

Ephesians 3: 20 and 21; “Exceedingly & Abundantly Above”, Message # 24 in a series entitled – “The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, A Bible Study prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 20th, 2021.

This is a doxology which the apostle Paul lifts up to God at this point in his letter; a doxology which is very appropriate as he has now finished relating the doctrinal portion of his letter concerning God and His purposes, and now will give practical instructions and exhortations to the church at Ephesus concerning living the Christian life. Before he transitions into this next section of the letter, he wants to commend all who are reading it to what God the Father is able to do in relation to our prayers. 1st of all – He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we can ask or think. And 2nd – He does all that He does for us according to the power that works within us. And 3rd – He does all that He does for us so that His glory can be seen in the church in relation to Christ Jesus, to all generations. Let’s see if we can apprehend something more of the greatness and glory of our God and our Christ in this message.

1st – God the Father is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

This is because He is God who is infinitely great in all of His attributes. It is good that we remind ourselves of this truth on a regular basis. But it is even better if we will remind ourselves of it while we are praying. So turn with me over to Jeremiah 33, and we will look at verses 1-13. “Moreover the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was shut up in the court of the prison, saying, “Thus says the Lord who made it, the Lord who formed it to establish it (the Lord is His name): ‘Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.’” “For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah, which have been pulled down to fortify against the siege mounds and the sword: ‘They come to fight with the Chaldeans, but only to fill their places with the dead bodies of men whom I will slay in My anger and My fury, all for whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city.’”

“Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth.” “And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first.” “I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.” “Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it.”

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Again there shall be heard in this place – of which you say, ‘It is desolate, without man and without beast’ – in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who will say: ‘Praise the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever’ – and of those who will bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD.” “For I will cause the captives of the land to return as at the first,’ says the LORD.”

“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In this place which is desolate, without man and without beast, and in all its cities, there shall again be a dwelling place of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down.’” “In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the South, in the land of Benjamin, in the places around Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, the flocks shall again pass under the hands of him who counts them,’ says the LORD.” Now, there are many good things for us New Testament Christians to think about here, in relation to God’s ability to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think. The first is that we must learn to call upon the Lord to see Him do these great things when we are in difficult and discouraging circumstances.

Where was Jeremiah at this time? He was in prison. He was shut up in the court of the prison. And God knew that He needed to instruct His prophet Jeremiah in relation to what he should pray about. And so He reminded him that He (God) was the One who made it. It was He who formed it to establish it. And so Jeremiah should call to Him about it. What is the “it” that God is referring to, in verse 2? From the context, we know that the “it” was all Israel and Judah, and more specifically the city of Jerusalem. It was at this time, as it says in verse 4, that the houses of that city and the houses of the kings of Judah had been pulled down so that they could fortify themselves against the siege mounds and the sword which the Chaldeans were bringing to them to destroy them. But Jeremiah was very concerned for spiritual the well-being of the people of God.

And so, God came to him and He bid him to pray. And, He says that if he did pray, if he did call to God, that God would answer him, and show him great and mighty things which he did not know. The same thing is applicable to us at this time in our nation’s history, when we see the forces of wickedness come up against us politically and within our own country, many wicked people are now in positions of political authority, and they are besieging the good principles of our government, and threatening to tear down our fine institutions before our very eyes, and take away our Constitutional rights of freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and the right to bear arms. What are we to do, having lost this last election, or had it stolen from us. We are to pray. We are to call to God and He will answer us, and He will show us great and mighty things which we do not know. God will help us to bear witness to the truth, even if we are in prison.

But there is more. We must remember that God has great and mighty purposes and plans in regard to the building of His Church through our Lord Jesus Christ. And those purposes relate to many people coming to know the Lord through faith in Christ. This is what verses 14-26 in this chapter are all about; they are promises related to the New Covenant and the great salvation which is found in Jesus Christ which the Father would bring about in His good time. He would form and establish His Church through a New Covenant which Christ would fulfill on spiritual Israel’s behalf. Jeremiah could not possibly understand the timing of all of these things, in terms of the fulfillment of them, but they would surely come to pass because God would do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that he could ask or think. He was to call, and God would show him these wonderful things.

