

# Christianity is Christ

## Dwelling in the Believer

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Ephesians 3:14. "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father..." So we know that we have prayer. The prayer of an apostle. And what he's praying for this church in Ephesus. "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father from whom every family in heaven..." Or, "from whom the whole 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 man (or inner being) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

Now, we looked at this last week. And I don't feel like the few comments that I made last week on these mighty verses - or even verse - verse 17, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." I don't believe that they've been adequately handled. I feel like this is one of the greatest truths. I feel like most of us pass over this verse when we read Ephesians. I feel like it has very little meaning, very little substance, very little impact on our life - if the truth be told. I think this is a window into some of the richest possibilities of being a Christian. And I feel like we would do a disservice if we simply run on to something else right now.

And I'll tell you this, all through the week - and I don't believe that this had to do with the fact that I was sick this week - but every time I would come and open up the Scriptures and I would look at this verse, the more I looked at it - you know what this is like - if you've spent any amount of time studying and meditating on Scripture; if something grabs hold of you in Scripture, you begin studying it, looking at it, mulling it over. The bigger and bigger it got to me, it felt like it sucked the energy and the life right out of me. What I was reminded of was the Queen of Sheba. You remember how it was said she saw Solomon's wisdom and she saw his house and she saw his servants and she saw how the whole thing was decked out and she saw the offerings that were being given, and you know what it says? It sucked the breath or it took the breath right out of her. And that's how I felt to this verse. I felt staggered by it. I felt ashamed maybe that a jewel was here and I haven't seen it for what it is, but this is how I felt about this verse 17. As I was being confronted by this, one of the things that I wanted to do was I wanted to say, Paul - this was the title of the message last week - Paul, teach me to pray.

And you know one of the things that really strikes me about Paul's prayers is the way he prays for Christians. Go back to Ephesians 1, the first place where we found Paul's prayers in this letter. If you go back to chapter 1:16, Paul said, "I do not cease to give thanks for you remembering you in my prayers." We have the same thing going on here. He's praying for the Ephesians. "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give you..." now some of your Bibles say "a spirit." I think it should be "the Spirit." I think he's talking about the Spirit of God. In the original, it's difficult to know whether it should be a capital "S" or a small "s," but "the Spirit." Now, let's say he's talking about the Spirit of God. Praying for Christians that they be given the Spirit. They have the Spirit. And even if it's a small "s," "the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." What are we saying? Are we saying that they're void

of that? Are we saying that these Christians at Ephesus lacked any bit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Christ? Listen, v. 18, "Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope..." Now get this. That they might know what is the hope of their calling, or the hope to which He has called you. The hope of God's calling. But what are we going to say? Are we going to say that these people don't know anything of that? If they've experienced it, obviously. If they've been called of God and they're saved, they know something about this.

Or, what's the next thing? "That they might know what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints." Or the next thing, "what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might." You see, what I'm learning about Paul's prayers is that Paul, all through this letter, do you know that every place that talks about his prayers, he's praying for something that at least in part, these people already had. And what that does, is it so powerfully comes home that there is so much more in the Christian life. You've got to see that from these prayers. That he's talking to God about the needs of Christians, and he's praying for the very things that if we were to be honest we would say they probably already have - at least, to some degree. See, that's the issue. To some degree. Why is he praying? Because he knows that they don't have it to the degree that they could have it. That's the issue. That's the issue all the way through here. These prayers don't mean that the Ephesians were void of these realities. It's enlargement. That's it. Enlargement. What more we could have. And that's what I want us to get a feel for. Before I just run on to something else, we need to feel it. I could have more. I could have more if I were to pray, if others were to pray for me and ask God for these very things. I could have much more. Christianity.

Oh, I forget where it was. It's just coming to my mind right now. Spurgeon talking about the Christian life, and he sees it as many men in the Christian life, they wade in the shallows. And he said some, a few, they go out deeper to where they're waist- deep in these waters. And he said, oh, just a scarce amount - the very fewest - dive in and find it an ocean to swim in. (incomplete thought)

There's a possibility here. He's praying, "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith," to people who are already Christians. And you've got to let that register. They're already Christians. He's praying that Christ would dwell in their hearts. This - do you feel it? This is what you were meant to be. This is what we're to press on to be. This is what's possible for us. And I don't want us to be content to sit stagnant in our Christian life. Do you realize this about yourself? The potential. What more there is to be had. It's precisely because this reality exists that Paul prays the way he prays. If this reality didn't exist, if the Spirit of God was saying to Paul, "Paul, there's no more. Once you've become a Christian, you've got everything. You don't need anymore." If that was the reality, the Spirit of God would not have moved upon Paul to pray this prayer. The very reason that he's praying this way is because this reality is possible. Greater, greater. This is what is possible for you in this life.

