

SEEKING TO KNOW THE LOVE THAT SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE

INTRODUCTION:

About a month ago we were reminded from James 4:14 that “we know not what shall be on the morrow.” In some ways, that’s a good thing. If we knew the future, many of us would spend our days depressed about what was going to happen—or looking for ways to change it!

In spite of all the draw-backs of knowing the future, I must admit that once in a while it would come in handy. Wouldn’t it be nice to know ahead of time if what you were planning to do was going to work out or not? For example, a deacon friend of mine and I spent a couple of evenings each week for it seemed like an entire winter rebuilding the motor of my youngest daughter’s Honda Civic. As we were working, my friend would often ask “I wonder if the prize is worth the chase?” In other words, ‘is all the work that we are going to put into this endeavor going to be worth it?’

The answer turned out to be “NO;” the prize was not worth the chase. Why? Because we got the car to start and run for about 2 days, then couldn’t get it going again. Had I known from the beginning what the final result would be, I wouldn’t have had us go through the all trouble!

The same thing happened with our Santa Fe when we were in the process of moving up here. Some men of the church and I spent a fair amount of time working on it, but never could get it running. I don’t recall how long we worked on it, but after the Honda Civic incident I was much more willing to give up so as to not waste any more time. The prize—getting the Santa Fe to run—was no longer worth the chase.

One other example—a non-vehicle related one—has to do with being disappointed after reaching what is considered a somewhat “famous” destination. My apologies if this offends you, but I remember our first trip to the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore in S.D. Prior to getting there, we drove hundreds of miles and all along the way saw signs for “Wall Drug.” Unfortunately, I “took the bait” and we stopped. Three things stick out in my mind about Wall Drug: 1) one of the kids being scared by an animatronic dinosaur; 2) a myriad of shops with Black Hills gold; and 3) the feeling this mega-tourist trap was way overrated!

Imagine knowing the future in each three scenarios—knowing the “prize” before beginning the “chase”—but still choosing to go through all the work anyway. Wouldn’t make much sense to spend months working on a car if you knew in the end it wouldn’t work and it wouldn’t make sense spending who knows how many extra hours to go see Wall Drug if you knew ahead of time it was going to be a major disappointment.

Would God ever want us to use our time that way—to pursue something we could *never* catch? Kind of like telling one of your children to chase a butterfly, knowing full well they are not going to catch it! Would God ask *us* to do something like that? In the passage we are about to read, He actually does! We looked at these verses a couple of weeks ago, but I want us again to turn to Ephesians 3:14-19.

In verse 19, Paul prays that they would “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge...” In other words, his desire was for them to know something that was **unknowable**. However, unlike working on a car that you know you will never get to run, the prize of seeking to know the incomprehensible love of Christ *is* worth the chase. The question I want us to consider this morning is simply this: Are you seeking to know the love of Christ? Paul gives us 2 reasons why we should pursue knowing the love that Christ has for us. We will look at one this morning; the other this afternoon. First, we should seek to know the love of Christ because...

1. *It is a profitable pursuit*

Why pursue knowing the unknowable love of Christ? Because there is profit for us in doing it; there is benefit in the “chase” even if we don’t catch “the prize.”

A. The bountiful result at the end (v 19b)

“That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” **Clarke writes:** “To be filled with **God** is a great thing; to be filled with the **fulness** of God is still greater; but to be filled with all the **fulness of God** utterly bewilders the sense and confounds the understanding.”

Imagine you were part of the multitude that was there when Jesus fed 5000 men—beside women and children—with just five loaves and two fishes. Suppose you were near the front and saw the boy’s lunch when it was handed to Jesus. And suppose you were “super” hungry—but also very conscientious—and thought to yourself, ‘I’m going to have just a little bit so there is enough for everyone.’ The person sitting next to you takes a big handful and sets it on his lap—but you take just a little bit. The person on the other side of you takes a large handful, too, and there is still plenty to keep on passing it down the line. You eat and are still hungry, of course, but you are too embarrassed to ask for more. And you go home—hungry—when everyone else was full and there were 12 baskets full to spare! How foolish to not be filled; to go home hungry!