God also tells him the bad news in verse 5 where it says that there would be those who would take the radical action of pulling down many houses, and the houses of the kings to fight against the Chaldeans, but it would only fill their places with the dead bodies of the people whom God would slay in His anger and His fury; all for whose wickedness He had hidden His face from that city. God would judge those who had dishonored Him by their sins. And yes, He would take into captivity, many of His own people during Jeremiah’s days. The great and mighty things which God mentioned all relate to the salvation of His people. Verse 7 – God would cause the captives of Judah to return after 70 years, and He would have the people rebuild the city and the temple and reestablish His worship.

But He was also going to take steps to eventually establish the New Testament Church through the sending of His Son into the world. It would be on the basis of His glorious work that the whole Church, both Old Testament believers and New, would be established in the everlasting blessings of grace that are mentioned in verse 8 and 9. He would cleanse them from their iniquity by which they had sinned against Him. He would pardon all of their iniquities by which they had sinned and by which they had transgressed against Him. And then “it”, that is Jerusalem and Judah would be to Him a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all the nations of the earth, who should hear of all the good that He would do for them. They would fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that He would provide for it.

And so the desolate places would be restored, the voice of joy and the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride would be heard again. There would again be shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. And so what should we conclude, we who are living in times of national judgments? I think that we should take a long term view of things in terms of God’s fulfilling all of

His promises to the nations. But we should always be encouraged to take the short term immediate view in relation to what He will do for all of His elect people in every generation to help them. God will honor His promises to all generations concerning the great salvation in Christ; the great grace that He will give, and the great things that He will do so that Christ's kingdom will flourish. It will flourish in some generations more than others, but His building of Christ's Church will never cease, and it will never fail.

2nd – God's does exceedingly abundantly according to the power that works in us.

The power that works within us is the power of the Holy Spirit who was given to us. But we should not forget that each of the 3 Persons of the Godhead are consubstantial with the others. And so you will find the Lord Jesus saying in Matthew 28: 18 – “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations”. He said this as the Man Christ Jesus, the only Mediator between God and Men. We need to believe the plain statements of the Bible and not question that God is all-powerful. There are many statements in the Bible which tell us that God is all-powerful. Let's look at couple of these.

Psalm 63: 1-11. “O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek my life, to destroy it, Shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword; They shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God; Everyone who swears by Him shall glory; But the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.”

You can see here that David is crying out to God in his longing for Him, his thirsting for Him, looking to be satisfied by Him even in this dry and thirsty land where there was no refreshment; being persecuted by Saul. He had looked for God in the sanctuary to see His power and His glory. He knew that God's lovingkindness was better than life, and so He would praise God, and He would bless God while he had life. He would lift up his hands in His name. He is giving us a model for prayer and especially in times of difficulty. He says to God – Thus will I bless You. Even though he was undergoing this personal persecution, I want you to see how much he remained in the Spirit; looking to God as His refuge. He remembered God upon His bed in the night watches, and his soul followed closely after Him.

How could David think this way and not worry all the time? It was because of the exceeding great power of the Holy Spirit in His life. When he sinned with Bathsheba he prayed that God wouldn't take His Holy Spirit away from him. But here he is abiding in the Lord, remembering God, praising God, looking to God, that he might be satisfied by God and his mouth praise Him with joyful lips. Even the end of the Psalm is amazing. He had the confidence that his enemies would fall by the sword. And this is the kind of confidence that we should have during times like this, so that we might not become discouraged. Psalm 43 – “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” “Why are you cast down within me?” “Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him for the help of my countenance and my God.”

Since the Holy Spirit is with us, we have Him working powerfully within us even if we do not realize it experientially. We understand it experientially more and more by faith. God's power is working in us, when we are abiding in His word and His commandments; trusting that He will give us the power to do what is right, and the power to endure whatever the wicked person will dish out, without our sinning against God or that person who is persecuting us. 2nd Corinthians 12: 7-10 – “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”

“Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.” “and He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake.” “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” This is exactly where the exceeding greatness of God’s power is seen, is it not? This is why Paul said in verse 13 of Ephesians chapter 3 – “Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” He knew that these things that he suffered would be for their glory, for their being able to boast in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ as they saw Paul suffering for the sake of the gospel. They would glory in Christ’s grace to Paul, and that he would be able to fulfill the ministry that the Lord had given to him.

