

“Power and Glory”
Ephesians 3:20–21
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June 5, 2022 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Our text for this study will be from Ephesians 3. This is a doxology of praise that Paul erupts in and is one that is not just beautiful but amazing. Please pay careful attention for this is God’s holy and inerrant Word. Ephesians 3:20-21 says *[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.* This is the Word of Lord. Thanks be to God!

Some years ago, in a restaurant I ran into a man who served as an elder at the church I was currently pastoring. This family left the church after some difficulties and struggles they were having as a family. I had heard that they had bounced around to several churches but I didn’t know which church they ended up at, but as I saw him, I went up to him and we exchanged some pleasantries. Then I kind of kicked into shepherd mode. I was thinking ‘Was he being shepherded, discipled? Were they hearing the Word and being fed?’ I then asked ‘Where are you attending church?’ He looked at me with a flat expression and said ‘We’re not going anywhere. We still love Jesus but we’re orthodox believers with unorthodox practices. We don’t like God’s people very much.’ What a sad thing to hear. I knew I had nothing to lose so I said ‘You know you can’t love Jesus and not love His bride.’ He looked at me as we went from smile to smile and then he said ‘We’re done here. Good to see you Rob’ and that was that. A few years later I had learned that he and his wife had divorced and he had now as they say ‘deconstructed’ his faith and no longer called himself a Christian.

Sadly, that story is repeated far too often. We see that church members can and do misrepresent their glorious Lord through their words and actions, somewhat so that they tragically hurt people, to the point that they feel tainted, have a cynical view of the church and even stop going all together. I know ultimately it is their responsibility as believers to understand what their role is in seeking the Lord but, people can be hurt and leave the church. In other cases, sometimes churches lose interest in the minds and hearts of the people because what they hear coming from the pulpit and see going on in ministry is really not much of anything, with nothing to hold them there.

How can that be in passages like Ephesians 3:20-21 are true? How can it be that we can have a lack luster view of something that God says is glorious? The church is God’s chosen repository of His power and glory. I realize the word repository is not a word that many use very often for I don’t but as I was studying this passage it was the very word that came to mind so I did further study on it by looking at an online dictionary. The resource I looked at said this; a repository is a place in which something has accumulated or where it is found in significant quantities.

There is no question that Paul sees the church as the place which God’s glory is to be found in significant quantities, led by the Holy Spirit, Paul says, in no uncertain terms. God’s desire and design is to display His glory and power in the church. I have to ask, is it immediately obvious to us? Is that what you think of when you think of the church? Is it a place that is filled with God’s power and glory, accumulated and found in significant quantities? If not, then I submit that the problem isn’t God’s design at all, but our perspective. Have we lost sight of

God's power and glory that is all around us as we gather to hear God Himself speak from His living Word? We are surrounded with power and glory in the church.

Some of you are thinking, 'what do you mean by church' for there are all different ways we use the term church. We rightfully make a distinction between a local congregation – a manifestation of the body of Christ – and the invisible church. Some would say Paul is speaking of the invisible church here in Ephesians 3 and he is. The visible church as we see in Acts 28 is the flock which Jesus obtained with His blood. The former is fixed in time and space to a particular historical moment. It is a local congregation of the body of Christ yet it is in these local time bound manifestations of the body of Christ that God has ordained to nourish believers by the means of grace – the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, worship, prayer – the faithful means and use of these means of grace are in fact a manifestation of that very power that God has designed to show in the church.

I want to look at this passage in Ephesians as we prepare to come to the Table and I want to point out that Paul has been leading up Ephesians 3 since Ephesians 1. In fact, we could probably say that all of chapters one, two and three of Ephesians is really apart of the doxology. Paul begins in amazement and then in Ephesians 2 he speaks of God's grace, mercy and salvation and by the time he gets to Ephesians 3 he is just overwhelmed with the power and glory of God. God demonstrates His power in the church.

