

Love
Ephesians 3:14-21
Summer Road Trip Week 7
July 23, 2017

Welcome/intro/vision

Before we get started this morning got a little bit of family business to attend to. Over the past couple of months we've been looking for a part-time person to lead Chatham Kids, our children's ministry

We had some outstanding candidates apply for the position and went through several rounds of interviews

But after much prayer we're thrilled this morning to announce that we've hired someone for that position that I'm going to introduce to you this morning

Cynthia Dekaney is our new Chatham Kids director, Cynthia come on up!

Cynthia is no stranger to Chatham Kids, she volunteered as the Chatham Kids director for about 5 years and really held it together in a time of tremendous transition for the church before taking a year-long sabbatical and then coming back as a volunteer again this past year

So she is super-familiar with the ministry and we were all delighted when she decided to apply

Couple questions:

1. What do you love about children's ministry?
2. What made you decide to apply for the position?
3. Looking ahead, what are you excited about for the ministry moving forward?

Feel free to talk to Cynthia if you've got any questions or want more information about Chatham Kids.

We will be looking for people to help out with Chatham Kids this fall coming up soon, so if you love kids, Cynthia would be love to talk with you!

Prayer

Today we're test driving something new—several weeks ago we announced that in the fall we're going to add another service here in Pittsboro

And if you're brand new you might not know that we have another campus up in North Chatham and what typically happens each week is I speak here and then go up to Northern Chatham and speak at the service there

But all that's going to change because in late-August we're going to move to 4 services, we'll have two services here and two up in northern Chatham

and I can't do all of those services in one Sunday morning, so what we're going to move to in the fall is a team-teaching model

Where Steve Tamayo, our executive pastor, will be speaking at one site and I'll be speaking at the other site, and after a week or two, we'll trade off

So we'll both be speaking at both campuses every few weeks in the fall as we move to four services

And this week we're test-driving that, as I'll speak here and stay here and Steve will be up speaking at Woods.

Next week I'll pick up doing both services again until we move to four services later in August

So especially if you're new in the past few weeks and I haven't had a chance to meet you yet or make a connection, please come talk to me after the service

I'd love to get to know you a little better and take advantage of the fact that I'll be here afterwards

This is the last week of our Summer Road Trip series, if you're brand new let me get you up to speed:

it's summer time and for many of us that means getting away for some rest and vacation which is a great thing

But many of us can attest to going on vacation with an unrealistic expectation of the problems it would solve.

Most of us have gone away on vacation and been glad to get away from the problems back home only to return from vacation and find those problems still waiting for us.

There are things that vacation cannot fix!

So we're for the first half of the summer we're taking a road trip through the first 3 chapters of the New Testament book of Ephesians

to help us to get answers to these deeper questions, to meet some of these hungers that are too deep and too big for a summer vacation to meet

This morning we're going to end our message series looking at what is arguably the single most REVOLUTIONARY and important and unique aspect of the Christian story and the Christian message

Today, we're going to talk about love.

And because so much of our nation and our culture was built with a judeo-Christian framework and because the Scriptures have influenced our culture so deeply that doesn't sound so revolutionary

But it was Christ-followers in the first couple of centuries who took this idea of a selfless love and elevated it over power, over prestige, over self-interest, over pride, over conquest

And made it front and center and most important for a healthy person and a healthy society

Today, of course, even in secular psychological circles, we all realize the importance of love, back in the 1940's a psychologist named Maslow came up with **this pyramid that he described as the hierarchy of needs**

And at the base here is basics of air, water and food. And just above that is physical safety: to have shelter and be free from war or other things that might threaten our safety

And just above that is love. The Beatles famously sang that all you need is love, but as Steve Tamayo pointed out this week, you also need groceries!

So if you've got groceries and shelter more or less covered at the base of this hierarchy of needs, then the thing that you most need is love

without it, both the psychologists and the Scriptures say that we are barely alive

And so it's very appropriate that we're going to close out our Summer Road trip series talking about love today

because this is perhaps the single most important thing that a vacation can't give us

Have you ever been on vacation with other people where there was no love between you and the people or person you were with?

Your marriage was in a difficult place or you're with extended family and there's all sorts of tension and conflict and strained relationships? Miserable!

