

Rest and Roots Made for Family Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Brad and I'm one of the pastors here. Over the past two weeks we have been journeying together through a sermon series called Rest and Roots, a look at what the Bible has to say about resting in Christ and rooting down deeply in him. Although we started within the first five books of the Bible, this week we're jumping way ahead to the New Testament in light of Family Sunday. There we find an epic passage in the book of Ephesians that contains the themes of both family and roots, giving us a vision of what God the Father wants for his family, the church, which then has application to the individual Christian families that make up the church.

Warning: it's a vision that's as big as the universe--well, better put, as big as God himself. And yet it teaches us on a ground level, how to put down roots in order to see that vision become reality; what kind of soil that our roots must go down into. We'll be considering three big dreams that God the Father has for his family: to strengthen his family to know his love, to empower his family to experience his love, and to fill his family with all the fullness of his love.

With that said, if you are able, please stand with me to honor the reading of God's word. Today's passage is Ephesians 3:14-21. You may follow along in your Bible or on the screen. Hear the word of the Lord:

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

May the Word preached here today echo among the nations. You may be seated.

Exposition

Well, I think it's fitting on a Sunday when we're about to embark on big, glorious ideals about family that we start by getting real. And what could be more real...than family photos; and not just the one family photo that turns out ok, but some of those *other* ones, the real ones...¹

Needless to say, thank God he did not invite us into his family based on our striking good looks!

We start with this for more reasons than just a good laugh. As Paul the apostle wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he was writing to people like us in many respects: a wide variety of people from a wide variety of families, all with their unique stories and quirks, and now all caught up into the family of God. If we read between the lines of what Paul was telling them, there's a good chance this part of God's family was wrestling with things like tendencies toward rootlessness and instability [and] inferiority [and] confusion...to [a lacking] sense of their identity as part of the Church, and [a lacking] appreciation of the power and love available to enable them to live as God's people".²

Can anyone here relate? Is your life and emotions and desires anchored so firmly that you experience every day with unwavering confidence in who you are in Christ, so much so that you enter every situation with the power of one who knows they are loved and believes they are ready for anything? Maybe a few of us experience life that way. But it takes the words of God and encouragement from seasoned saints to remind me that God wants *all of us* to be able to live that way. So Paul's words to the unstable Ephesians are also Paul's words to us.

In the first two chapters of the letter he reminds them of their "cosmic" privileges as a result of what God had done for them in Christ; "cosmic" meaning massive, epic, out of this world.³ We can see the climax of these privileges in chapter two:

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by

¹ Photos from awkwardfamilyphotos.com

² Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 202

³ Lincoln, 201

grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus Ephesians 2:4-6

See what I mean about this being “cosmic”? God, out of his love and mercy and grace, moves us from death to life, causing us to rise from our own tombs just like Jesus rose from his, and to continue to rise with him so that we are seated with him in heaven. What does that mean? Surely it’s future tense, right? No, no, this isn’t even present tense--it’s past tense: “seat-ed”.

If you are in Christ, you have already been hidden in Christ, just as if you were one of those animals who ran into Noah’s ark before the big flood. You are *in* Christ, and whatever happens with him, it happens with you. If he is raised to heaven, then so are you. If he failed to keep his great throne in heaven (which he never will, but hypothetically *if* he did), so would you. When the wrath of God against the sin of the world comes down in great fire and judgment, just like the flood came down upon the ark, only those safe in Christ will survive. Church, you are seated with him in heavenly places--that is literally out of this world. It’s cosmic.

But the privileges don’t stop there. Paul goes on to describe the epic mystery of God now revealed as this: God’s family is not only for the Old Testament people of God, the Jews, but also for anyone who is not Jewish, Gentiles like probably all of us in this room. One big crazy family, united through Jesus Christ.