There are two realities I want to look at and is part of what led Paul into the praise that he has. Ephesians 3:20 says *[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.* This verse is present tense, not past tense, although God has worked His power in our salvation. It's not future tense and yes God will work His power in our lives for He has promised He will, but this is present tense. It could even be better translated as 'the power that is working in us.'

Paul as already mentioned with amazement Ephesians 1:19-20 which says *[19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might [20] that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.* He is saying this power that is working in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and it's the same power that the Apostles went back into Jerusalem to wait for – the power that fell upon them at Pentecost. It is the same power that allowed them to be witnesses and that empowers us as well to be witnesses in this world of bearing witness to the fact that Jesus is alive and gathering His people.

What is He doing with that power in our lives? Do you feel the power of God at work in you or do you feel dry and powerless at times? Looking at this passage in Ephesians God is at work finishing what He has ordained to do from the beginning. Paul says in Philippians 1:6, *[6] And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* God is working out to the end what He began, a power first demonstrated by making dead rebels into live saints.

I want to look at an important passage from Ephesians 2:1-3 which says *[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— [3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*

There are two things to note from this passage. One, in our natural state every last one of us is dead in sin which means we are unable to come to God. Also, in our dead state we sin intentionally from a desire to sin, which means even if we were able, we are unwilling to come to

God and that's our natural state. You can't find a more desolate, desperate place to be apart from hell itself in this world – spiritually dead but physically alive, unable and unwilling to come to God. But then comes Ephesians 2:4.

Ephesians 2:4-6 says *[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 grace you have been saved— [6] and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

You can't find a more blessed place to be apart from being with the Lord in the eternal state in a fully redeemed body and a fully redeemed soul – spiritually alive, forgiven by God and seated with Christ in the heavenly places – than this truth right here. That is where we are because of the power of God that is working in us.

For anyone reading this who have not trusted in Christ as your Savior I have Good News for you in a moment, but even more important than that there are people reading this who have had God's power displayed and is now working in their lives. Anyone you know who is a Christian were formerly dead rebels and are now living saints. Some of us know how particularly true that is because we had no interest whatsoever in the things of God and didn't want God in our lives, but God had His way by His power and He changed our hearts. Dead people don't resuscitate themselves – they have to be resuscitated and that is true spiritually by the power of God at work. When we are in a gathering of God's people at church we can say that is an accumulation – something that is found in significant quantities in terms of God's power.

That's not all for Paul is even more amazed as he goes on in Ephesians 2 because the saving power of God that creates the church by making dead rebels into live saints, is also the reconciling power of God within the church by making dead set enemies into family. The greatest threat to the early church was not external but internal. When Jesus came in fulfillment of the promise that He would be the King of the Kingdom, the Messiah, it was humanly impossible for first century Jews to accept that this Kingdom was spiritual in nature, and it expanded under the Great Commission to include all nations. Many insisted that the Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to obey the Law – they had to be Judaized before they could be Christianized. That wasn't the Gospel. It wasn't just theological because of the arrogance that had developed in their self-righteous hearts for they despised the Gentiles as unclean dogs. It was hard for the Jews to see the Gentiles coming into church, but the book of Acts says not without difficulty the power of God's Spirit won the day these two ethnicities, once dead set enemies, the Gospel was preached and brought them together as family.

Look what Paul says in Ephesians 2:13-16, *[13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

This is not a message about reconciliation between believers but I want to say this; what is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27). The reconciling power of God is still not just available but it's possible today. It is no less powerful for when there is conflict in the church we must avail ourselves of that power and of God's designed way of dealing with those conflicts so that brothers may be reconciled. Psalm 133:1 says *[1] Behold, how good and pleasant it is, when brothers dwell in unity!* Because of the truth and our bound together in

repentance and love for one another. This power is so important to be demonstrated in the church particularly because I think it is a display of that glory that can make the impossible possible for God also displays His glory in the church.

