



To Him Who is Able to Do More Than We Can Imagine

Behold Our God – Read the Bible for Life Series #50

Ephesians 3:20-21

Pastor David Sunday

October 28, 2012

Holy God, we lift up our open hearts to You, praying that You would fill us with the light of the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. We pray, Father, that You would shine beams of gospel light and truth into our hearts and that You would especially impart the gift of increased faith in Your Word. Lord, we believe; now help our unbelief. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 3. We are fast approaching the end of our journey through the Bible and are spending these final weeks focusing on four New Testament doxologies. Last week was Romans; next week will be Jude. But this week we're looking at the sublime doxology in Ephesians 3, which has been called astonishing, audacious, staggering, so much so that we're tempted to think that the things Paul prays for and the way Paul worships God must only be for a few super-elite Christians.

As we read God's Word, I would encourage you to dispel that notion and realize Jesus Christ was sacrificed on the cross for you so that these things Paul prays for can be poured out richly in your life today and in the days to come. We should probably kneel when we read these words. Instead, let's quiet our hearts and give our most reverent attention and adoration to God as we read Ephesians 3:14-21—Paul's prayer and then his doxology.

For this reason I bow my knees 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.

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, to him be glory in the

*church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.*

Praise God.

Yesterday, the New York Times reported that more than 50 million people from the mid-Atlantic to New England were bracing for a potentially massive storm as hurricane Sandy turned northward on a collision course with another storm system that is sweeping in from the west. The two storm systems were on a collision course, which resulted in a flood of problems.

In another sense, John Piper has observed that there are two powerful theological storm systems that are colliding together when we get to this prayer in Ephesians 3. As Paul writes to a church that verse 13 indicates was losing heart over his sufferings, Paul seeks to encourage the church by praying that they would be strengthened in two ways.

First of all, in verse 18 he prays that they would *“have strength to comprehend with all the saints”*—not just alone as individuals, but in fellowship with one another; not just with those who are their friends, but with all the saints. Together they would *“be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ...”* Paul prays:

- that they would know how broad His love is in welcoming sinners like us
- that they would know its length in always being patient with us and never abandoning us
- that they would know the height of Christ’s love—always reaching higher than the towering mountains of our guilt
- that they would know the depth of Christ’s love that is always deeper than any pit our sin and misery could put us in

Paul says this love *“surpasses knowledge.”* This love is so powerfully strong that our hearts as they are cannot contain it. We need to be strengthened by the Spirit so we can know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge—not just intellectually but deeply, meaningfully and in a life-transforming manner. That’s the first storm front. It’s a good storm—the storm of God’s love flooding your life; that which you’re rooted and grounded in just washing over you with overwhelming surging forces.

The second theological storm front is in verse 20—God’s power. Paul prays that we would not only experience God’s love but that we would also trust in God’s power—*“the power at work within us.”* Piper goes on to say that these theological storm systems are on a collision course and when the massive weather front of God’s love meets the massive weather front of God’s power in the heart of

the believer, it produces a hurricane of confidence called “Gloria.” Hurricane Gloria: glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus now and forever!

As Paul considers God’s love and power, it moves him to praise God. Paul has been thinking about and describing these things in Ephesians 1:3.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...

Verse eight says, in Christ, He has “lavished on us the riches of His wisdom and insight.” Verse 11 says, “*In him we have obtained an inheritance.*” We are rich in Christ. As Paul considers these enormous blessings, he already starts praying in chapter one. I want us to start there because chapter three is a continuation of the prayer in chapter one. Paul says in Ephesians 1:15-23,

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Paul is praying that we would know the riches of God’s kindness and the immeasurable greatness of His power. Then, in chapter two he goes on to describe how that kindness and power has worked together to save us by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and how we have been raised up with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places. Then in the second part of chapter two he shows how that grace and power has been at work in the world, bringing together two parties that were alienated and hostile toward one another—the Jews and Gentiles—and making them one through the blood of Jesus Christ.

In chapter three, Paul starts to show how God’s grace and power have been put on display in his own apostolic ministry. We read in Ephesians 3:10 that the church is God’s

theater in which He puts wisdom on display “*to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.*”

Paul is laying out a breathtaking vision here of a God of immense grace, unfathomable love and infinite power. As he looks at this God, he prays not for small things but for great things because he knows, as the hymn writer John Newton says,

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much;
None can ever ask too much.

(Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare by John Newton; 1779)

Paul believes in that kind of God. He’s asking God to do amazing things in our lives. He’s asking God to help us know what is unknowable and to be rooted and grounded in that. As he tries with all his might and strains his eloquence in these chapters to its utmost powers, he’s trying to define the undefinable and measure the un-measurable. But now he’s got to move in Ephesians 3:20-21 to singing. He can’t define or describe it, so he has to doxologize it—put it into music to praise and worship this God. Even in his worship in verses 20 and 21, he finds himself at the limit of his powers to express Who God is and what God is able to do. He piles superlative upon superlative to try to describe the greatness of our God. He can’t do it! All he can do is sing praise to this mighty, mighty God.

As I look at this, I think, how can I describe the wonders of this doxology? I have 12 points for you this morning, but really, it’s only one point—12 variations on one theme. **The main point or theme is this: God can do more!** He can do more in your marriage, in your ministry, through your failures, through your disappointments, in the midst of your struggles, in the life of our church. God can do more than we think. He can do more. Let’s develop that theme with 12 simple points this morning.

1. **God is able to do more because He is passionate about His own glory.**

He is absolutely committed and passionate about bringing glory to Himself and about the world seeing the radiance of His kindness, power, grace and love. He is the One for Whom all of salvation and the universe exists. Look at how Paul begins the doxology in verse 20. “*Now to him...*” This is an important reminder that we exist for Him. The church

is here for God's glory. My life exists for God's glory. God's passion for His glory never takes an intermission. There's never a moment in which God says, "I'm not really very concerned about that right now."

This brings us conviction and promise. It brings us conviction regarding any part of our lives that we would want to erase if we were to stand before God today. We would want to get rid of that habit or thought because it doesn't bring glory to God. If God is always passionate about His glory, then we need to be passionate about eliminating from our lives that which detracts from His glory. Is there is any sense in which we think of church in terms of what we get out of it instead of seeking to contribute to the greater glory of God through it? This doxology reminds us why we're here and what our church is always for. It's not for what I get; it's for the glory of God.

This truth also brings us confidence because if God is passionate about His own glory, that means I can rest in perplexing and challenging situations, knowing that if I trust and obey God, He will get glory for Himself in this situation. God is able to do more because He is passionate about His own glory.

2. God is able to do what we ask Him.

Secondly, this doxology reminds us God is able to do what we ask Him. No prayer is too small for this God. *"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask..."* God invites us to come to Him.

I remember three weeks before Kate's surgery in the summer of 2010, as we were contemplating this weighty decision and wondering what would be the best thing, our friends Mike and Bev Bullmore quoted Philippians 4:6. *"Let your requests be made known to God."* They encouraged us to tell God what we would like to see Him do. You don't have to be ashamed to come to Him and ask Him. You can know that He hears you when you ask.

3. God is able to do all that we ask Him according to His will.

He is able to do all. Look at Ephesians 3:20 again. *"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than **all** that we ask or think..."* Someone has said that those words, *"to him,"* should be translated as, "now to the dynamic One; now to the One Who has all power because to Him all things are possible and nothing is impossible."

Is there anything God cannot do for you according to His will? Has God ever experienced an obstacle He cannot surmount? No. As I read the Word of God, it seems to me that God likes to create obstacles just to show us His glory in being able to surmount those obstacles. There is nothing in our lives that God cannot handle.

Do you ever think, “My sins are too great. I couldn’t bring *that* to God. I’m too ashamed. My problems are too big and my fears are too terrifying”? Don’t think that way because God is able to do all that we ask of Him—no limits. I love this statement: God’s abilities overrule our inabilities.

4. God is able to do what we fail to ask Him to do.

He’s able to do even the things we never ask Him to do. I want you to savor and chew on this verse from Isaiah 64:3. The prophet says to God, “...*you did awesome things that we did not look for...*” “We weren’t even looking and You did awesome things! We didn’t even ask You for this and You’ve done it!”

God’s will to act is not limited by our failure to ask. God has already done more in all of our lives than we ever expected Him to do—more than we could have ever imagined. He has surprised us with blessings that we’d never even ask for just to show us that He is able—able even to do what we fail to ask of Him.

5. God is able to do *more* than we ask or think.

Do you see that in verse 20? “*Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think...*” He is a God Who specializes in exceeding our expectations. We come to Him and say, “God, forgive me.” He says, “Not only will I forgive you, but I will adopt you into My family.”

We come to Him like the returning prodigal and say, “I’m not even worthy to eat under Your roof. Just make me one of Your hired hands.” But while we’re groveling toward Him, He’s running toward us. And before the words can even come out of our mouths, He’s lavishing us with kisses of grace and mercy; He’s taking out a robe of righteousness—the righteousness of His Own Son. He’s saying, “Here, put this on. Come into My house. I want you to feast on the abundance of My household and drink from the river of My delights” (Psalm 36:8). He doesn’t just meet our needs. He specializes in exceeding our expectations. He’s able to do more.