Paul was being spoken against by false apostles and had to defend himself against them at certain points. But he was given so great revelations by God, that God thought it good to give him a thorn in the flesh to keep him from exalting himself. Paul prayed that it might be removed from him but God thought it better for him to keep this thorn. Why? Because God’s power would be perfected in his weakness. And what God wanted Paul to learn was to be able to boast in his infirmities, that Christ’s power might rest upon him. That is what we are talking about here in the book of Ephesians. A personal sense of God doing exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think. His power works in us personally. Because he knew that he was weak, he would pray pleading that the Lord would help him, and God would help him, but in a way that he at first did not understand. He would learn to take pleasure in infirmities. He would find real victory in Jesus. He would work from that position instead of his boasting in his revelatory knowledge.

3rd – God does exceedingly abundantly by Christ Jesus to all generations, that His glory might be seen in the Church.

“To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus.” We could read this – “To Him be praise in the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations”, but that would not be enough to bring out the meaning of how this word is used here – the word “glory”. For the Father has given us all things in Christ. The Father and the Son sent the Spirit to the Church at the beginning of this Church age. We little realize just how much He has given us, in giving us His Son. There is a good illustration of this which used to be told by J. Wilbur Chapman, concerning a man who came to one of his meetings and related this to him. “I got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year I begged on the streets for a living.” “One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said, ‘Hey mister, can you give me a dime?’” “As soon as I saw his face I was shocked to see that it was my own father.” “I said, ‘Father, Father, do you know me?’” “Throwing his arms around me and with tears in his eyes, he said, ‘Oh my son, at last I’ve found you!’” “I’ve found you.” “You want a dime?” “Everything that I have is yours.” “Think of it,” said the man, “I was a tramp.” “I stood begging my own father for ten cents, when for 18 years he had been looking for me to give me all that he had.” (John McArthur’s *Commentary on Ephesians*, P. 111)

So, you can see from this simply story what God wants to do in each and every generation; His glorious purpose to all generations is to reveal to us the exceeding greatness of the glory of His grace, and what He will do for us as we grow up into Christ. He wants us to be filled up, with all the fullness of Himself. And so, the Father accomplishes this holy purpose by Christ coming to dwell richly in our hearts, in accordance with our prayers and our striving to do His will. And knowing our hearts, and seeing us learning to do His will, we will know the reality of His powerful working in our hearts, and see that He is doing exceeding abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think.

The Holy Spirit works in us in a way that is far above all that we can ask or think in relation to our prayers for the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom in our heart, and in the world. In and through this marvelous working of the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Christ Jesus His Son, are building glory into the Church, so that through all of her battles to see the truth of His word be lived out, and go forward, God is glorified. As Christ’s kingdom goes forward, whether by small steps or in great leaps, in each and every generation, His glory is seen in His saints, both individually and

collectively. It is the glory of righteousness and holiness in our lives which glorifies Him. Each generation of Christians has a glory of its own.

Each generation of Christians, is called upon to fulfill God's purpose in their generation. Each Christian will be rewarded according to the work that they have done to show forth the glory of the God and Christ, in their words, their works, and their life. Their prayer is – May others see God's glory in the way that I live my life. After Christ comes back, in those early days of the New Heavens and New Earth, you will see the glory of God shining forth in Christ's Bride, the Church. Turn with me over to Revelation 21, verse 9. "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, 'Come and I will show you the Bride, the Lamb's wife.'" "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God." "Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."

And then in verses 12 to 21 is given a description of the gates, the walls, the foundations of the walls which were adorned with stones." But look at verse 22 – "But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it." "The Lamb is its light." "And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it." That is how it will be brethren; the glory of that day will be infinitely great; exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us.