being rooted and grounded in love. Have strength to comprehend with all the saints.
What is the breadth and length and height and depth. And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
[21:40] Paul is praying that they would love. And this is the most basic Christian characteristic. I've been talking about this in Crossroads quite a bit recently.

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This is fundamentally the most basic Christian characteristic. That we love others. In 1 John 4, 7-10. It says, Beloved, let us love one another.
For love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God. And knows God. And anyone who does not love does not know God. Because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us.
That God sent his only son into the world. So we might live through him. In this is love. Not that we have loved God. But that he has loved us. And sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.
That is the biblical full picture of what love is. God has shown us his love. Even when we did not deserve it. And that is the basis in which we live our lives.
[22:44] Paul wants this kind of love for his people. And he is, by praying for them. Even while he is in prison. Demonstrating this kind of love for them as well. They don't necessarily do anything to deserve Paul's prayers.

But he loves his brothers and sisters in Christ. And he prays for them. Paul prays that they would be rooted and grounded. This pulls from agriculture and construction language here.
I have the great privilege of having my parents here with me this evening. They live in sunny Florida where it's normally sunny. But they came on Tuesday.
Midnight, early morning on Tuesday. They got their power back because they were hit by the hurricane that hit the Pensacola area. So they had some cleanup and all of this. They sent me a picture of a tree. Doesn't sound that cool.
But the tree was pulled up out of the ground. And this is a tree. I mean, in the picture it looks like it's 20, 30 feet tall. It's a very big tree. And there's a giant six foot hole in the ground where this tree used to sit.
[23:50] Pulled up out of the ground and set to the side. And too many of us are living our Christian lives like that tree. We are big and full up top.

But we are not rooted and grounded in the love of Christ like we should be. And when difficult times come, we are pulled up and thrown aside.
Because we're not rooted in who Christ is. We don't have strength in what Christ has done for us. So at the slightest breeze, we flop over.
Pulled up out of the ground. Paul's prayer is that they would not be like a tree hit by a hurricane in Pensacola, Florida. He prays that they would be rooted and grounded in love.
That no matter what they face, disappointment in ministry or the uncertainty of life, new friends, changing friends, changing circumstances, whatever it is. That they would be rooted in Christ's love.
[24:57] And strengthened to endure whatever they face. And the reality is, is that this is one of those things that just does not make sense to the world around us. To be so firmly rooted and grounded in the love and the strength of Christ.

That even in the worst times, we continue to praise Him. We continue to glorify Him. We continue to return back to the things of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 2.14 says, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to Him.
And He is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Paul understands what these people are going through.
He understands that the pagan world, the epicenter of pagan and Roman mythology that's going on around them there in Ephesus, is not going to understand.
And he is praying that they would be strengthened in Christ. This kind of grounding can only come in time. The kind of strength to endure can only come in time.
[26:02] That they may have strength to comprehend, Paul says, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth. There is just one gospel message for all of God's people.

And the stories of the saints before us strengthen us and encourage us. The stories and the testimonies of how people have walked with the Lord through difficulties builds us up.
So as we think about friendship from this morning again, who are some elderly saints that you have befriended? Who are some dead saints that you've befriended? Who are some dead guys that you're reading?
How are you learning from the testimonies of God's people what Christ-likeness looks like? And how we can endure no matter what the world may throw at us?
Verse 19, Paul, he asks for God's fullness. And then we be filled with all the fullness of God.

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[27:11] He wants them to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, which is kind of a paradox of a statement. That they may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Have you ever met that person who's just full of God? And when you talk to them, it just seems to seep out of them the things of the Lord. A person that can barely speak without using biblical language.
Those people that even in the most difficult of circumstances, they just continue to be unwavered in their faith. It's being full of God.
Being strengthened by Him. They are rooted and grounded in Christ's love. And they have learned of the infinite reach of His mercies. Of His goodness.
Of His tender care. It's not unlike what Pastor Jeff was reading out of 1 Timothy 1.16. To be holy for I am holy. To be full of God.
[28:14] To live like Him. Have the strength to endure whatever it is that you may face. Dr. Derek Thomas says that prayer is an expression on our part of our finitude.

It is an expression of our helplessness. That we need someone who is bigger and greater than us. In a Christian sense, we need God and His sovereignty, His omnipotence to act on our behalf and do the things that we cannot do to help us and to sustain us.
And Paul is modeling for us here that prayer is a means to strengthen God. He is praying for the people. And we too should be praying for other people.
It doesn't mean we can't pray for ourself. But we need to be praying that God would strengthen us with the truth of His gospel so that we can endure whatever it is that we may face.
It's exactly what Paul is praying for his people. God, according to His sovereign will, has chosen to use Christian prayers as a means to work in us and through us to grant us strength to minister and endure.
[29:30] Fourthly, Paul's prayer becomes Paul's praise. Verses 20 and 21. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory, be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all the generations forever and ever.

