

More Than We Can Dream

Ephesians 3:20-21

How many things do you pray about? Seriously. What kinds of things qualify? Do you only pray about the big things, or do you include the little things as well? A woman once approached the famous preacher, G. Campbell Morgan, and asked him, “Do you think we should pray for even the little things in our lives, or just for the big things?” He replied, “Madam, can you think of anything in your life that is big to God?”

Several months ago we began our tour of Ephesians, the Grand Canyon of Scripture. As we’ve descended into the depths of this New Testament letter, we would take a few steps and pause long enough to discover what God might be saying to us at that point before moving on. And I believe God has blessed this careful digging out of what His Word really says. Today we reach the figurative bottom of the Canyon, and next week we will begin our ascent to the other side of it.

You know that the Book of Ephesians has six chapters, and they can be separated very neatly into two sections. The first three chapters describe for us some of what we believe as Christians. Then chapters four, five and six point out that since this is what we believe as Christians, here is how we should behave. So today we come to the end of chapter three, and we see that 3:20-21 serve as a doxology or benediction for all that has gone before.

What we find just before this doxology is a prayer, remember? And in that prayer, among other things, Paul attempted to describe the indescribable. He is saying that the love of Christ cannot be measured. That prompted him to think of something else that cannot be measured—the power of God. Paul basically tells us here that the power of God is so great that we can’t even imagine it. God is able to do above and beyond all we can ask or think! Let’s look closer.

1 He is able
Take a look at that word “able.” As we stand at the very bottom of the Grand Canyon of Scripture, and look up, we can see a beautiful vein of gold in the rock running all the way from the top to the bottom. We’ve stopped to look at it occasionally as we’ve descended, but now as we stand at the bottom, we can see that it is there all the way through. The word “able” is the verb; later in this verse we see the word “power” which is the noun. We also have the word “work.”

When you put those three words together that idea of the ability, power and the work of God runs throughout these first three chapters of Ephesians. In 1:19 it is called *“his incomparably great **power** for us who believe.”* We saw it back in 3:7, where Paul wrote, *“I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the **working** of his **power**.”* We also see that gold vein of power continuing into that prayer of Paul in 3:16—*“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power** through his Spirit in your inner being.”*

The point Paul is making with this sub-theme is that God *has* the ability to do whatever needs to be done. Last week in Ephesians 3:18 we saw that Paul said that he was praying that his readers might *“grasp how wide and long and high and deep **IS** the love of Christ,”* and we pointed out that that little word “is” tells us that the love of Christ is present tense, that regardless of where we are or what we are going through, His love *is*. We have the same thing here in verse 20, don’t we? *“Now to him who **IS** able...”* This, too, is a present tense word, meaning that God is continually able, has always been able, and that that power to do anything will always be at work.

The same idea jumps out at us later in this same verse: *“...according to his power that **IS** at work within us.”* It means that there is nothing He cannot do. Remember how we always say “Scripture agrees with Scripture”? This idea that God is able to do anything is backed up all over the pages of our Bibles. Here are just two examples: *“Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him”* (Psalm 115:3); and *“For nothing is impossible with God”* (Luke 1:37).

Time never runs out on this. It has no expiration date. It was true at Creation; it is true today. There is no limit to it. It means that there is nothing—not one thing—you and I could ever face in our lives that the power of God is not able to meet.

2 He is able to do immeasurably more

Think of the greatest thing that God has ever done. What do you think it would be? Of course, we would have to list the Creation, and how He spoke all this into existence. Steven J. Cole, a pastor in Flagstaff, Arizona, described it this way: “Whether we look at the vastness of the universe, with billions of galaxies containing billions of stars, or at the complexity of our own bodies, or at the incredible design on the microscopic level, we see evidence of a powerful Creator. Have you ever swatted a little gnat that was flying in front of your face? Have you ever stopped to think about how difficult it would be to design a creature that small that can not only fly, but also eat and reproduce?” We

could spend a lot of time right here on this topic; surely Creation would have to be on that list!

But also on that list of the greatest things God has ever done would be all the amazing things we read about in the pages of the Bible. They are described as “*great and awesome wonders*” in Deuteronomy 10:21. Job 5:9 refers to them as “*wonders that cannot be fathomed,*” while other passages simply refer to the works of God as “*great things.*” They would include parting the waters of the Red Sea so an entire nation of people could escape on dry land from the Egyptian army; the manna in the wilderness for forty years; the collapse of the walls of Jericho; and that’s just the very beginning. But according to the Scriptures, that is only a small example of what He can do! In fact, when Job was trying to talk about the wonders of God, he named several things, but then said, “*These are the mere edges of His ways*” (Job 26:14, NKJV).