And I would just say this to all of us, can you be content when there's such verses as this? I'm telling you as this got bigger and bigger before my eyes and sucked the breath right out of me, it makes me want more. My greatest fear is that as a preacher that I would handle this verse in such a way as to just leave you all that way. Just the same and content. And walk out of here with no greater expectation than what you had before you heard me preach on these

verses. And I fear having a church that knows very little in experiential fashion of what this verse means.

See, this is the thing, when we even hear it, when we hear Paul praying that according to the riches of the glory of God, that we would be strengthened with power by His Spirit in our inner being, that we might have Christ dwell in our hearts through faith. When we hear that, what? My fear is that we would say, "I don't know what that is. I can't relate. I mean, yeah, that's nice. Let's go on to something else because that doesn't really move me, that doesn't stir me. I don't really know what Paul's talking about there. I mean, yes, we walk by faith, not by sight. And I've got this faith that Christ is there somewhere and that He's real. I believe the facts. I believe Jesus died. I believe He rose again. And I don't know about this, but you know, I guess I assume it should be true that Christ is in me." That's not what we want. That's not what Paul's talking about. Paul isn't talking about something that you should take by faith in your head to know it's true, but there's no experiential reality behind this. That is not what this is about. Because where he's going to go on with this is that we might have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is this breadth and length... This gets into the realities of being rooted and grounded in the love of Christ and having that love burst forth on us. If we get to the place where we say we don't know anything about this, I don't know whether we should bow our heads and weep, or we should just try another religion. Or go back to the starting point, because if that's all we're getting out of what Christianity is all about... Paul is telling us something.

Look, the Christian is called that one who hungers and thirsts. And I hope that there's a longing in your soul. And I was just reminded of Psalm 81 that says, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." It's like, Lord... give me this. Give us this. Give us the more. Don't tantalize us. Don't dangle this in front of us only. I'll tell you what this is all about. Craig talked about the glory. It's about that glory coming inside. It's that glory becoming real. The possibility. I want us to pursue this until we can all say, "yes, I know at least something of what Paul's speaking of." This is one of the greatest truths that a Christian can ever be confronted with - the possibility of more of Christ. Surely then, what could be more important to us? If that is a reality that for each of us to know what this is - what is this? And to know how to pursue it, how to arrive at this position.

And I want us to think. I want us to think what's actually being said here. And we're just going to focus right in on verse 17 and the first part of chapter 3. Verse 17, "so that Christ..." So that Christ - let's give the emphasis there first. "...That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Christ. And what I want you to see as the apostle's prayer is that Christians might possess the indwelling Christ in the heart. This is Christ - actually Christ dwelling in the heart.

What is this? It is far, far more than when we say, "Well, I bear you in my heart." Or, "I have you on my heart." And Paul talked that way sometimes. He would say things like this, "make room in your hearts for us." "We've wronged no one. We've corrupted no one. We've taken advantage of no one. I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts." That's not what Paul's talking about. What is that? That means I have affection for you. I'm thinking about you. But that's not what Paul's talking about. We don't want to limit it to that. In Ephesians 3:17, Paul is speaking about far more than having feelings in our heart for Christ. Don't try to water this down by saying that it means that we simply have thoughts about Christ or warm fuzzy feelings toward Him or that our lives even resemble Him. That's not it. That's not what Paul's praying for here. Do you realize a dead Mohammad can produce that in

his followers? A dead Joseph Smith can produce that in his followers. What? They think about him. They even are inspired by him. They even resemble him perhaps. They imbibe his teachings. But that's not it.

What Paul is talking about here is the living Christ dwelling, dwelling in you. The living Christ does not influence His people far away, separate, from the grave. It's nothing like that. What Paul sees is this: The people of God being influenced by an actual living Christ that takes up His dwelling inside the believer. He is actually inside. It is the presence of His own self that influences us. Not just what we read about Him in a book. You see, if that's all that Christianity is, that is a miserable kind of Christianity where your Christianity comes from a book, where your faith is simply these abstract facts that are removed. That is not biblical Christianity. Biblical Christianity is Christ actually coming inside the believer, into the heart of the believer, within us, exercising influences upon us which are inseparable from His presence. That's it.

