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Enjoying the View

Ephesian 3:14-21

Each fall my family is blessed to spend a week in Canaan Valley - perhaps the most beautiful place in our entire state. Near our accommodations is a mountain called Bald Knob - one of the highest points in the valley. At least once, during each stay I enjoy hiking to the top. It is not a long trip, but it is very steep. In my current, out of shape condition it is a bit of a challenge. Once reaching the summit, there is an awesome view of the entire valley to the West and miles of meadows into Dolly Sods to the East. There are rugged rock formations and there is always a strong wind blowing. One trip I made the trek in order to be at the top in the evening in order to watch the sunset over the valley. There is something invigorating about being at that place with that view. Getting away from the stresses and struggles of daily life and spending some time at such a spot is both refreshing and encouraging.

You all have been facing some tremendously challenging days here at the capitol. The situation over the budget has been stressful, contentious, and perhaps discouraging. I have thought long and prayed much about what might be genuinely helpful during such times. The best thing we can ever do is to take time to “climb the mountain” and enjoy once again the view of God’s great love for us. This is where we find spiritual refreshment and encouragement in difficult times.

A great Bible passage which will help us do this is Paul’s prayer¹ for believers found in Ephesians 3:14-21:

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think,

according to the power that works within us, ²¹to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Paul is writing a letter from prison in Rome to a group of believers in a church in the city of Ephesus. In the first three chapters Paul shares a wonderful description of the gospel and all the blessings God has given us through Christ. He is taking us to the top of the mountain in order to enjoy the view of all that God has done for us. As Paul closes the gospel part of his letter in chapter 3, he shares with those believers, and with us, how he has been praying for them. As we look at Paul’s prayer, we would see that these requests for the believers in Ephesus are certainly things we want to occur in our own lives.

Note the requests that Paul prays for believers:

That we would be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.

Paul prays that we might be strengthened by God’s power through the Holy Spirit. “The inner man” is speaking of our Christian character and Christlikeness. It refers to our heart attitudes, even as we face the challenges of life such as you are facing here at the statehouse. It is as we take the time and make the effort to enjoy the view of all that God has done for us that we are strengthened to deal with and respond to all that comes into our lives.

That we would be able to comprehend the breadth, and length and height and depth of God's love.

Paul prays that we might be able to grasp and understand God's great love for us. Standing at the top of Bald Knob in Canaan Valley is indeed an exhilarating experience. Taking time and effort to contemplate and even begin to understand God's love is something far greater. In chapters 1-2 Paul lists the blessings God has given us and describes God's love. The best description is found in 2:4-7:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul gives a vivid and terrible description of our situation without Christ. He sums it up by reminding us we were "dead in our transgressions". But because of His great love, He saved us and raised us up, and He will continue to show us His great love and kindness in years to come. Paul also describes this love in His letter to the church at Rome:

⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:6-8

Paul prays that we might "**know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.**" God's love is something we can never completely grasp and understand. That God the Son would humble Himself, take on human nature so He could suffer and die for sinful people such as us is beyond what we can ever hope to comprehend.

The believers at Ephesus were part of a great church. They had been taught and led by Paul himself for nearly three years. Paul sent a capable young man named Timothy to continue the work. Yet Paul assumed these believers did not adequately appreciate the love of Christ. The same is certainly true of us. Although we may have followed Christ for many years, do we ever fully, completely understand God's love for us? We

should never tire of considering, contemplating, and meditating on God's love for us.

Obscuring the View

There are many things that may obscure or distort our view of God's love. It might be sin in our lives or a wrong understanding of ourselves or God as revealed in the Bible. However it is most often the challenges, trials, and difficulties of daily life that distract us from taking the time and effort to stop and enjoy the view of God's love for us.

I pray that taking a few minutes to focus on God's great love for us during this special session might help us experience being filled up to all the fullness of God in our lives.

The View from the Mountain Top

As we enjoy the view of God's love from the mountaintop, we might find great refreshment and encouragement.

- From the top of the mountain, we can see the great depth of the valley from which God has saved us.
- From the top of the mountain, we can see the way the Lord has led us.
- From the top of the mountain, we can see our destination. This will give us hope and joy in the midst of our severest trials.
- From the top of the mountain, we can see what God is ultimately doing in our lives. God is maturing us and making us more like Christ.

¹It is a wonderful Bible study to consider Paul's prayers for believers in the various churches to which he wrote. You can find other examples of these in Philippians 1:9-11; Ephesians 1:15-23; Colossians 1:9-14; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12. A great resource is *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. D.A. Carson. Baker Book House. 1992.

SPECIAL SESSION BIBLE STUDY
SUNDAY, JUNE 12 – 6:00 P.M.
MCMANUS CONFERENCE ROOM
252-M (Located by House minority offices)