To Him Be Glory

Ephesians 3:20-21

Introduction

In our passage today we turn to one of Paul’s great doxologies. He has been talking about how God has brought the nations together into the church. The divisions of mankind have been abolished by Jesus’ work on the cross. Then he shared with the Ephesians the prayers he had for them. He prayed that they would have power and know the incomprehensible love of God. Upon this thought, he breaks out in another prayer, this time, in praise of God.

In Ephesians 3:20-21, we see why Paul could confidently pray that Christians would be strengthened with power and know God’s love: it’s because God can and will go far beyond what we pray for.

Before we dive into the passage I would like to read a quote from Charles Spurgeon on prayer that will help us to begin thinking about this great doxology. “Prayer is the Christian's never-failing resort in every case, in every plight. When you cannot use your sword—you may take to the weapon of all-prayer. Your gun-powder may be damp, your bow-string may be broken—but the weapon of all-prayer need never be out of order. Leviathan laughs at the javelin—but he trembles at prayer. Sword and spear need furbishing—but prayer never rusts, and when we think it most blunt—it cuts the best.

Prayer is an open door which none can shut! Devils may surround you on all sides—but the way upward is always open, and as long as that road is unobstructed, you will not fall into the enemy's hand. We can never be taken by force or storm—so long as heavenly help comes down to us to support us in the time of our necessities.

Prayer is never out of season—in summer and in winter its merchandise is precious. Prayer gains an audience with God—in the dead of night, in the midst of business, in the heat of noonday, in the shadows of evening. In every condition, whether of poverty, or sickness, or obscurity, or slander, or sin—your covenant God will welcome your prayer and answer it from His holy place.

1. **What can God do? Vs. 20**

Paul is piling on descriptions of what God can do.

* 1. He is able to do. David’s prayer in 1 Chron 16 calls the people to remember all the wonders, marvelous works, miracles and judgments of God. This is in contrast to the gods of the peoples that are “worthless idols”.
  2. But…He is able to do more. Isaiah 44:16-17 “Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also, he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"
  3. And yet…He is able to do far more. Isaiah 41:21-24 Set forth your case, says the Lord; bring your proofs, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them, and tell us what is to happen. Tell us the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, that we may know their outcome; or declare to us the things to come. Tell us what is to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods; do good, or do harm, that we may be dismayed and terrified. Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing; an abomination is he who chooses you.” Now we are just getting warmed up because…
  4. He is able to do far more abundantly – This should not surprise us because God’s people have always followed Psalm 145 “One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.” We know that God is a God of abundance.
  5. He is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask
     1. Sometimes we ask wrongly – James 4:3 “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”
     2. But he is able to do better than we ask because he is able and wants to give. Matthew 7:7-11 says “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”
  6. He is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think – This must be true because “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” God has infinite thoughts and infinite goodness. Our thoughts are limited and are often tainted by our selfishness. He can do way better than we can think.
  7. Charles Spurgeon also said, “Nor is prayer ever futile. True prayer is evermore true power. You may not always get what you ask—but you shall always have your real needs supplied. When God does not answer His children according to the letter—He does so according to the spirit. If you ask for coarse meal—will you be angered because He gives you the finest flour? If you seek bodily health, should you complain if instead thereof—He makes your sickness turn to the healing of spiritual maladies? Is it not better to have the affliction sanctified, than removed? My soul, do not forget to offer your petition and request, for the Lord is ready to grant you your desires!”

1. **How does God do it? Vs. 20**
   1. According to his power – The power we already talked about in Ephesians 1:19-21 “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, 21 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.”
   2. His power at work within us – Ephesians 2:5 taught us “even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” This is the power that is at work in us. The power that raised Christ from the dead, the power that raised our souls from the dead is still at work in us.
2. **Why does God do it? Vs. 21**

This is another piling on of attributes.

* 1. To him be glory
  2. To him be glory in the church and Christ Jesus – John Stott said, “God desires glory in the bride and in the bridegroom, in the community of peace and in the Peacemaker”
  3. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations – that means throughout the rest of this age until Christ returns.
  4. To him be glory in the church and Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. – Glory in the church and Christ Jesus will never have an end.

**Conclusion**

Since these things are true then we need to respond correctly. JR Miller said, “God often does better for us — than we ask.

We go to Him — with our little requests.

We are in need — and ask for temporal relief.

We are suffering — and ask that our pain may cease.

We are poor — and ask Him for more money.

We are just like the beggar, holding out our hands for paltry alms to eke out the day's need. Then God looks down upon us and says, "My child, are these little trifles all you want Me to give to you — daily bread, clothing, fuel for your fire, medicine for your sickness, comfort for your grief? The small things to supply your common needs — are these the only gifts and blessings you want and ask from the hand of your heavenly Father, who has infinite treasures to give to you?"

Yet thousands never get beyond just such requests in their praying! Bowing daily before a God of infinite power and love, in whose hands are unsearchable riches — they never ask for anything but fleeting earthly comforts and worldly trinkets! They ask only for things for their bodies, or to beautify their homes — making no requests for the heavenly and spiritual gifts that God has for their souls! We should learn to ask for the best things in all God's treasure house!”