Paul uses the term "dwell." And as I said last week, it's got a "kata" on the front. It means "down." He settles down into the believer. This is not some shallow thing here. And as I reminded you last week from John 14:23, I mean, hear Jesus' words. He says that "My Father and I, we will come to him and make our home with him." No matter what you want to say about Islam, Mohammad can't do that. "We will make our home with him." And I mentioned to you Revelation 3:20. There's Christ. He says, "I'm knocking at the door." And He says, "To those who hear and open that door, I will come in and I will sup with them and he with Me." You need to hear that. "I will come in." See, this isn't some teaching like, oh, this is just speaking of affections and feelings. Like: I bear you on my heart because I have a deep love for you. Sometimes the New Testament speaks that way, but when it comes to Christ in the believer, that is not the issue. He says, "My Father and I, we will make our home in you." "I will come in." Paul is not praying merely for some thing to happen. He's not praying that we would simply grasp the truth of this. We're talking about Him. He wants us to be strengthened to receive Christ Himself, Christ in our hearts. We're not just pursuing some truth about Christ. That's not it. It's Him. And this isn't just theory here. It's to where Christ comes in.

Brethren, do you recognize? You get some people, and I had a brother telling me recently about his concern for people who they seem to talk the talk, but they seem to lack a sense of the reality. And you know when your Christianity is all theory, that's bad. That's bad because Christianity deals with more than just a knowledge up here of what the truths are. You know what I see? I see some people - and we don't want to be these people - they know the truth and they try to persuade themselves that what is true of biblical Christianity because it's described in this book, they try to persuade themselves that it's true of them. But we're talking of something - listen, if Christ indwells your heart and you're rooted and grounded in that love that He saturates you with, and you begin to have some idea about the breadth and length and height and depth and to grab hold of this unsearchable love of Christ, and you're filled with all the fullness of God, I guarantee, that's not the kind of thing where you have to sit back and say, "Well, I don't feel the reality of this, but because I believe it in my head, I'm going to try to persuade myself that this is real." That's not what's happening here. That's not the kind of Christianity we find in Scripture. Let me ask you this: is Christ real to you? Is Christ real within you? I'm not talking religion and church and reading your Bible and singing the hymns. Is Christ real to you? Him! Has He come in? And in the same way that He would sit down with somebody

and have supper with them, and you would know it, do you know that reality? Because if not, I'm telling you, don't be content.

Look, if you're not ready to go further here, if you're content with this, you can be content with that. But I think verses like this are meant to make us not content and to take the prayer as an indication that this is a promise. If Paul weren't under inspiration, we might question: Well, he's fallible. Could he be praying for something God wouldn't maybe perhaps really be willing to give us? But he is under inspiration, which means Paul asking this for us is as good as it being a promise. This is God telling him, "Paul, pray that way for them and let's record it in the letter to the Ephesians for all the future generations to see that this is a very valid and legitimate thing to ask for because I intend to give this." It's a promise. Christ came.

You think about this, Christ came from the glory, and He dwelt among us, He tabernacled among us. And what happened? He lived and He died. And He died on that cross and after three days, He came forth. Death couldn't hold Him. And for 40 days, He was here. And then He ascended to the right hand of His Father, and Scripture says that He is there to intercede on our behalf. And I'll guarantee you this, as much as it is a reality that He sits in Heaven, there situated at the very right hand of God making intercession for His people, I'll tell you this, it is just as true that He is within every believer in this room. That is a fact. Not just that you have an affection on your heart and soft, warm, fuzzy feelings about Him, it is that He actually has come in and He dwells there. He lives within the believer. That is a reality. We're not talking just about some theory or some "thing" or some "it." It's not just some doctrine. This is Christ - more of Christ - that Paul prays for. And look, I would say, we must pursue it. Because He dwells there by faith. And if we really understand faith, then it's something that we're going to pursue.

Before I get to that, Paul isn't just using some figure of speech which actually doesn't mean, after all, that Christ is in us, but some other meaning. Do you remember what Paul himself said to the Galatians? He said, "I was crucified with Christ." And then what does he say? "I live, yet not I, Christ lives..." Christ who lives in me. Or Colossians - Craig's been going through Colossians. Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Now you should just stop right there a second. If you simply have a head knowledge of this and you're trying to persuade yourself of this, because there's no real evidence. You're just trying to hope and persuade yourself. You're seeking to persuade yourself that Christ is in there even though you're not really sensing this in any tangible expression. How can Christ in you be the hope of glory? You see what Paul's saying? To have Christ in you is the very thing that gives you the hope that Heaven awaits you at the end. Christ in me. Christ. I would say it again, do you know the reality of this? Are you experiencing Christ in you? Inside. When Christ manifests Himself to us, this is not merely a figure of speech. It's real. It's actual. If it's not real, it can't give us the least hope of glory. So, it's Christ. Christ who dwells in you.