Going back to our text for this study, Ephesians 3:20-21 says [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.*

This is very typical for Paul to be very exuberant in his wording especially as you read the phrase; far more abundantly. This phrase is two words in the Greek. The first word is *hyper* and it's a preposition which means over and above. It is where we get our word hyper from. Paul takes that preposition and attaches it to another word which already means abundantly. The Greek word is *huperekperissou*. Scholars believe Paul made up this word because it was so magnificent he could find no more better words so he made them up. This word appears only one more time in first century Greek history and that's again by Paul in I Thessalonians 3. One lexicon suggests we should say over and above from out from abundance. Either way, it is a whole lot better than 'in great measure.' This is the One who is able to do in us – over and above from out of abundance and that is to His glory.

Paul is offering this seemingly grammatical messy sentence because he has already been amazed at what God has done and who He is. It all begins in Ephesians 1:3-14 and in that text are some of the most richly glorious words in all of Scripture.

Ephesians 1:3-14 says [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, [4] even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love [5] He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, [6] to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

[11] In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. [13] In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory.

There are a cavalcade of blessings and amazing things that Paul is absolutely taken by in this text. Paul is giving us a much needed perspective (view) from verse 3 from where God has placed us through the saving work of Christ. He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (verse 3). It's the same thing when Paul says in Colossians 3:1, [1] *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*

Three times in Ephesians 1 Paul says that our very existence as the elect children of God is for God's glory – verses 6, 12 and 14 – the praise of His glorious grace, to the praise of His glory. Paul is taken by this reality and as he tumbles through those words in Ephesians 1 we can see that he is absolutely smitten because he has a view from the right hand of God. That is what

he is trying to do for us so that we can see that God displays His glory in the church by showing us the view from our right hand seat in heaven. If we could just view everything in our lives from this perspective, this perch, this reality, we would never doubt that God is able to do far more abundantly in all we think or ask, both in our lives and in this world for His glory. It is a perspective that is desperately needed in all that we do.

In 2004 a friend of mine had the opportunity to participate in the dedication of the WWII memorial on the 60th anniversary of D-Day. He said it was profound and moving to be surrounded by members of this greatest generation but now there are not that many left. Later in that day, he was in his hotel room watching a news report about the events of the day and a reporter was interviewing an infantry man who came in not in the first or second wave of those entering from the beach but later and was greeted with chaos as he tumbled onto the beach. Bullets were whizzing past him, bodies in the surf, artillery fire constant and he made it to the beach as he found shelter behind the body of a fallen comrade. He thought to himself ‘there is no way we are going to win this war.’

The interview cut away to another man who had been in the Army AirCorp who also came after the beachhead had been established, after paratroopers had successfully made their way inland. He could see that critical German defenses had been disabled and more than anything else he could see the Nazis running. He thought to himself ‘there is no way we are going to lose this war.’ The difference here is perspective. The vantage point allowed him to see what the other man could not see, if he could only know what was happening.

We do know what God has done as He seated us in the heavenly places to give us a view of all the blessings we have now in this world and the power that is ours as we live as God’s people and share the Gospel in the world that reap the waiting elect. If we could just view everything in our life with this perspective we would have no doubt that God is able to do far more abundantly than we could ever think or ask.

I don’t have time to go into Ephesians 3 like I would like to but I challenge you to dig into this chapter. It’s not just that God wants to put you on this perch and tell you how great the view is, but it’s as if He wants to put His arm around us to show us how marvelous it really is and that it’s ours forever. He wants us to enjoy now and into all eternity, because God’s desire is that we would know Him and He shows His glory in the church by showing us this vision for our relationship with Him. It’s not just a heavenly transaction, but it’s God’s desire for us to know Him as He knows us. It is one thing to say that we are saved but it’s another thing to say that we are children of God.