And so this morning, we're going to come to the fountain of love, the source of love, and be invited to drink deeply of this deepest core soul hunger that we all share: to be loved perfectly

Bible/no Bible/on screen/book case, Ephesians 3:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

We've got a lot of people here at CCC who have adoption as a part of their stories: some of us were adopted as kids, some of us had adopted siblings as kids

And then a number of us have adopted kids who needed homes

And one of the questions that adopted kids can sometimes wrestle with is the question of identity and belonging, especially if they're adopted into a family alongside biological siblings
"Am I really one of you?" is a question that adopted kids often wrestle with

Now remember, Paul has just spent the last two sections of this letter explaining how God has done something new through Jesus to bring Jews and non-Jewish people INTO A NEW FAMILY together

And this was hard news for the first century community to grasp, the Jewish people had a couple thousand years of the Old Testament and God at work in their people in unique ways making unique promises to them

In fact, one of the EARLIEST stories in the Jewish Scriptures, we get a story of an angel of God wrestling with a man named Jacob all night long and after this long, exhausting night of wrestling, the angel changes his name from Jacob to Israel

The name of the Israelite people was given from God himself, how much more chosen can you be?

But in this letter Paul has been advocating this reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines because of Jesus

and so as he transitions into this prayer, he declares as a good Jewish man that the Jewish people aren't the only ones who have a name that comes from God

You Gentiles, you've been adopted into this family, and your name is given to you from God, too.

You belong to this God, too. You come from and your origin, your family tree, is rooted in the name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

Every family in heaven and on earth derives its name from God this same good, good Father.

This is good news for all of us—my family tree has a pretty significant legacy and heritage of all kinds of people involved in all kinds of ministry for many generations: pastors and missionaries and choir directors everywhere

But maybe your family doesn't have that same legacy.

In fact, maybe you're like someone I talked to a year or so ago who confessed that as a grown man in his thirties with multiple kids that he hadn't told his mom yet that he and his family were all going to church because she'd flip out!

When you're hiding your church attendance from your parents, you know you're a big rebel!

Even if you come from a long line of atheists, or apathy-ists

or even if you come from a long line of people who have been devoted to other religions or other beliefs, the Father of Jesus is where your family name and origin has come from

And you belong here with us, worshiping Jesus with us together—this is part of the power of God's love that he's going to talk about here in just a moment:

This good, good Father who is the source and the source of love for all peoples, everywhere

EVERY family belongs in this household, in this Father's great love, every family on earth comes home to its true home when we gather in Jesus's name to worship the Father that Jesus has shown us

From this transitional sentence, Paul unleashes this wonderful prayer:

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 Lord's holy people, 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.

There's a lot of talk in our culture about the issue of power: who has it, who doesn't, who deserves it, who doesn't and what do people who have power do with it

This is an important issue—how many of you have known someone who had power or authority in a work place or a family environment who abused or mis-used that power or authority in some way?

One old dead philosopher famously said that power always corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely

Jesus told us to pray that God would deliver us from temptation and power sure seems to bring with it a whole bunch of temptation

But instead, here in this passage, **we see Paul praying that God would GIVE us power**

And as we look at this prayer, what we see is the redemptive use of power

How does power get used in such a way that it's a blessing to us and not a curse to us? How does power given to us not corrupt us, not turn us into dictators and despots and hoarders and graspers?

Power is a gift to us when it is employed not as an ends to itself but **when it serves faith and love**. Paul is praying not that the people reading this letter might have power for the sake of more power

He's praying that they might have power for the sake of something else that's much much better

And those two much, much better things, faith and love, require power in order to get a hold of them rightly.

Faith, of course, is the hard part for so many of us, even those of who believe. Let's talk briefly about that

Some of us are skeptics by nature, some of us just have a hard time believing something we can't pin down or dissect or touch or handle

This morning, if you know that faith is not easy for you, or maybe you're one of the many people here who are stuck at that place of needing to take the step of faith,

My prayer for you is THIS prayer:

I pray that out of God's glorious riches, the source of all power in the cosmos that he might strengthen you with POWER in your inner being, so that Christ might dwell in your heart through faith

And for many of us, the only trick is to not resist it, to not push back

to be willing to receive the Spirit's work and to be willing to get in step, keep in step, to say not my will but yours be done and then to jump in with whatever the Spirit brings up around you