Now let's think about the next thing. Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. I want to look more closely at the heart. What is the heart? What is it? It's you. I mean, let me ask you this: Where are you? Where are you? You say, well, I'm right here. Can't you see me? Well, to about the fifth row. I can't see you after that. I see you. But see, I see your body. That's not what I'm asking. I'm not asking where your body is. Where are you? Where are you hearing me? Right here, but where are you processing what I'm saying? Where are you? Where is the center

of consciousness right now? It feels like it's in our head, right? In our brain somewhere. And yet, we feel. We feel here. We can feel. And it's all mixed together in this mysterious way. Where are you? That is the heart. And Paul often talks about the heart. He loved the term. It comes up in his writings a lot.

And let me just give you a sampling of the way that he used the term. Because I want us to get a feel for what did he mean by it. When he talks about Christ dwelling in your heart, where is the heart? What is the heart? Where is Christ dwelling? Where should we look for evidence of His dwelling? Well, in Romans 1 - don't look at these, because I'm going to shoot through them fast. You won't have time to get there. But Paul talking about fallen humanity, he talks very specifically about them being futile in their thoughts, their foolish hearts darkened. Their foolish hearts darkened. The heart is where the thoughts are. Their thoughts - they're futile in their thoughts. The thoughts of the heart. Only evil continuously. It's where we think. It's where we're thinking now. Paul talked about the lusts of the heart a little later on in Romans 1. The lusts of the heart. Or, the desires of the heart. It's where we desire. It's where we think. He also speaks about an impenitent heart. You know what that means? That means we repent in the heart. That means we feel sorrow for sin in the heart. There is a turning of the will in the heart. That's where that happens. The work of the law - this is Romans 2 - the work of the law is written on their hearts. What does it mean to have the law written on your heart? It means you know it, you feel convicted by it - conviction, the conscience. That's where the heart is. "The love of God poured abroad into our hearts." Have you ever read that one in Romans 5? What does that mean? That means we feel God's love for us. We have some cognizance of it and we're feeling His love. He bears witness of His love for us. That happens at the heart level. Or you read this, Romans 6, "obedient from the heart." Obedience. Where I'm surrendered. Where my will is operative. That is at the heart level. Or, "let the peace of God rule in your hearts." Being at peace, not at war. "With the heart one believes." You see where we're at? It's where we think. It's where we know. It's where we believe. It's where we desire. It's where we repent. It's where we feel - he talks about the sorrow of the heart. "Deceiving the hearts of the naive." Or, "the imagination of the heart." "The purposes of the heart." "Their hearts may be encouraged." Or, "thankfulness in your hearts." You see everything that's attributed to the heart?

And here's my question: The heart is you at the deepest level - it's you. It's at your level of consciousness. Your level of knowing, your feeling, your desire. That's where Christ is going to dwell. Remember. It means to settle down. Where are you? Are you able to look where you are and say yeah, Christ is here with me. That's what Paul's praying for. Christ would settle down. That's what He means when He says, "I stand at the door and knock." You open that door. I'll come in and I'll sup with you. I'll have dinner with you. I'll eat with you; you with Me. There's going to be a closeness as there is when you have communion with somebody across the dinner table. And in Eastern mindset, this is extremely close. We don't take it like they did. Can you look, where are you? And just think. Look. Look where you are in there. Not your body. Not your physical eyes. But are you able in your consciousness to look above and beneath and beside to the right hand and to the left hand and say Christ is here with me? He dwells with me. Oh Lord, I want You here more. Or do you look around and you're just trying to persuade yourself that it's true, but when you look around, if you're going to be honest...

The heart is you. It's the deepest part. It's the consciousness. Where are you? See, this is what Paul's praying for. You're not alone anymore when this happens. Oh, how the world struggles with loneliness! But you're not alone. This is the greatest communing and fellowship that can be imagined. He comes in and He settles down. And so when you arise in the morning, when you go off to sleep at night, you know what happens? He's there. He's close. And you know He is.