What would you say is the greatest thing God has ever done? He loved the world so much that He sent His One and Only Son to be born of a virgin, to live as one of us, and then to die a horrible, violent death that paid the penalty for the sins of all who would believe in Him. Then, as Paul has written about here in this letter of Ephesians, God made it possible for all races of mankind to be included in that wonderful plan of salvation. That would have to be on the list, if not at the very top of it.

But how would we pick the one greatest thing God has ever done? Paul used the words “immeasurably more” to describe the power of God. The King James Version says, “able to do exceeding abundantly above all.” It’s as if when Paul tried to describe it, he had to pile up words on top of each other. Together they mean “surpassing, superabundantly, beyond measure, exceedingly, overwhelming, more than enough, over and above.”

So, if we take the greatest thing that God has ever done, and put it up against Ephesians 3:20, we realize that God, our God, can do infinitely more than that! Creation, Jesus being born of the virgin Mary, Jesus dying on the Cross to provide salvation for us—all of that is just the *beginning* of what our God can do.

3 He is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine

Isn’t that what we would expect of a God who loves us so much that His love cannot be measured or even adequately described? The immeasurable

love and the immeasurable power fit together. Here is where we begin to put all this together. Though we are focusing on verse 20, don't forget that it is part of the prayer that begins back up in verse 14. The things that Paul is asking for in that prayer are given only by a God who is actually able to do anything.

Dissect what he is saying here in verse 20. First, God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we can ask. Think about your most recent prayers: are you daring to ask God for big things? He is honored when we make big requests. Think about going into a bank and asking for a loan. The bank manager will say, "How much money do you need?" Picture the look on that bank manager's face when you say, "Oh, I just need about ten dollars." That would be an insult to the resources of the bank, which has millions of dollars available.

But isn't that what we do when we approach God in much of our praying? The Bible says that God is able to do superabundantly, exceedingly above and beyond all we can ask, and too much of the time we fool around with small, trifling prayers. We're asking God for ten dollars when He is able to do for us much more than we can even ask.

Second, this verse says that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can imagine. The word originally refers to the process of thinking. It has the idea of imagining something, of dreaming something. Your biggest dreams and desires are no match for the power of God.

It's good to have dreams and goals for our lives. It's good for any Christian to dream big and pray big. It's a good thing when a church dares to dream about what God would have them do, especially if that thing is bigger than they are. I believe that always honors God when we dream big and pray big.

But you know why we don't see more of the power of God in our lives and in our church? It's because we don't rely on His power. We don't really expect His power to be active in our lives. We only see God's power in our lives and church to a limited extent because we're not thinking big, not planning big, not dreaming big. We take life one day at a time as it comes and don't even imagine that God might have something much more in store for us.

So what's the problem? The Bible says that He "*is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us.*" That's the catch, right there. How much of God's power is at work in us, and in our church? How much of God's power is at work in me? in you? "Exceeding

abundantly” is for every believer, not just the elite! Do you claim to follow Christ? Then “exceeding abundantly” is your birthright.

Such truth deserves a response. In fact, just knowing these things won’t do a single thing to change our lives unless we respond to them. Naturally, when we hear about the love of Christ, our response is to love Him right back; since He gave us His life, our response is to give Him ours.

But what kind of response do we make when we learn that God is superabundantly, excessively, exceedingly, above and beyond able to do anything we ask or imagine? How can we read about that kind of power, and continue to pray anemic, wishy-washy, lackluster, feeble prayers? How can we be satisfied to limp along in our prayer lives, offering prayers that don’t come anywhere close to tapping into that awesome power of God? Why would we say that we believe the truth of Ephesians 3:20, and continue to live powerless, anemic Christian lives as we limp along through life? Why would we ever fail to lay before God our deepest burdens and largest petitions? It truly honors God when we believe and depend on His power for the challenges of our lives.

Here is the summary of what we’ve discovered today, before we begin our ascent back to the rim of the Canyon: He is able to do what we ask; all that we ask; above all that we ask; abundantly above all that we ask; exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask; exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think! (Stephen Olyott, *Alive in Christ*, Evangelical Press, 1994, p. 93)

And since that is true, we should never, never, never be satisfied to make measly, lackluster, feeble requests of our great God. We should never, never, never be satisfied to live weak, little Christian lives when God has made all His power available to each of us who follow Christ.

“Can you think of anything that is big to God?”