

Christmas Eve 03

10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 12 In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. 13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory. 14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is 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 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, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:10-21 (NIV)

You might think this is a strange Christmas Eve text, but actually it is what Christmas is all about. God **so** loved the world that He gave His only Son. He sent His Son to rescue us, but also to reveal His great love toward us. I can understand why the manger scene is being outlawed while the menorah and crescent are allowed to remain. You see, Judaism and Islam demand that you obey rules. Amazingly enough, that really isn't threatening. We obey all kinds of rules and laws everyday. What's a few more? It is love that is threatening.

Love captures your heart and can cause you to surrender completely to the desires of another. That is why that baby in the manger is so upsetting. No prophet of Judaism ever claimed to be God. Mohammed never claimed to be God. But that little baby grew up to declare Himself to be one with the Father. He claimed He was in existence before the prophets. His disciples would declare Him to be the God's expression of love toward the world, the exact representation of God.

In this prayer, Paul, the apostle, is praying that God will strengthen us through God's Spirit in our own spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. We can't make our hearts a manger for the Christ child unless we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit. The world has no room for Him, and when our hearts are full of the world, we have no room for Him. Paul is praying that the believers might be strengthened by the Spirit so that Christ will be at home in their hearts. Love needs to be received before it has an affect on the one loved.

Then He prays that as we are rooted and established in love, we would have the power, along with all other believers, to grasp the dimensions of God's love. We really need this prayer as we look at the manger. In our carnal thinking we cannot fathom the depths of love that would cause God to become a man.

There is a fairy tale of a king who saw a lovely peasant woman. The more he saw her, the more his heart went out to her. He knew if he proposed to her as the king, he could not be sure if she loved him in return or was simply yielding to the king. He snuck out of his castle one evening disguised as a peasant. He lived for months as a peasant while he won her heart. Once she had accepted his love and proposal for marriage, he revealed the truth of his position as king.

The step down from the king's castle to become a laborer was not nearly as far as Christ stepped down from heaven to win his bride, the church, you. That is what this passage is about. Jesus wanted His bride, the church, to express to *the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms* his manifold wisdom. The wisdom of God is seen in the fact that the ones who are forgiven the most love the most. The wisdom of God is seen in that real worship comes from a heart that understands that grace alone made them a worshipper. It certainly wasn't anything we did. It was God's willingness to become like us so that we could be like Him.

Would any of us consider the incredible plan that God brought about, inhabiting your own creation? It is especially incredible when you consider He knew that those He created would kill Him in the most horrible way imaginable. Who would imagine that out of that suffering they could demonstrate their love to the greatest possible extent? Could we foresee forming a group of worshippers who would fulfill the great commandment to love God with their all, because they saw our love through our sacrifice? Not likely! That was Divine wisdom that chose that path. It is the wisdom of God that sent the babe to the manger. No wonder its being outlawed! It sings of incredible wisdom and love.

Paul prayed that we would grasp the dimensions of that love. He added that if we come to know this love that surpasses knowledge, we will be filled with all the fullness of God. What a statement! I could describe God's love for you with the best possible words but would fall miserably short, because God's love surpasses knowledge. It must be experienced. Experiencing that love fills you with all the fullness of God! Your attitudes and opinions change. Your priorities change. No wonder the world wants to outlaw this Nativity scene. "Keep it in your church," they say, "Don't push it on us. You can believe in whatever you like, just don't put it in our face!"

How powerful the Nativity scene is! From laborers to kings, surrounding a man and woman used by God, all worshipping a little baby that was the incarnation of Almighty God. It can capture your heart if you will let it. Look with them and wonder and worship. He came because He loves you. He came to fulfill all righteousness. He came so that you could spend eternity with Him and He with you. Like the king that made himself a peasant, God stepped down from heaven, leaving His majestic splendor, clothing Himself in humanity to win your heart.

Will you stop and consider the greatest love, and let Him capture your heart?

12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 (NIV)