Where are you? Is Christ there? Because you see, this is what Paul says is the hope of glory. It's when you turn and you say He's here, and I hear His voice. Oh, the hope of glory! This is the seal that I'm heaven-bound. He wouldn't come with me now if He wasn't going to take me to be with Him then. That's the issue.

You remember the two on the road to Emmaus? Because that's a tremendous visual of Him coming in to eat. Did not their hearts burn within them? Why? Because when Christ comes into your presence, it does something. Their hearts burned. Christ came in. And He dined with them. And you know what? While He was there, their whole self was consumed with that reality, that this One sat at their table. And you know what they weren't doing? They weren't trying to convince themselves: this is true. Well, we're trying to persuade ourselves that He's really here, but there's no evidence of it. We don't see Him. We don't feel it. Our hearts really don't burn. We basically are sitting with an empty table - it's just you and me, the other guy on the road to Emmaus and we're just sitting here and we're trying to imagine Him being over in the seat. That's not what they did. Oh, I know they didn't recognize Him for a while, but they were totally consumed with this One. This is no theoretical thing. This is true.

This is not the kind of thing where we don't know it's true, but we're always trying to persuade ourselves this is true. This is the possibility being held out by Paul in this prayer to all of us that Christ might settle in. Not like those two guys where Christ vanishes, but where He settles in and He doesn't vanish. Basically, He settles in and He comes more and more in His fullness and He takes you right on out to the eternal day when you'll see Him as He is. This is Christ in His personal presence and power in the center of your being. That's what this is. This is being permeated with Christ. This is Christ coming, Christ breaking in upon the soul with His presence. Brothers and sisters, there's more to be had. That's why Paul is praying. He wasn't doubting the salvation of the people back there in Ephesus. He believed every bit they were saved. In fact, he says confidently, you were chosen before the foundation of the world. He was confident. He wasn't doubting their salvation. But then on bended knee he pleads, Lord, strengthen them with the power of the Spirit of God according to the riches of Your glory. Strengthen them and sweep them into these fuller realities of Christ.

Now, I want to emphasize the last two words. That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. These two words, they convince me that none of us should be content to simply let Paul pray for us, or let somebody else pray for us that Christ might dwell in our hearts, or that we just simply pray for it. We should. We should pray for it. But if you say, well, that's all we can do. Paul's praying, by the way, and you know, he's not really telling us that we should do anything else. It's by faith. We simply take this at God's Word and isn't that what faith is all about? We just sit passively by and wait for Christ to come into our hearts. And I would just ask this, since when is faith ever passive? It isn't. Since when does true, God-given faith in any aspect of life just sit passively by? Do we say God's going to save some from every tribe and

tongue and so we're just going to passively sit back? We don't say that. Do we say that God is going to save whosoever He wills so we're not going to evangelize? Are we going to say, well, God's going to do what God's going to do, so we don't pray? We don't think that way. That isn't the way we want to think. Through faith. Faith.

Listen, listen. Jesus Christ coming to a church, He says, "Behold, I stand at the door." To a church. "I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. You open the door." He says, "I will come into him." And so I think the thing that we should ask is this: Do you believe Christ can come in? Do you believe He can come in more? Do you believe He can settle down more? That's certainly what Paul's praying for. For the life of the Ephesians. Is that reality that he's praying for in the life of the Ephesians also possible for us? I don't believe these truths are meant to simply apply to the Ephesians and not to us. This is the Word of God. It's profitable for every one of us for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, that the man of God - that's for all of us, not just for the Ephesians.

Shouldn't we ask ourselves the question: Lord, okay, You stand at the door and knock. That picture in itself is showing a responsibility on our part. Wouldn't you agree? If we are to open and He will come in, I think the question arises, how do we open? What do we do? We need to be strengthened here. Strengthened - that's where Paul started. Strengthen us! Why? Where do we need strength? Maybe in the area of resolve? Maybe in the area of the will? I mean, you can get gripped by this reality. There's a door here. Christ is saying, "I'm on the other side. Come and open, and I'll come in." And you know what? You can sit in a message like this and you can hear this and you can say, "Yeah, I want that." "I want that." Have you ever noticed - maybe the word "fickle" is a good word - have any of you ever been in the place, you sat under powerful preaching, you had a sweet time in prayer or powerful season in the Word, and you're resolved. I want that. I want to go deeper. I want to go further. I believe it from Scripture. I can have it.