And then Paul goes on to pray that same power might be at work lead us into love, love, love and more love

He prays first that we'd be **rooted and established in love**. This is the starting point when we come to faith in Christ and are connected to God through him

Now of course, there are all sorts of other alternatives, lots of OTHER things that we could swap out for love and attempt to be rooted and established in

we could attempt to root and establish ourselves in **wealth, in work, in family and friends**

we could root and establish ourselves in **volunteerism, in do-gooder-ism, in politics, in patriotism, in our golf game, in college basketball**

we could even root and establish ourselves in our **books and magazines, in movies or t.v. shows**

But what Paul is talking about is when we commit ourselves to following Christ, we are rooted and established in love—he's celebrating that and naming that as a core, good thing

What he's talking about is something like **Christian base-camp**

Here's base camp at Everest, really a big tent city where all kinds of companies and tour guides set up shop and prepare for the big ascent

Base camp is the place at the foot of the mountain where it's a little less treacherous, a little safer, more secure

It's the place of preparation before you attempt to hike up the summit

And if we're talking about base camp, about where you go to get refueled, where your anchor is, where your start is, where your safety is, where you go to get your energies and what's most important

Anything less than love as our life base camp results in a life that is less than what we were made for

You know why after air, water, food and physical safety, love is the next most important thing in our wiring and make-up as human beings?

Because we're made in God's image, the God who is perfect love, makes creatures who were designed to receive his love and then to extend that love to one another. We are made to give and receive love

And so many of us spend so much of our lives looking for love in all the wrong places, bending our lives around all the wrong people and gods and all the wrong things

Trying to be rooted and established in something other than God and we're trying to extract love out of something that can't deliver the love we're made for

So a question for you this morning as you're here on a Sunday morning in July is what's your basecamp today? Where is your basecamp set up right now?

Is it at work, or in your garden or your social status or your independence and self-sufficiency?

You were made in God's image to run on God's perfect love like a fish was made to swim in the water.

And so the Scriptures all throughout invite us to build the base camp of our lives along with people from all over the globe, right here in the love of Christ

And many of us start out in a relationship with Jesus and have love as our base-camp only to drift ever slow slowly into other things as base-camp

while others of us have never made that commitment

Maybe you've never been in a church setting or known any Christians who demonstrated love as their base-camp, unfortunately there's lots of that around

Or maybe you've visited church or played around the edges of faith and around the edges with a relationship with God,

but you've never really put the stake in the ground and said, "Here's my basecamp. I'm a Jesus person."

That's who I am and his love is what I'm going to spend the rest of my life rooted and established in."

If any of that describes you, the invitation this morning in real-time is to pull up your tents from any other base-camps

and this morning to commit yourself to being rooted and established in Christ's love

Paul's praying that we'll start at the base camp of being rooted in the perfect love of Christ,

And from that rootedness, from that establishedness, you might have power **to ascend as high as you possibly can into the infinite summit of Christ's love: high and wide and long and deep!**

And you're going to need a lot of **POWER to start that ascent!**

It takes power to grasp how wide and high and deep is Christ's love, and it takes even more power to know it, to experience it, to have a personal experience with it that confirms it to you in your inner most being

In fact, Paul says, I want you to know this thing that you can't really ever fully know, to know this love that surpasses all knowledge

Before I had children, I had no idea that you could have an experience of someone driving you absolutely crazy in one moment

And then merely seconds later be so utterly irresistibly wonderful and delightful and feel such intense feelings of love

My wife and I have already with kids ages 9, 11, and 13, poured out more time and effort and energy AND MONEY and LOVE into their lives than anything else in our lives

Our kids will never, ever fully understand how deeply we love them maybe until they have kids of their own

So they'll never know the fullness of it while they're still kids, but you know what they can do? Begin to **grasp it** and begin to **know it**, the two key words that Paul uses here

When you grasp something, you've got something of an intuitive sense of it. You've got a feel for it. You *grasp* a concept or theory—it's a sense of the bigger picture, how it fits together

So I never fully grasped chemistry—I never understood how it all fit together, there was never this intuitive click 'aha!' that I kept waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting to happen

I could maybe run an okay one-off experiment, but I never grasped how it all fit together

But with the help of a great teacher in college, I could begin to grasp the brilliance of Shakespeare and Chaucer.