Ever been at a family reunion and thought, ‘How in the world do we all have the last name--we’re all so different?’ Or been at a church where you thought, ‘Man, this would be a lot easier if we didn’t such different opinions and personalities?’ Why? Because family as a concept was given to us to point to a greater reality: the diverse family of God as one, just as our God is three in one. This is why Paul continued,

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named Ephesians 3:14-15

Any thought or experience of family is meant to prepare us for the reality of God as our great Father. And for good or evil, this is how it works. Think about it, the way in which you experience your earthly father in childhood almost always defines the way in which you tend to view God as an adult. Was your dad not around much growing up? You probably find yourself assuming that God, too, has abandoned you. Or perhaps your dad was an imperfect man who was being changed more and more by his relationship with Jesus, who pointed you to Jesus as best he could, and was honest about his

shortcomings. If so, be grateful, because that is rarely the case. And for many in this room, that was not and is not the case.

Honestly, I was hesitant for us to use the children's storybook that we did this morning, for a couple of reasons. First, because in its attempt to communicate the truth about fathers as the spiritual leaders of their families, it could be taken as not valuing the role of mothers. Mothers are often the powerful day-by-day, moment-by-moment disciplers of children. If dads are like pastors, then moms are like family group leaders, who are intimately involved in your everyday life.

And second, I didn't want to come off as parading a biblical norm that won't be the norm for some families here. But we chose to go with the the storybook anyway because it's what God wants for his family--not just fathers stepping up as spiritual leaders, but *all* the family of God stepping up to love and serve and fill in the gaps we have in our earthly families. That's the family culture we want at Antioch.

And that's why it's not just religious mumbo-jumbo that Paul moves from talking about God the Father's desires for his family to *praying* for them to become a reality. In an age in which it was customary to stand while praying, he was *hitting his knees* "before *the* Father, from whom every family in heaven on earth is named".⁴

It's highly debated as to what Paul meant by this, but remember the whole letter of Ephesians is set in the context of "cosmic" things, epicly big. And when you've got a group of Christians who are feeling pretty unsure of themselves, they need to be reminded of the greatness of their heavenly Father; just like when the very first group of Christians in Jerusalem shook under persecution and suffering: when they gathered together, take note of the first line of their prayer:

"Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them..." Acts 4:24

They set their eyes on the Maker of heaven and earth--and by the time the prayer gathering was finished it was not them who shook, but the "place in which they gathered [as] they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

⁴ Lincoln, 201

Got a deadbeat dad? A wayward wife. Children who are out of control? Family scenarios that don't have easy answers? Here is a big prayer to a big God with a family so big that it stretches from heaven to earth.⁵ Legion of angels who stand at the ready? Made by him. Battered refugee family huddled together in worship and prayer? Fathered by him. Small church in the south end of Louisville? Named--not just by men like Todd Robertson and Jason Hunsucker--but named *by him*.

I. God Wants to Strengthen His Family to Know His Love - vv. 16-17a

And this brings us to our first observation from Paul's prayer, a prayer that reveals not just what Paul wanted for the Ephesians, but what *God wants* for his family: God wants to strengthen his family to know his love. Paul begins the prayer with these words:

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith Ephesians 3:16-17a

John Stott described this prayer like "a staircase [in] which [Paul] climbs higher and higher in his [desire] for his readers".⁶ Even though there is not yet a mention of love, we know that the strengthening and power that Paul prays for is what the Ephesians needed in order to really know the love of God.

But we would be wise to ask ourselves, 'Wait a minute, doesn't Jesus come to live in my heart as soon as I believed in him?' Absolutely! I'm already talking about that truth with my two year-old. So why in the world would Paul pray for something that had already happened to these Christians? Consider this bridge. Your relationship with God is like the towers of the bridge. They are set in a deep, immovable foundation. Jesus has come to dwell in you through the Holy Spirit, and he will not move out. This is your *union* with him. And yet your relationship with God is also like the deck of this bridge. It is designed to bend and flex as weather and weight causes it to ebb and flow. As Jesus dwells in you, it can ebb and flow based on how much or how little you respond to Jesus' love and presence. This is your *communion* with him.⁷

And this kind of relationship, just like any deep relationship, takes a mysterious inner strength to cultivate. Not the kind of strength our world celebrates, that throws around heavy weights or big egos, but the kind of strength runs to a cross, a strength that is

⁵ Lincoln, 202-204; Francis Foulkes, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, 101-102

⁶ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 134

⁷ John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*

stronger than death itself because, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁸

II. God Wants to Empower His Family to Experience His Love - vv. 17b-19a

As Paul continues his prayer we see--and this is our second key observation from the text--that God wants to empower his family to *experience* his love. The theme of a supernatural inner strength builds further beginning in the latter half of verse 17:

that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge Ephesians 3:17b-19a

It now becomes extremely clear where this strength comes from and what it leads to. Where it comes from is a life that is “rooted and grounded in love” (v. 17b). Paul combines two metaphors here to pray forward the Ephesian believers, not toward superficial, just-going-through-the-motions love, but toward deep, authentic love, like a well-rooted tree and a well-built house.⁹

And this is a large part of what makes this passage so relevant to our Rest and Roots series. As we consider the idea of putting down roots as a church family, or, for our purposes today, as individual families, what kind of soil do we root down into? Is it the soil of stability, with bigger numbers and multiple services and a plumper budget? What about the soil of safety, with erring on the side of wisdom and not sacrificing too much and little variation from white, middle-class Americans? Perhaps the soil of activity, with new ministries and more missionaries and a buzzing schedule of involvement in the neighborhood? Church family, what soil will it be? Moms, dads, or moms and dads-to-be, in what kind of soil are you planting your little ones? Hear the desire of your Father’s heart: let it be the soil of love.

Let this church, and every family that is represented within it, be characterized primarily--if nothing else--by love. Let it not be said, ‘That Antioch, that’s the missions church,’ or ‘That family, that’s the family with the really well-disciplined kids,’ but instead, ‘That church was so loving,’ and ‘That family really cares’.

And notice in verse 19 that the aim of this rootedness in love is “to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge”. What is greater than knowledge? Experience. Here is

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 99

⁹ Stott, 136

why this is so important: to experience love in the family of God is to experience *Jesus himself*. Any term like “the love of God” or “the gospel” or “grace” are words we use to describe what is actually quite personal, namely, the Person of Jesus Christ. One theologian puts it this way:

*Grace is the grace of Jesus...there is no “thing” that Jesus takes from Himself and then, as it were, hands over to me. There is only Jesus Himself.*¹⁰

Want more of Jesus? Want to experience all of him and the love he has to offer? Want to know the breadth and length and height and depth of it? How can you? It doesn't just come through a personal decision and waiting for the day you see him in all his glory. This passage tells us it comes through “all the saints” (v. 18), the massive family of God. That's why we emphasize membership and Family Groups and sticking with the church when things get tough--not for the sake of our numbers, but because according to Ephesians 4 it takes “the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, [to make] the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

III. God Wants to Fill His Family With All the Fullness of His Love - v. 19b

And God intends for all his children to experience all of his love. This is the third big dream that God has, to fill his family with all the fullness of his love. In verse 19 we read the climax of Paul's prayer:

that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 4:19

It's like God is growing his church like a great, big flower pot that he is pouring all of himself into. It's the grand conclusion of all things, where a big God with a big love and big family are all mixed together and all the attention will forever be on the great God who made it all grow.¹¹ It's a compelling reality. It's a satisfying reality. It reminds me of the lyrics from a Shane and Shane song:

¹⁰ Ligonier Ministries, “By Grace Alone: An Interview with Sinclair Ferguson,” <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/grace-alone-interview-sinclair-ferguson/>

¹¹ Lincoln, 215

*I'm so satisfied
At the thought of you
Growing up in me
Covering everything¹²*

Conclusion

My question then this morning is, “Are you?” Are you so satisfied at the thought of these things that it leads you to put down deep roots in the family of God?

It was this family that Jesus had in mind on the night he was betrayed, when he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said to them, “This is my body, which is broken for you; eat this in remembrance of me.” He also took a cup of wine, and after blessing it, gave it to his disciples and said, “This cup is the new covenant marked by the shedding of my blood. For as often as you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you announce the Lord’s death until he returns.” **We are announcing that Jesus Christ has made a way for us to be part of the family of God.** Our tradition here at Antioch is to come forward and break off a piece of bread and dip it in the juice. There will be stations here in the front; gluten-free bread will be available to my left, your right. If you’re not a Christian, this sacred symbol is not for you, but rather than taking communion, we encourage you to take Christ. He has made himself available to you this very moment. There will be pastors in the back and people to pray with you on the sides. Let’s pray.

¹² Shane and Shane, “The Answer,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DmzDDzXBj9g>

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