And yet that is what too many of God’s children do too much of the time. We are content with scraps and don’t seek to enjoy the fullness of God—all that God has given us in Christ. God wants us to enjoy and partake in His fulness—not the leftovers! While preparing this message, I noticed something in Ephesians that I had never noticed before—how frequently Paul refers to the **abundance** of the blessings we have in Christ.

--1:3 “...blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”

--1:18 “...riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints...”

--1:19 “...exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe...”

--1:23 “...the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”

--2:4 “But God, who is rich in mercy...”

--2:7 “...exceeding riches of His grace...”

--3:8 “...the unsearchable riches of Christ;”

--3:16 “...riches of His glory...”

--3:20 “...exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think...”

--4:13 “...unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”

Is God rich? Does He have enough to spare? Of course, He does—and He wants us to have it too! Even if we don’t “catch” the “prize” of **fully** knowing the unsurpassing knowledge of the love of Christ, the end result is that we will enjoy more and more of the fulness of God. So what exactly is the fulness of God?

First, what it is **not**. It does not mean that we will inch closer to being all-powerful...or all-knowing...or everywhere present. What it does mean, however, is that we will become more Christ-like—we will display more of the fruit of the Spirit—the love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance Paul wrote about in Galatians 5. That is what God wants you and I to have and enjoy. He wants us to have

- the ability to forgive and love those who harm us like Jesus forgave and loved those who killed Him
- the ability to trust God in spite of the storm clouds—both physically and emotionally—that lie ahead
- the ability to remain hopeful in the most difficult trial because God loves us and will never leave us

Why seek knowing the love of Christ—even if it surpasses knowledge? So we can be filled with all the fulness of God. Are you seeking to know the love of Christ? If not why not? The prize is worth the chase—we will experience more and more of the fulness of God.

Not only is there a bountiful result at the end, there is also...

B. The blessed realization along the way

Think of the blessing it is to become more and more familiar with—to experience more and more in your heart and soul—the love of Christ for you! My wife and I, Lord willing, are going to Yosemite National Park the end of May. Part of my on-line research in preparing for this trip is watching videos and looking at pictures of the various points of interest—primarily waterfalls. Some of the hikes we are tentatively scheduled to do are not easy—7 miles round trip and half of it uphill! In spite of the difficulty of the hike, however, many of the trail descriptions claim two things:

- 1) it will be worth it when you get to the end; and
- 2) even if you don't get to the end, it will still be worth it! In other words, the scenery along the way is beautiful enough that you will in no way feel "cheated" if you don't reach the destination!

That is how I believe this pursuit of the love of Christ is. We will not reach the pinnacle this side of glory, but we will certainly enjoy the journey! What will we discover on this journey of attempting to comprehend—to know and experience—the love of Christ?

i. The breadth (width) of Christ's love

--v 18 "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the **breadth...**"

"Breadth" is another word for "width." How **wide** is the love of God? How expansive is it? **Trevor Chuma** writes: "It is as boundless as space, as wide as the ocean, as limitless as the sky."

--In his song "The Love of God," Frederick Lehman writes,

*Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made,
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill, and ev'ry man a scribe by trade,
To write the love, of God above, would drain the ocean dry;*

Nor could the scroll, contain the whole, tho' stretched from sky to sky. (Stanza 3; pg 108)

--The love of Christ is not only wide in **how far** it reaches—it is also expansive in regards to **who** it reaches.

Who does it include? Many of us have sung "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

- He loves the young and the old the rich and the poor the famous and the unknown
- He loves the powerless and powerful the educated and the not educated
- He loves the humble—and the hypocrite the religious and the racist the addict and the adulterer
- He loves conservatives and liberals gays and straight
- He loves men and women and boys and girls and those who don't know what they are.
- He even loves those who are trying to change how He made them!

Don't misunderstand me—God hates their sin and rebellion against Him—but He still loves them and desires that they repent.

ii. The length of Christ's love

--v 18 "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and **length...**"

--How **long** is Christ's love? When did it start? When will it end?

--Ephesians 1:4 "According as He hath chosen us in Him **before the foundation of the world.**" He loved us not only before He created us—He loved us before He created the world!