6. God is able to do *abundantly* more than all we ask or think.

Paul has to add that superlative. Not just more, but *abundantly* more. “He’s not able to just do more than our wimpy prayers and our timid thoughts,” says Ray Ortlund. He’s able to do far more than all our prayers and thoughts, including our highest and best prayers and thoughts.

Take everything you’ve ever prayed, everything you’ve ever learned about God, everything you’ve ever heard about Him through His Word and every good conversation you’ve ever had about God, then put abundantly more on top of what you already know about Him. That’s what God is able to do.

7. God is able to do *infinitely* abundantly more than all we ask or think.

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think...” It’s as if Paul is saying, “Okay. Are you with me? Do you realize God can do more in your life than you think? Now kick it up a few notches. God can do *abundantly* more than you think.” So you think, “Okay. He must be amazing in His grace and generosity.” Then Paul says, “Don’t stop there. He is able to do *infinitely* abundantly more than you could ask or think. I’m not just talking about a generous God but a landslide of liberality and an outpouring of grace and goodness from the heart of God that flows from a power that is inconceivable to our imaginations. His grace and power are such none can ever ask too much.”

Is there any promise in Scripture that you could bring to God and hear Him say, “Oh, I didn’t really mean that. You’re not really going to claim that, are you?” Does God ever exaggerate or promise more than He can deliver? May we never diminish Him in our thoughts or insult Him in our prayers. May we believe that when we finally pass beyond the walls of this world into our ultimate joy in His presence, we will see that He has not only answered our every need, but *out-answered* our every need infinitely above what we could have asked or imagined.

8. God is able to do infinitely more abundantly above all we ask or think *within us*.

He's able to do this in you—in your life, in your situation. He's able to work His almighty power, not only in the universe, but in you and through you. He wants to put His grace and power on display in your life situation. Unbelief says, "Yes, I believe God is able to do infinitely more than I could ask or imagine according to His power. Yes, God is omnipotent. I know that." But when unbelief is confronted with these words in verse 20, "*...according to the power at work within us,*" unbelief says, "No. That's too far-fetched. Yes, He's omnipotent but there's no way His omnipotent power is at work in me—not in my marriage or position in life; not with my financial situation; not with my friends. God is not going to use me to carry on the mission of the gospel to them. No. God may very well be all powerful, but there's no way His almighty power is at work in and through me." That's unbelief talking. Unbelief talks as if God has forgotten me, as if I'm overlooked or that God is unable to bring good out of the mess and misery of my broken down life.

Faith says something different. Faith says, "I may never understand what God is doing in my situation, in my job, in my grief or in my disappointments, but I know that God is for me. *"In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid"* (Psalm 56:4).

I've seen this in our church family this past month. I was so impressed by God's grace at work in Jim and Reba's lives. I was talking to Reba just a few days after their daughter died and I said to Reba, "The peace that you have right now—how you're accepting this, how God is working in you through this—is amazing to me." And she said, "David, the most important thing is that God gets glory from how we respond to this." That's the grace of God at work! Then we saw Jim stand up at his daughter's funeral and give testimony to God's kindness, glory, faithfulness and to the gospel of Jesus.

Listen, her death was not what Jim and Reba were asking for or imagined. But they believe and are showing they believe that God is doing far more abundantly beyond what they could ask or imagine through it. They believe that when they get to the other side, beyond the walls of this life to our ultimate joy, they will see that God has brought infinite glory to Himself and good to all kinds of people through something they didn't ask for. He's been doing *more* than they've been asking for.

Think about the things in your life that are perplexing you and eating away at you right now. Are you facing those circumstances as if Ephesians 3:20 is true about God? Or are you looking at some area of your life right now and acting as if that situation is beyond God's power to bring glory to Himself? Do you believe there's something in your life in which God is not able to be glorified? Do you believe there's some area of your life—

heartache, pain, wreckage—that God is *not* able to work in you with such power so as to bring glory to His name?

9. God is able to do infinitely more abundantly above all we ask or think in the church.

“To him be glory in the church...” That means in our church, New Covenant! They say politics is the art of the possible but the church transcends politics. We must never look at the situation where God has placed us—the mission we’ve been talking about this fall—and say, “What can we handle?” That’s not the way God’s people think. God’s people always look to God and say, “You are the God of the impossible so all we’ve accomplished already You’ve done for us. We’re going to trust You to do even more. God, You can do more.”