And over time, I've come to grasp the wonder of Jesus who is not just nice, but utterly brilliant

Paul wants us to feel in our bones, in our souls, at the deepest places of our being this intuitive sense of the majestic love of Christ, as I heard one woman describe it: she knew the words but she became a Christian when she heard the music of the gospel, the wonder of Christ's love

How high is that summit of Christ's love? How wide, how deep, how infinite? We'll spend eternity exploring it and knowing it and never scratch the surface

And so Paul wants us to grasp, deep in our souls, the infinite greatness of Christ's love.

But it's not just intuitive, not just something we feel in our hearts, not just something we grasp, it's also something we *know*, dig into, go to work learning about

You can grasp how big a mountain is that you're about to scale and how intimidating it might be but if you want to climb it you know what you've got to do? You've got to go to work studying it, understanding it, knowing the ins and outs of it

take a step and learn, take a step and look around you, discover the contours of it and the surprises waiting around different turns

and what kind of rock it is and what the best options for ascent are

That's not just a gut feeling about it

that's a real understanding of what's before you and how to relate rightly to it, how to engage rightly with it otherwise you fail the ascent and perhaps fall and break into a few hundred pieces!

And so Paul calls his readers to KNOW the love of Christ, to roll up our sleeves, study the Scriptures, pray and explore, learn, to take risks and step into it,

to be intentional about getting as much information as we can about the love of Christ

This is part of the reason why we're doing this study of Ephesians tonight. If we aren't equipped to read the Scriptures for ourselves, it's going to be very hard to KNOW this love of Christ and understand it in the ways that Scriptures call us to

The fountain head source of the love that we all were made to crave is found right here

and Paul wants us to grasp it, become enamored with it, for our imaginations to get caught up in it, to experience it for ourselves and have it meet those deepest longings

AND he wants us to roll up our sleeves and to study it, to KNOW it, to understand it, to climb up into it

And this morning, at our last stop on this summer road trip through Ephesians, we're hitting on the deepest core soul hunger that we all have: this core soul hunger to be loved and loved perfectly

And this morning, the invitation is to have that deepest core soul hunger met by the infinite and perfect love of a generous God

Today's TAKE-WITH's are all about that love, some things for you to ponder, pray about, and go to work this week

How might you position yourself to grasp and to know how high and wide and deep and long is the love of Christ?

For some of you this means **moving your base camp** from some other place.

If you're not a Jesus person, you've got base-camp somewhere, you're looking for love somewhere, chances are you've tried so many other things and they haven't quite worked out OR they're working kind of, but at great cost to you and the people around you

The invitation to everyone here who's not at basecamp Jesus

is to know that you can join with the great crowd of witnesses who are rooted and established in his perfect love and are fighting to remain rooted and established there, in spite of all the things that pull at us

Others of us this week just need **to pray for power to grasp it**. Paul says it takes God's power to begin to grasp how high and wide and deep is the love of Christ

So for those of you who kind of know it or have a sense of the basics but have never been overjoyed at the love of Christ, never had moment of awe or wonder at the love of Christ

If you've never felt it in your bones and been humbled and wondered by the love of Christ, perhaps that's worth asking for—this power to grasp how high and wide and deep is the love of Christ

For others of you, you need to know it [**take a step towards knowing it**]. You don't need awe, you need knowledge, understanding, wisdom.

You need to come tonight to the Ephesians study, you need to buy a good book off the book shelf

you need to get together with someone who's older and wiser in the faith than you are and ask lots of good and even dumb questions—ask them to tell you more about God's love and then watch them fumble around trying to explain it to you!

That's three options, there are others, that you can do today, this afternoon, to take a step towards knowing and understanding how high and wide and long and deep is the love of Christ.

As we wrap up our summer road trip together, my prayer is that the good news that we've talked about over these 6 weeks might sink deep into our hearts and our minds and into our community

And that after our experience together in Ephesians, we might be all the more rooted and established in the love of Christ

And to be better equipped to grasp and to know high and high wide and how long is this love that surpasses knowledge.

Paul closes this section of the letter with this wonderful prayer that I want us to read out loud together a couple of times, an exclamation point to close out this series:

²⁰Now 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, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.