--Ephesians 2:7 "That **in the ages to come** He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us..." He loved us in eternity past—and He will love us for eternity future!

Jeremiah 31:3 "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with **an everlasting love**: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Christ is everlasting and so is His love. Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ we are told in Romans 8:39.

iii. The depth of Christ's love

--v 18 "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and **depth...**"

How deep is Christ's love? Two aspects regarding the depth of Christ's love

a) How **far down** will Christ's love reach?

--It can reach to the vilest of sinners

--It can reach to the abortionist doctor and the consenting mother

--It can reach to the serial killer and the drug pusher

--It can reach to the human trafficker and the homosexual

Can the love of Christ reach down and save the soul of Chris Watts, the Colorado man who smothered the life out of his wife and two little girls? I believe it can.

b) How **deep in satisfaction** is the love of Christ? One man:

"God's love can make up for the rejection of others. God's love can feed our lonely souls. God's love can fill the overwhelming heartache when we lose a spouse of many years. God's love can bring us purpose and vitality even in the aches and pains of life. God's love is deep."

iv. The height of Christ's love

--v 18 "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and **height;**"

Although it is true that no matter how high we go, Christ love reaches us, I don't believe that is the point here, though. Again, I think of two aspects.

a) How **high and lofty** and impossible it is to grasp. God's love and His ways are higher than ours.

Psalm 103:11 "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him."

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

--Christ's love is high because it is beyond our ability to comprehend. I think there is a second aspect, though, that being...

b) The **exalted position** it places us in

Ephesians 2:6 "And hath raised us up together, and made us **sit together in heavenly places in Christ**"

Romans 8:17 "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also **glorified together.**"

Romans 8:18 "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the **glory which shall be revealed in us.**"

Are you pursuing—are you seeking to experience—the love of Christ? What a profitable pursuit! Although it will never be fully grasped, it is still a prize that is worth the chase. In fact, I believe it is actually **a blessing** that the love of Christ will never be fully understood this side of glory. Why? Because we will never come to the point where we say 'I have comprehended and experienced all there is to know of the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ.' We will **never come to that point**; there will always be more to learn and more to experience and more to appreciate.

We looked at **why** we should pursue comprehending the love of Christ; notice now the "who"

2. **Who should pursue comprehending the love of Christ?**

--v 18 "May be able to comprehend with **all saints**"

This pursuit is not just for pastors or deacons or teachers—it is something God desires for **all His children**.

God wants us **all** to enjoy the fulness of His spiritual blessings—not just a select few.

Are you seeking to know better and more fully the love of Christ?

3. How do we pursue comprehending the love Christ?

Obviously don't have time to elaborate on these, but here are a few:

--Direct your thinking to the love of God. Commentators point out that the word "comprehend" means to "seize, grasp, attain." It is an active pursuit—not a passive one.

--How do you direct your thinking to the love of God? Romans 10:17 says "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

--Be in church whenever you can

--Read your Bible on a consistent basis

--Meditate on the fact of God's love—not your feelings

--Memorize Bible verses regarding the love of God

--Write down blessings you experience—demonstrations of God's love to you—to refer back to and encourage yourself in.

'Pastor, that sounds like a lot of work.' Maybe, but we have assurance from the Word of God that the prize will be worth the chase!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

1. First a question: Does God's love have **limits**? No—and yet, **YES!** Kind of a trick question, but here's what I'm getting at—God's love does not over-ride His holiness. What do I mean by that? Simply put, it means this: God has provided **one way**—and only one—for sinful man to be forgiven and escape the penalty for their sins. If you reject that way—and try to get to heaven **your way**—God's holiness **over-rides His love**. In other words, God's love does not mean that you will get into heaven "no matter what." We need to come to God on God's terms—not ours! Are you saved? You cannot comprehend or experience or pursue the knowledge of the love of Christ if you are rejecting Him!

2. For those of you are saved—for those who have trusted Jesus and Jesus alone for their salvation and forgiveness of sins—are you actively pursuing comprehending the love of Christ? If not, you need to start! Don't be content to feed on scraps when God wants you to be full!