But what happens? Any of you ever been there where you look up and it's like what happened? How did I get distracted? I mean, I was resolved for this. How did I get here? I was determined. I wanted that. I made certain resolutions. Have you ever been there? You make these spiritual resolutions and then what happens? What's the difference between the people that press on to know the Lord and the ones that kind of give up or are always struggling? Always falling short? What's the difference? Well, I think it comes back to this. I think it comes back to being strengthened by God Himself to have a will that's committed. I think it comes to having appetites that are strong. I mean, we know it. You know what, I got sick this week. My appetite has not been there. Do you ever go through seasons in your life - maybe you're saying yeah, way too many of them - where you're hungry? You're hungry all the time. You can eat and you're still hungry. What's the difference? Well, there's a difference in the health of that appetite. I'll tell you, if our appetite itself were to be magnified a hundred fold, we desperately needed Christ. Maybe some of the trivialities that have sidetracked us and derailed us - did any of you after last week's message, any of you go out of here thinking, yeah, I want that? I want that. I want you to want it! I hope so! See, that's the kind of thing that I'm afraid of. That you went out of here not thinking that. I hope you did! I hope some of you did! You were feeling like: I want that! I want to know more of the fullness of Christ settling into my heart. I want that. I want it deeper.



But, tomorrow came and what happens? We forget. We become distracted by something else. Oh, you were fully resolved a week ago. A week ago right now, it was like, ah, I want that! I'm going to open the door! I want Christ to come in. You prayed last week: Lord, give me that! The thing that Paul prayed for. Give me people to pray that for me! I want it. But the cares and the concerns and the trivialities of the world - and you see, our commitment is weak. Our will is too weak. Your faith is too weak. I mean, you hear the man in Scripture: "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." And I guess one of the things that I would have our faith to go to in the very beginning is this belief that there is a God who can and will and does strengthen His people.

Has your faith even latched on to this reality? That there is more - I can have Christ settle in. I can have Him come into me in a way that He's never come into me. Go back and read the Song of Solomon. You want to feel this at the level - marriage is only the picture! The intimacies of marriage are only the picture. And you can go back there and you can say yes, "my Beloved, He put His hand to the door latch." And what happened? "Well, I already washed my feet." Is that not the sad commentary on too many of us? Yes, I want it! He stands at the door! He's knocking! I want to let Him in! But it's just like the Song of Solomon. We hesitated. We hesitated. Something else was more important.

You know what will happen? The Lord will test your heart. I wanted to sing that song: "I asked the Lord that I might grow." Because you know what happens oftentimes? You say, "Yes, Lord. I want this. And I'm going to seek to be careful to not let the kinds of things into my life that might grieve and offend You. I want You to find my heart a sufficient place for You to dwell deeply in." And you know, you begin to pray for this, and you begin to long for this. And what happens? You begin to pray, "Lord, strengthen me for this. More of this. More of Christ." And then you know what happens? The Lord tests your heart. You remember the song. Suddenly Newton's hymn breaks in upon us. It can seem very discouraging. Yes, brother, I went out of here last week. I was very determined, but you know what I found during the week? I found such manifestations of pride in my own heart and idolatry or something else. I asked the Lord that I might grow. But you see, you forgot the song. Because you hear things like this and it's like: That's glorious! Christ coming in! And oh, bringing His fragrance, His power and His presence in my inner being. Yes! I want that! I asked the Lord that He might come in. And Newton said, "and seek more earnestly His face." Yes, I want to seek more earnestly to open that door that He might come in. "'Twas He who taught me thus to pray."

Isn't Paul teaching us to pray this way? That Christ may come in. Lord, You're teaching us to pray. "And He I trust has answered prayer, but has been such a way as almost drove me to despair." See, that's often what happens. Lord, please come in. Come close. Indwell. Come in and sup with me. And see, we hope the same way Newton hoped. "I hoped that in some favored hour, at once He'd grant me my request. By His love's constraining power, subdue my sins and give me rest." Instead of this: "He made me feel the hidden evils of my heart, let the angry powers of hell assault my soul in every part." And you know what happens? You suddenly feel like, Lord, I want this. I want to go deeper. But as soon as I set my heart to it and I begin to pray I feel like I'm further away than ever from Christ. You may actually feel much worse now than before. Why? Because things have come up. They've come to the surface in your heart that you never imagined were there. It drives you to despair. It drives you to be desperate.