Several times Paul drops to his knees as it were in prayer through out these first three chapters in Ephesians but he does it in Ephesians 3:14-19 when he says [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.*

Paul is marvelously smitten as he continuously adds these words. There is enough material in these three chapters for a year’s worth of sermons, but Paul directed by the Holy Spirit falls to his knees in prayer and I believe he wants us to pray that we would have the knowledge of faith that assures us that we may personally know God and His love in this way.

To think that the universe cannot contain in all of His fullness, Paul prays that fullness would come to us.

If you're reading this and you don't know Christ, you're probably thinking this is too good to be true, but I've got Good News for you, it is true and there are formerly dead rebels who are alive saints who would agree with that. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to an end of trying to form or think that you can do enough but you cannot for you are dead in your sins anyway but if you are reading this and you desire this then God's power just may in fact be drawing you to Himself so come to Him. Jesus says in John 6:37, *[37] All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out.* I'll be happy to talk to you about how you can know for sure as Jesus says 'he who believes has eternal life' (John 6:47). You can call Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 and I'd be happy to talk and pray with you for that's glorious!

Why do we not see God's glory in the church more often? How is it that we have this malaise about ourselves? It's maybe because we don't ask or think. Maybe we don't think of the church in light of God's desire and design to display His glory or maybe it's because we think it's presumptuous to be so bold. Is it presumptuous to ask God to awaken His people and revitalize His church across this country to boldly proclaim Christ and is King over all of life – our marriages, families, houses, jobs, politics, our nation? Is it presumptuous to imagine Birmingham, the state of Alabama, our nation as places teeming with saints who are running after righteousness in every one of those areas so that Christ their King is glorified? Is it presumptuous to ask multiple denominations and churches, not just the PCA, in loving obedience to Christ the King doing true works of Biblical justice, mercy, compassion and sharing the Gospel fearlessly? All of this is not presumptuous to think or ask if God's desire is to get glory in the church because that is His design.

How do we learn to consistently see everything from our right hand seat, to believe that God's vision in our relationship to Him is a reality and that we really can know Him to this depth? Here's the takeaway. It's exciting, for we must pray. Paul throughout this passage has prayed and Martin Lloyd Jones believes Paul's doxology is really an exhortation to pray – to ask God to show His glory. We must pray and ask God to empower our faith with a view from His throne, thinking on these things to renew our minds with His vision for the church. As we pray we pray through His Word using His Word as He speaks to us and we hear Him, He fills our hearts and renews our minds with this vision so that we are reminded to view everything from our seat that we may see.

In the early 1990's my wife Lisa and I assisted in leading a mission's trip of high schoolers to London while we were working in a working class area and stayed in a rectory of an Anglican Church while we were there. One of the interesting features of that rectory was the room we stayed in which was filled with furniture that looked like it was made for a hobbit. Everything was half size except the bed, thankfully. It must have been a child's room. It was somewhat inconvenient and we went throughout the week as sometimes working with teenagers can be somewhat like herding cats, especially when it got to the Lord's Day and everyone had to share one shower in that whole rectory. The hot water ran out before everyone showered, people couldn't find their clothes, I was running around barking orders so it was a huge challenge to get people ready on time and what entered my mind was something that had come to me earlier. It was that I had neglected an awful lot of time in prayer that week. I was tired. Who could blame me?

As I was finishing trying to get ready, I was tying my tie and I was so frustrated. I stood in front of the mirror and all I could see was from my elbows down. That was the last straw and I shouted 'I can't believe this!' As I dropped down, I had to kneel to see. Talk about feeling conviction at that moment. Yes, we have to kneel to see and on our knees we will see from the highest seat possible from the view of what God has already done and is doing by the power that is at work within us. Martin Lloyd Jones says 'the God who can do all that can do anything and can do everything and there is no limit to such power.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord God, we thank You that You have promised us Yourself, not just salvation, but You are our salvation and You promised that You will use Your church to get glory. Forgive us and empower us and bring us to our knees to see, for we pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.