

Know The Love Of God

Ephesians 3:13-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Do you know what today is? It is 9-11. There have been numerous songs written about being Americans since then. Checking into airports since then has inconvenienced many because of that. And if you happen to want to travel even to Canada or Mexico, that which used to be just a drive over the border, now requires you to have a passport and is no longer easy.

We pray for all those who were affected in some way by the events of 9-11, for there are many who still remember.

But how many of you have ever suffered tribulation in your life? Jesus is entering Nain as a funeral procession is leaving the city, the only son of a widow has died. How terrible that this widow is now further bereaved by the loss of her son. And even more so when we consider that she was not receiving social security, nor did her husband leave her with a pension. Her son was her caregiver and provider.

Then there is our Old Testament lesson where we find Elijah living with the widow and her son as we heard last week, but now, the son has died. This widow is distraught about this tribulation that has now come into her life.

Finally, Paul writes our Epistle to the church from his imprisonment in Rome. He is imprisoned jail because he was going on journeys proclaiming that Jesus is God's Christ, that He is true God who became man, suffered, died upon the cross, and was raised the third day; and all this Jesus did for the express purpose of bringing forgiveness, life, and salvation to sinners.

Paul begins our text asking you not to lose heart over what he is suffering for you. What could he possibly be suffering for you? Initially, we'd like to claim, "it isn't really for me that he is suffering, but for the Ephesian Christians, after all, he died almost 2100 years before I was born, how could he be suffering for me?"

Have you ever read any of books of the Bible which Paul recorded? Have you ever heard the message of your being justified before God, by grace, through faith, in Christ Jesus? Have you ever heard that you were baptized into Christ's death and resurrection? If so, you heard them because of Paul, and it was those are the things for which Paul was suffering imprisonment in Rome.

Many people, especially the Jews, wanted Paul silenced and/or put to death. They didn't like him telling people about Jesus being God's Christ. The Jews detested the fact that many claimed that Jesus was the Messiah. Anybody who spoke about salvation coming through the works and mediation Jesus, not through the keeping of the Law of Moses, needed to be silenced. This is why Paul is in prison and suffering, because he proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ – and

if you believe it, then it is to your glory – and he suffered for proclaiming and writing of Jesus, God's Christ.

So, how many of you have read all of Paul's letters in the New Testament? They are Romans, 1st & 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1st & 2nd Thessalonians, 1st & 2nd Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and possibly Hebrews. Have you read them? How many of you know the life story of Paul, from his persecution of the church, to his conversion on the road to Damascus and ultimately his death, probably by beheading.

Do you know what Paul's most important message was? Paul speaks in our text about it, he prays for the believers in Ephesus and for you, bowing before the Father, *from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may 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.* (vv14-19)

What is the love of Christ that you are to know? What is this love of Christ for which Paul would gladly suffer?

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men... For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 1:22-25; 2:2-5)

How great is the love of God for you? It cannot be found in nature, it cannot be seen in the stars at night, nor anywhere in creation. You see it only in the crucifixion of your God and Lord, your Savior Jesus Christ. Yes, it culminates in the empty tomb, but the love of God in the suffering and death that Jesus Christ, endured upon the cross, to free you from sin.

Christ's tribulation begins in the Garden of Gethsemane, and we see the love of Christ evident in His prayers. Jesus knows what is coming. He knows that a friend will soon betray Him, that *all* his friends will abandon him, and one of His best friends will deny him. He knows the anguish, pain, mockery, scorn, and shame He will soon endure. He knows that he will be nailed to the cross and suffer the most agonizing death devised by man. He knows that He is doing it to make the atoning payment and sacrifice for your sin, for mine, for the sins of the Christians in Ephesus. He knows He is about to endure the burden, shame, and guilt of the sins of the whole world.

It is for this reason that Jesus prays, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (Luke 22:42) If this is what I must endure for Us

to love them, then so be it. If this is what must happen so that they might join Us for eternity in Our eternal kingdom, then out of great love for them, I will do it.

You and I have a hard time getting our heads around exactly what that means. Why would someone endure such grief and pain and tribulation for us? Because, as it says in our text, this is the “love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.” Or, as it says in another place, it “surpasses ALL understanding.”

Why would anybody go through all that for us? Why would a loving Father desire for His only Son to suffer so for others? In order that what brings tribulation, sin and death, might be defeated and done away with.

Christ willingly went to the cross. He endured all that He suffered to purchase your forgiveness and grant to you life everlasting – eternal freedom from all pain, grief, and tribulation. That is love! He took into His own flesh, all our pain, grief, and tribulation. So, all that He endured, He endured in your place – in my place – in Paul’s place.

Why would he do such a thing? It makes no sense whatsoever? This is the love of God, the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. He died in your place, so that you might be freed from sin and have everlasting life.

Do you know the love of God? It was on the cross where He gave His Son, and in His suffering and death, you know God’s love. God’s love comes to you that you might know that love more intimately, that it might build you up in His love.

Know the love of Christ... You are forgiven that you might live without fear or tribulation with Him for eternity.

Know the love of Christ... take and eat, this is my body, given for you.

Know the love of Christ... drink of it, this is my blood of the new testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you celebrate the Lord’s death till He comes. You celebrate His love which frees you from sin and gives you life everlasting where there will be no more sorrow, pain, or tribulation. Know the love of God in Christ and rejoice. Amen.