But you know what I say? Is look, this is often part of it. This is often what God is doing. Why? You have to remember this. I think this is key. Those Laodiceans - if Jesus would have just broken in right away and said to them, "I stand at the door and knock. Open up." Well, you know what they were saying. We're rich. We've got our act together. We don't need anything. We've prospered. In need of nothing. And you see, you feel so boldly and confidently, "Yeah, I'm good." "Christ, come on in." But Jesus said this to them: You know what the problem is? You don't recognize the reality about yourself. What? The reality is that you're wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. And you see, what we have to recognize is this: That when Christ comes in, we don't deserve it. We don't deserve it. Our faith needs to go there. Our faith needs to latch on to that reality. Christ coming in and settling down, it's entirely a mercy. You don't deserve it and your performance isn't the basis of it. Look, it's true, you can do things to drive your Master away. There's no question about that. But how does Jesus want the Laodiceans to approach the door? Confident? Got our act together? Let me tell you this. If you began to pray and you began to seek this, and suddenly God began to show you things in your heart, then you know what? What you want to do is like the Laodiceans, you want to repent. You want to recognize what you are in your own strength. And recognize that this is God's way of taking you on, taking you deeper. To sweep that heart that Christ may come in. Don't resist that. And don't be in despair because of it. Oh, the devil will be right there saying, "Look at you. You're a mess. You think Christ is going to come in and dwell there?" Listen, whatever his foul language may say you remember this: Christ came to save sinners. And He came to save them and He came to love them and He came to commune with them and He came to dwell within them. And never because of any merits on their part. Simply because for their sake, He's willing to die and to do this that the glory of God might be shown.

Several years ago, actually when I was in this portion of Scripture, maybe a verse or two removed from where we are right now, I first brought up this picture. Praying Payson - Edward Payson. I'm going to his hometown. I've seen his grave. I'll be heading there in August. In Payson's works, you remember the concentric circles. He basically paints a picture. Imagine the sun in the middle. Concentric circles moving out. Concentric means they all have the same center. Concentric circles moving outward like the orbit of planets in the solar system. Christ is in the middle. And you know what? The tighter the diameter, the more - more real, the closer that Christ is dwelling. And listen, Payson paints the picture like this: he says those that are closest in - closest to the sun - he says, "they're the ones who value the presence of their Savior so highly that they cannot bear to be at any remove from Him. Even their work..." He recognizes they need to work. They can't be in prayer all day or just sitting in their Bibles all day. But even in their work, "they will bring up and do it in the light of His countenance." They're knowing His presence right there, and they're mindful to find that presence. Some of you have heard how Wesley said he was determined to pray until he prayed. He was willing to pray until he found God. That's the kind of Christianity you want. You want it to where you are going to press on until you find Him. These people - they don't want to ever lose Him. They don't want to lose "one ray, one beam of His light."

Now, he takes us out to the next concentric circle. He says, "Others, who to be sure would not be content to live out of Christ's presence, but they're yet less wholly absorbed by it than those on the inside. And it may be seen a little farther off. Engaged here and there in their

various callings. Their eyes generally upon their work, but often looking up for the light which they love." But they're just not as sensitive.

Then he says there's a third class. A third circle. A bigger, broader diameter. Further away. It's beyond the first two. "But, it's yet within the life-giving rays." They're Christians. "It includes a doubtful multitude." And by "doubtful," he doesn't mean doubtful whether they're saved. He says they are within the light-giving rays. They're doubtful about what they really want most in life. "Many of whom are so much engaged in their worldly schemes. They may be seen standing sideways to Christ." Brethren, if the truth be known, how many of us are sideways standers to Christ? "...Looking mostly the other way. Only now and then turning their faces towards the light."

Now he goes further out. "Yet farther out, amongst the last scattered rays of the sun. So distant that it's often doubtful whether they come at all within the influence of those light beams." They may not be real. "It's a mixed assemblage of busy ones, some with their backs wholly turned upon the sun. Most of them so careful and troubled about their many things as to spare but little time for their Savior. The reason why the men of this world think so little of Christ is they do not look at Him. Their backs being turned to the sun, they can see only their own shadows and are therefore wholly taken up with themselves. While the true disciple, looking only upward and inward, sees nothing but his Savior and learns to forget himself."