Every time we stretch our faith to what we feel is the limits of what is possible, after God works on our behalf, He looks at us and says, “Do you see what I’ve done there? Are you ready to trust Me? I can do more.” God can do more than just bring two congregations together to form a new church. This is not the end—it’s just the beginning. God can do more in New Covenant Bible Church for His glory.

10. God is able to do infinitely more abundantly above all we ask or think in the church because the church is in Christ Jesus.

“To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus...” (Ephesians 3:21). We are Christ’s body—what the world can see of Christ. We represent Him on earth and He represents us in Heaven. The reason God is not only able but willing to do infinitely abundantly above all that we could ask or imagine is because we know there is nothing that God the Father would not do for Jesus His Son. Would God ever not do for Jesus what Jesus needed? If we are the body of Christ, we need to believe that whatever the Father would do for Christ His Son, He would also do for Christ’s body, the church, in order to bring glory to His Son through us.

11. God is able to do infinitely more abundantly above all that we ask or think today—in our generation.

I love how Paul ends this doxology in verse 21: *“To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations...”* Yes, even in the 21st Century in a culture that seems like it’s declining and decaying. Even in a place where it seems like the darkness is on the rise and the light is diminishing, *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever”* (Hebrews 13:8).

Do you believe Him today? Do you believe that His eyes are actively roaming to and fro throughout the earth and that He desires to strongly support us today (2 Chronicles 16:9)? Do you believe that God wants to do more than we could ask or imagine in this generation (1 Corinthians 2:9)?

12. All eternity will never exhaust the glory due to God for what He has done through Christ Jesus in His church.

For all eternity will we never get over our amazement at what God, through His power, has done through His church? To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus all generations forever and ever will praise Him.

When I was a kid, one of the things I loved to do was go to my dad’s parents’ house—Grandpa Gene and Nana Joyce—on Sunday nights after evening church. My Grandpa Gene had a hobby of taking lots of photos and back then they were in the form of slides. He had carousels full of slides that recorded every conceivable event of every one of my dad’s siblings—their trips all over the country, camping trips, birthdays. I loved to sit there on Sunday nights. My Nana Joyce would make caramel corn and we’d sit and watch the slides in their living room. I loved to watch because I got to see what was happening in my family when I was not there. I got to understand more of the history of what had gone before me.

In Heaven, when God the Father gathers His children and says, “Come on, kids, let’s watch some slides and see what I was doing in the church through Christ Jesus—things that you never even knew. When you weren’t even there, I was doing this work.” He might show us a snapshot of a sister in Christ in Sudan who is starving right now as she holds her little baby and trusts in the promises of God saying, “I’m going to exalt Jesus in this situation.” She’s going through that right now and we don’t see it. But someday we’ll see many, many manifold ways in which God has gone above what we could ask or imagine through His church in Christ. And we will view the exploits of God’s grace and power and bring glory to Him forever and ever.

The last word is just, “Amen.” Amen means, “count me in. God, I want to be trusting in a God like You. I want to believe that You can do more in my life. God, I want You to expand my horizons, enlarge my vision, come into our church and give us faith to believe that You can do more than You’ve yet done.” Amen.

I remember a few years ago I was up in Wisconsin during New Year’s weekend which fell on a Sunday. I was not scheduled to preach down here—Jeff Brewer was. Then I got a phone call after church saying, “Andy Euler preached today on Ephesians 3:20-21.”

I said, “I thought Jeff was preaching.”

“Well, Jeff got sick last night so Andy preached.”

He gave a message on this passage that was being talked about throughout the church the rest of that month. I listened to the message later and Andy encouraged the church to pray a prayer that riveted me. I wrote it down in my Bible and have thought about it many times since. I think it’s a fitting way for us to respond to this God Who is able. The prayer said simply this:

“Lord, let me make a difference for You that is utterly disproportionate to who I am. Let me not limit you by what I can or can’t do. Let me make a difference for You that is utterly disproportionate to who I am.”

Today we could pray, “Lord, let New Covenant Bible Church make a difference for You that is utterly disproportionate to who we are.” Will you join me in praying that?

Father, all that we’ve done so far You have done for us and through us. You’ve already done in our lives more than we could have ever asked or imagined. You continue to do in our lives more than we could ask or imagine. In the future You will continue to do exceedingly, abundantly infinitely more than we could ask or imagine. For all eternity we will never stop praising Your power, goodness and love. So Lord, enlarge our vision, increase our faith and make a difference through our lives that is utterly disproportionate to who we are. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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