

SERMON FOR FPC WORSHIP ON OCTOBER 18, 2020 by Austin Graef

My first job was working for my dad. It was work for his window cleaning company, though it was before I started as a window cleaner. He used to have this warehouse on the Northside near Burns Street Bistro, a fun little restaurant. By the way, they have this maple candied bacon that is absolutely killer, you guys have to check it out sometime. Anyway, once a week, my dad would pay me \$50 to totally clean this warehouse. I mean wiping down all the desks and tables and equipment, doing a full sweep and wet scrub of the floor, vacuuming the office, taking out the trash and recycling, and most importantly, cleaning the bathroom. Now, you might think the toilet needed the most love, but it was usually this big old mop sink. I mean, it could hold 12 gallons of water probably, and this thing got *nasty*. But every time I cleaned it, I wanted that sink to look good. I'd make sure the chrome spigot was shiny, and I'd scrub that fiberglass interior, and wipe down this thing, even the 4 legs it stood on, and the drainpipe underneath. Then I'd mop that whole bathroom, and as old as it was, I made that bathroom look good. I wanted people to know that I cared about what I was doing, and while it was just as bad every week, and people didn't treat it the best, I cared. I treated that place the best I could, because 14 year old Austin was going to *earn* that \$50, and he was going to make *sure* that people knew he earned it. My dad gave me all the tools, and cleaning supplies, and time that I needed to do what needed to be done, but it was on me to do it. Sometimes it sucked, honestly. But I had everything I needed, and you can bet your bottom it was going to get done well.

We've been reading out of Ephesians, this series rooted in the idea of "becoming who you are." It's based in the concept that God did all of the work in order to claim us, to choose us, as His own kids. You know, this idea that we already are made perfect, and whole, and complete by what God did, and we are retroactively growing into this role that God made available for us. It's the very heart of the idea that "God doesn't call the qualified, but that he qualifies the called."

I want to read you this week's passage from Ephesians. It's at the very end of chapter 3, and it's come at the conclusion of Paul revealing all of the new stuff that was available to Christians at this time. He's told us about Grace being the root of our being saved, about how we've all come into unity in Christ and have access to God. All of the mind-blowing stuff that Paul has showed us, it's all concluded by this sort of this grand prayer from Paul for us, and there's a lot in it. There's a lot to unpack, so I want you to go ahead and close your eyes, and think carefully on the words you hear.

Ephesians 3:14-21:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ of whom every family^[a] in heaven and on earth is named. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his riches in sublimity he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through believing. And I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to know the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or even imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, ²¹ to Him be sublimity in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Here's the deal: You've got a few main sections here. First, it's Paul's reminder that God has literally infused power into you, and his prayer that you'd continue to be empowered. Then it's this continuation of Paul's request that you'd be motivated by love, and a very particular type of love, which we'll unpack. Then, it's this benediction, speaking of God's power and willingness towards us, His people. I want to take you on a journey through the significance of this.

First, we need to backtrack. In Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3 and 4, God outlines something pretty enormous, and it's got a huge impact that I just want to touch on before we get to the most crucial part of this passage.

Ephesians 1:3-4

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love.

There's a lot in these two verses, and they reflect a lot of the content in the beginning of our prayer from earlier. See, that first verse: God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm. I've heard that described literally as "God has already equipped you with everything you could ever need, to do what you need to do." When you believed on Christ, in that exact moment, you had the fulness of God infused into you. Holy smokes. No matter how hard things may be, no matter how challenging the call that God has called you to, even when it seems that things are hard and painful and you just cannot take that extra step, you have to know that God has already given you everything you need. And I can prove it.

There's a passage in Acts, where Peter and John heal somebody who hadn't walked in 30 years, and they preach the name of Jesus in that moment. And you know what happened? They were taken before the ruling religious leaders of their day, and they were threatened, and mocked, and beaten, and told not to preach this Jesus any more. Their response? They gathered the disciples together and prayed for *more boldness* to preach the name of Jesus. God said, greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. Jesus said, those who believe on me, these works shall they do, and greater works also. Do you believe on that Jesus? If so, I guarantee. You have the fullness of God that God Himself has promised, and you can do what God has called you to do.

It goes further. It says God has blessed you, and he chose you, for the purpose that we should be holy, and blameless before him in love. Those words: holy, and blameless. They mean literally sanctified and unimpeachable. Sanctified: it means that God took one look at you, and He said, "this one is worth more." Literally, there's a passage in Luke, where Christ says, whoever testifies of me, I will testify of them before the angels of God. That's Christ standing before the angels of heaven and saying, "that one's mine. I choose that one." That's you. That's Christ choosing you. And unimpeachable... that's a big one. Did you know that devil literally means "the slanderer?" That "satan," literally means "the accuser?" And that his whole thing is to try to hold up your actions and your words against you, and that from the moment you chose Christ, you were unimpeachable. You were blameless. Nothing that they're trying to hold against you is going to stick, you are set free from the snares of the devil. You, are, blameless. That's huge. That is monumentally huge. And it gets bigger.