I would say this, if Christ does not settle down - this is the prayer - that Christ may settle down in your heart through faith. If Christ doesn't settle down in you, what do you have? If you're in there by yourself, and you look around and it's just you - your will, your desires - what do you have? What loneliness! What emptiness! Are you there alone? Or is the presence of Christ's own self there with you? His personal presence. His power. At the center of your being, the center of your consciousness, living there. What the height of foolishness to say, well, I believe. So whatever you're talking about, it must be real. Height of foolishness to be content with that. Look, you want to be like these people who look up and there He is. There are the beams of His light, of His glory that radiate and you have a sense: I'm not alone. He's here with me. I'm not alone. His blood has covered me. I'm not alone. His voice speaks to me. I'm not alone. I smell the fragrance of His presence. I feel Him here. I feel Him on my conscience. I feel Him in my thoughts. I feel Him in my desires. I feel Him in my hungering and thirsting. I hear Him. That voice. You don't want to just say, no, it's not true, but I'm a believer, so it must be true. You try to persuade yourself of that. The question is this: is Christ a living reality? And you know what it seems like to those who say, "yes, He is"? Those are the ones more desperate to get more. Oh, this is good.

Lloyd-Jones said this - and I feel it's spot on - he says, "I've often felt that there are many people today who have taken so much by faith, that they have nothing." You hear what he's saying? Of course, he's not talking about genuine faith. Because I'll tell you what genuine faith does. You know it - those champions in Scripture, or you find people that "by faith..." one guy did this, "by faith" she did this, "by faith..." What did they do? They pressed forward. They saw the promise. And they sought to embrace that promise. They saw a city whose foundations were of God and they pressed forth. And you know what it says? It says they had opportunity to go back, but they didn't go back.

And you know what? You have an opportunity to go back, just like it was before you ever heard this message. But you know what they did by faith? They embraced the promises. They obtained the promises. That's what faith does. Faith presses in. Faith goes on. What Lloyd-Jones is talking about is the kind of faith that is not true faith at all. It believes some facts it's content therewith and it just seeks to persuade oneself that all these theories in their brain are somehow reality. But it doesn't act on what it believes.

Listen, if you believe this; if you believe there is a way to go over and open the door, then I would take up your mind and your thought and your meditations and your Scripture readings and your prayers with: "Lord, show me and teach me and strengthen me according to the riches of Your glory that I might have the strength to persist enough to make it over to the door and open it up. I want You in here. I want to know something about You beyond what I know now!" Anybody else want that? I hope you do. Embrace it. Chase it. Pursue it. Open that door. Pray. That's what Paul was doing. Pray. We need to be strengthened to persist and to pursue: Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief. Lord, I want this, but help me to want it more. Strengthen me to pursue. Strengthen me to press in. Because we can get all lathered up, and I know many times through my Christian life I've been right there. You feel so powerfully affected, like, oh, I could never go back to how I was before. And then what happens? A week later, you're back to where you were before. Why? Why? Because we need to be strengthened. We need more resolve. We need more commitment. We need more humility. We need to see ourselves more like what Jesus was telling those Laodiceans they needed to see them. You're miserable. You're wretched. You're poor, you're blind, and you're naked. By ourselves, we are. Separate from Christ, that's exactly what we are. "Vile" is how Wesley put it. As Christians, aren't we obedient? As Christians, aren't we good? Yes, but you can view those realities separate from Christ. When we become self-confident - that's where the Laodiceans were - self-confident. You know what kind of Laodicean lukewarm attitude, how it would manifest itself here? It's just: I'm good. That's what they were: "I'm good." We got it. We're okay. We're rich. We've got our act together. Things are good. And you get done with this, and it's like, "Whatever. I'm good." "I'm out of here." That's a present-day Laodicean.

May God help us to abhor that and press on. Don't be content. Don't be content to not be able to say, you know what? I don't know the fullness of that text; I don't know the fullness of Ephesians 3:17, but you know what, ever since I heard it preached on, I have longed, I have thought on it, I have meditated on it, I have given myself to thinking about it, I've prayed for it. I am pursuing God for it. And you know what? You know what the reality is? I don't know as much as I think I can know about that, but God has broken in. There has been light. There has been a closeness. Things are happening. Because when Christ comes in - "I will come into him." That's what He promises. "I will come in." Look, if it happens, you're going to be able to have a testimony that you're going to be able to share. What could be better? What can be more glorious? What? You're too busy? Are you too busy to sleep? Are you too busy to eat? Are you too busy for this? What's more important? Man doesn't live by bread alone. What's most important? Look at that prayer and say: God promises something in that prayer and I want it. Lord, give it to me. Please, Lord, give it to me.

Father, I pray for all of us. Give us more. Give us more. And give us a discontentment to simply drink of the broken cisterns. Give us more. I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.