Paul has seen and experienced a lot through his life. He knows the things that God can do and He will do. He knows He does incredible things.
He knows that God will supply the power to live according to Scripture. And Paul's prayer is now moving into praise. Because he knows that God will be faithful to His word, that He will fill the people up, that He will give them power to endure.
Paul's theology, what he knows about God, is leading him not only to prayer but to doxology. And our theology should always lead us to doxology. Our study of God and His word should lead us to praise for Him and who He is and what He has done for us.
Paul tells us three things here. What God can do, to whom we should give the glory, and then how long He should receive it.
[30:56] And what can God do far more abundantly than we could ever ask or think. Far more. And that doesn't always play out the way that we think.

There are times that God will do things that we would never have planned for ourself. And God is doing something so incredible that once we've seen it, we would never go back and do something different.
Like we said, I lived for five years, my family and I, in upstate New York. We loved our time there. And I didn't really know what God would do with us or where He would lead us, but I knew one thing for sure.
I would never move back to Oklahoma. That was certain. I mean, I was, I was completely certain. And I definitely was not going to move back to Mustang, of all places, where I graduated high school and grew up.
No, I would never move there. But God has done far more than I could ever think. He moved us right back here.
[32:07] Back, not only to Oklahoma, but to the very town I grew up in. around people that I grew up with.

Richard Shipman walked up to me at Chick-fil-A and called me Ryan. The reason he called me Ryan is because I grew up with Ryan Brotherton. And the two of us were inseparable. We were always together. So it makes perfect sense to me why he would call me Ryan by mistake.

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Of course he did. My first week of work here, Mike Devonshire walked in with a folding chair.
A folding chair, he flipped it around. He said, I just want to give this back to you. He flipped it around. My name was signed under the bottom of it. Because when I was in high school, I thought that was funny and cool.
God has done far more abundantly than I could ever think. He's led us back to a place that we love. We love doing ministry here.
[33:10] And we get to see some full circle things like praying for a group of people that we used to live with in New York and do ministry with. I would never have the opportunity to support them and take mission teams to them like I do if God had not brought me back to this place.

So I could do ministry here and then take teams up there and support that ministry. It's amazing the things that God has laid out. I could have not planned it any better myself.
And if I could go back and do it over again, I would do it exactly as the Lord has laid out for us. What a gift. And who receives the glory for this?
Well, it's not me. I didn't do anything. The things that go on in your life, it's not you. It is God. Our Father who is in heaven.
Even Jesus points glory to God the Father. When he prays, he says, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. We point all glory to God for what he's doing in us and through us.
[34:26] How long should he receive this glory? Throughout all generations, forever and ever. We pass these truths on to the people around us.

We pass these truths down to the generations that follow. I'm grateful to have my parents here. And it's unique because in year 2000, they moved here to Mustang and they planted us here in this church.
My mom served on staff here and my dad was a deacon in this church. We're part of it. For all the generations, Christ receives the glory. We pass these truths on from generation to generation.
And I'm so grateful for it. I want to give you just five ways that this should shape the way that we pray. When we look at a passage like Ephesians 3, 14 through 21, how should we be praying?
How should this shape the way that we pray? Number one, this will be quick. We pray to God the Father who supplies our strength. We see that in verses 14 and 16.
[35:36] We pray with humble dependence on God, with confidence to go to God because we know that he's the one who supplies our strength. Secondly, we pray for the spirit to strengthen us inwardly.

We could do a lot of things outwardly, but we need inward strength. We see that in verses 16 and 17. We ask that the spirit would strengthen our hearts so that our motives and our desires will be set on Christ.
That then leads us to live lives that are governed by Christ, led by Christ. Thirdly, we pray to grow deep in Christ's love.
It would be firmly rooted in Christ's love in verses 17 and 19. We need Christ's love to be our foundation, that stable foundation that we would continue to grow deeper in our understanding, that we continue to grow and continue to grow in our strength.
Fourthly, we pray for the fullness of our spiritual maturity, that we continue to be sanctified, that God's character would continue to shape us and shape our character and who we are.
[36:58] And fifthly, we pray in confidence all for God's glory. We pray confidently before our God.

And all for his glory alone. Paul has a theology of the gospel and of the church, and it shapes him, it changes him, it leads him to pray for the people, that they would be strengthened so that they could endure everything that may come their way, whatever they may face.
We pray the same for us today, that we would be strengthened by Christ, that we can endure this world around us, no matter what it is that may come our way.
Let us pray. Father, we come before you in the name of Jesus. We're so thankful that you do strengthen us day by day. Lord, I pray that we would be a people who are firmly rooted and grounded in that love.
Lord, I pray that we would be governed by that love. Lord, that we would live lives that display that love to the world around us.
[38:16] Lord, that we would have strength to endure persecution or hardship, uncertainty, difficult times, good times and bad.

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Lord, that we would glorify you in all things, point all glory and praise to you forever and ever. Lord, we love you and we praise you, and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.
Amen.

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