I want to tell you guys a story about this guy Donny Fuget. Now, Donny used to work for my dad as a window cleaner, but that full-time job really was more of a side-gig for him. See, Donny was an evangelist. I'm not talking about the denomination, or the kind of guy who stands on a street corner with the John 3:16 sign, I'm talking about a true, God-ordained evangelist. The man knew the way to people's hearts and he knew how to win them for the kingdom. You could give the man 10 minutes in an auditorium to share the gospel, and he had the entire place on their feet praising God. He could bring the house down. Now, Donny died when I was only about 3, back when my family lived in Florida, so I never got to know him the way I wish I could have. But he had this thing that he used to say and teach on, this vision of Word Over the World. We called it "WOW." The whole principle behind it was "each one, win one." That with everything you did, every action, you were grounded in the love of Christ. Now, while it seems pretty simple at face value, you gotta ask the question. How the heck do I clean a toilet with love? And Donny would use that exact example. He'd say, "if you're cleaning toilets, or washing windows, or prepping somebody's lunch, you're doing it with love. So that when they go into that bathroom, or when they look out their window, or when they're sitting down with their sandwich, their thought is, 'wow. Somebody really cared about this.' Somebody really put in effort, because this was *important* to them." His whole thing was this: people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. They're not gonna give you the time of day with your words until they see your actions. Donny was right.

Paul says that he hopes that you'd be rooted and grounded in love, and that you would know the love of Christ, which exceeds all knowledge. Here's the love of Christ, as John 13 tells us: "love one another as I have loved you; there is no greater love than this, than for a man to lay down his life for his friends." That was Jesus speaking. Now, just to be clear, that doesn't mean that every time you want to show someone the love of Christ, you throw yourself in front of a bus for them. You can only do that once. No, it means that you do what Donny was talking about, you do the work and you do it with love. The work, the job itself, was never important. It's the motivation behind it that means everything. God equipping you for everything you ever need means *nothing* if your motivation isn't love. Check this out.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

¹ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not the love of God, I'm like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all believing, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing.

I want you to understand that nothing Paul says here is figurative in nature. When he says speaking with tongues of men and angels, he means it. And when he says without love, it shifts from being valuable to the people around him to just noise like somebody playing drums out of time... he means it.

When Paul says he had the gift or prophecy, and God revealed mysteries to him concerning all of the incredible stuff available through Christ, he meant it. When he said he could move mountains with his believing, he meant that literally too. And yet, though these things were available to him, if he did not have the love of God as his motivation, if he was not rooted and grounded in love, it meant absolutely nothing.

And he goes on, to say how noble he could be, giving away all he had to feed the poor, and throwing his body onto the fire, or in our case, in front of a bus, if he didn't do it with love as the motivation, if he didn't understand the width and depth and length and height of the love of Christ, if he didn't have that as his sole motivation... nothing. It means absolutely nothing.

Brothers and sisters, in the wise words of Captain Jack Sparrow, "the problem is not the problem. The problem is your attitude about the problem." Or more aptly, in our case, the action is not what's important. It was never about the action itself, the important thing was the heart behind the act.

Now, I know love. I think about my wife Lexi, or my puppy Reggie, and that's love to me. It's the kind of love that, with Reggie per se, that although that little dog had yet to do anything, I loved him when we first got him. I would've done anything for him, and I still would. Now, that's just a dog. But what about a child? Parents, you'll understand this. My dad, when he first held my older brother, was asked about the experience by a friend of his. The idea that this tiny infant in my father's hands, that had yet to do anything right or wrong, but that its first act was merely to exist... and yet my father would have done anything for that little boy in his hands. And his friend told him, "now you understand a fraction of the love that God has for you."

I know that there is a love, of love of Christ, and I can start to see the dimensions of it, higher than the highest heights and deeper than the depths of the sea, that stretches as far as the East is from the West. I know that this love exists. I also know that I will never fully understand it. But that love is the request that we would know, and that we would lean into it and live into it, so that everybody, and I mean just everybody, would get a chance to taste the goodness that we get to, regardless of whether or not we ever deserved it.

That love goes exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or even imagine, the love that meant God giving His only Son to die, and the raising him, so that we might live through his name. So I will say it again:

Unto Him, who is able to do *exceeding, abundantly, above all* that we can *ask*, or even *imagine...* according to the *power* that is at work within *us...* unto *Him*. Unto *that God*, be *sublimity* in the *Church* and in *Christ Jesus*, throughout *all* generations, *forever* and *ever*. Amen.