

# **Proclaiming the Unsearchable Riches of Christ**

## **A Great Doxology**

*Ephesians 3:20-21*

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## A Great Doxology

### Scripture

A few weeks ago, we started examining the third chapter of the Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Today we will conclude this all-too-brief exposition of this marvelous chapter.

Paul started praying for the believers in Ephesus in verse 1 of Ephesians 3. However, he then broke off into a digression in which he talked about the mystery of the gospel which had been revealed to him (namely, that God was making a new family of believers out of saved Jews and Gentiles), and about the ministry of the gospel to which God had called him. Then, in verse 14, the Paul got back to praying for the Ephesians.

Paul's prayer for the family of believers in Ephesians 3:14-19 is really a marvelous prayer consisting of four petitions. He prayed that believers would be strengthened with power so that they might do all that Christ calls them to do, particularly in dealing with their sin. He also prayed that believers would have Christ dwelling in them so that Christ might make them more and more like him. Furthermore, he prayed that believers would know Christ's love so that they might comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of this love. And finally, Paul petitioned God that believers would be filled with all the fullness of God so that they may know him better and better now and in eternity. Finally, Paul concluded his prayer with a great doxology.

Let's read Paul's great doxology in Ephesians 3:20-21. However, for the sake of context, I shall read the entire prayer, beginning in Ephesians 3:14:

<sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,  
<sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,  
<sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

**<sup>20</sup>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, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.** (Ephesians 3:20-21)

## Introduction

In his commentary on Ephesians, Dr. Bryan Chapell tells the following story about a time when he was the president of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, MO:

Some time ago, I needed to make a difficult financial announcement about our seminary because stock market dynamics were creating serious pressures on our finances. I was stewing about the announcement during my early morning jog around a neighborhood lake. Deep in thought, I came to the top of a hill just as some Canadian geese were approaching the lake from the other side of the rise. The result was that for a split second I found myself face-to-face with a flying goose. I ducked to my right, but he dodged to his left so that we were still on a collision course. I froze anticipating the crash of our noggins. But then, in one of those sequences that seem to unfold in slow motion, he tweaked his tail and lifted a leg so that

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his body twisted, and he went by my shoulder with an outstretched wing grazing the top of my head.

Once I realized that I had been spared, I could not help being a little philosophical. “Oh great,” I thought, “wouldn’t that have been a sad way to go out!” I could imagine the headlines: “Seminary President Taken to Heaven on the Wings of a Goose.” Though it may seem a bit silly, in a strange way being saved by that little flick of a goose’s tail gave me a great deal of peace that day.

My peace came from considering the protection God provided for me on that day I was so worried about dear friends, the place I serve, and many months of pressure to come. I began to consider what God had to arrange in order to make that split-second event of reassurance happen. What kind of planning did it take for a person—raised in Tennessee over fifty years ago—and a goose—probably hatched in Canada three years ago—to simultaneously approach a rise in Missouri and come within two feet of one another on the very day that I needed encouragement because of a difficult announcement that I had to make as a result of stock market dynamics that had taken years to develop in a worldwide economy?

The sequence of plans needed to make all of those events and entities converge so precisely is truly mind-boggling. The wisdom and power of God that made that goose’s tail twitch at the precise moment needed to fan into flame a flicker of hope in me were beyond anything I could ask or even think. In a world that whirls in an endless procession of unpredictable events and personal challenges, we lose track of what God does moment by moment to preserve us and his purposes for our lives. We know that our God loves us, but amidst the pressures of rents to pay, jobs to perform, medical results to await, tests to take, and transitions to make, we wonder still, “Is our God able to help *me here today?*” The Bible’s message of a sovereign God who rules over all things in all places among all people and for eternity calms our hearts and

stimulates our prayers with the simple affirmation: “He is able.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul’s doxology to conclude his prayer in Ephesians 3 is a powerful affirmation about the greatness of God.

## Lesson

Ephesians 3:20-21 shows us the greatness of God. Let’s use the following outline:

1. What Is God Able to Do? (3:20a-b)
2. How Is God Able to Do It? (3:20c-d)
3. Why Is God Able to Do It? (3:21)

### I. What Is God Able to Do? (3:20a-b)

First, let’s ask the question: What is God able to do? Paul noted that God is able to do two things.

#### A. *God Is Able to Do More Than We Ask (3:20a)*

First, God is able to do more than we ask.

Paul said in verse 20a, “**Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask....**” There is only one word in the Greek text (*hyperekeperissou*) for what is translated in English as “**far more abundantly.**” It means “an extraordinary degree, involving a considerable excess over what would be expected.”<sup>2</sup> So, the Paul was saying, “God is able to

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 167–168.

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 688.

do considerably more than all that we ask.”

Our prayers are so small, aren't they? We ask for success when we really need humility, security when we really need boldness, comfort when we really need character, and health when we really need holiness. We ask for what we think is best for us, but God in his marvelous grace is able to give us far more than all that we ask. He knows what will make us more like Christ in our walk with him.

Bryan Chapell tells the story about a childless woman named Mary Nelson. In 1983 Mary was working in her garden in St. Louis, praying while she worked. She asked God to help not only in her grief for the absence of children in her life, but also in her bitter awareness of women who could have children but choose to abort them. The absence of a child in her home created such a longing for life in her heart that Mary asked God, there in the garden, to help her give life to children in whatever way he would lead. Nine months later, Mary “gave birth” to the first Pregnancy Resource Center in St. Louis, and since that time literally thousands of children have been spared due to the prayers and labors of Mary Nelson and others who have followed her. She, who once asked to be a life-giving mother to one, has become life-saving mother to thousands.<sup>3</sup>

God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask.

*B. God Is Able to Do More Than We Think (3:20b)*

And second, God is able to do more than we think.

Paul said in verse 20b, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask **or think....**” This is so

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<sup>3</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, 170.

staggering! Not only is God able to far more abundantly than all that we *ask*, he is in fact able to do far more abundantly than all that we can even *think*!

How often has God done something in your life, and you have not even thought about it? I mean, who even thinks about getting cancer? But, God in his infinite wisdom allows cancer because he is working all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose (cf. Romans 8:28). As Bryan Chapell says, “God’s greatness allows me to believe in his good will even when something I ask for is not answered when I desire or how I think.”<sup>4</sup> God’s greatness is always designed for his glory and our good.

God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or even think.

## II. How Is God Able to Do It? (3:20c-d)

The second question is: How is God able to do it?

Paul showed us that God is able to do it in two ways.

### A. *God Is Able to Do It Sovereignly (3:20c)*

First, God is able to do it sovereignly.

Paul said in verse 20c, “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, **according to the power...**,” or, as the *New International Version* puts it, “according to his power.” God’s power is immense. In fact, God is all-powerful. He is supremely powerful.

How powerful is God? God spoke the entire universe into existence. He merely said, “Let there be light,” and there

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<sup>4</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, 171.

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was light (Genesis 1:3). He said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters” and there was heaven (Genesis 1:6–7). And so on.

God’s power worked in the lives of Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Gideon, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Nehemiah, and the people of Israel. God’s covenant was moving forward inexorably toward the arrival of his promised Messiah. And God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to be born of a virgin named Mary. Eventually, Jesus was crucified, but God’s power raised him back to life three days later.

God’s power is still working today as more than 2 billion people have been regenerated by him. The Church of Jesus Christ is expanding, and the gates of hell shall not overcome it.

So, dear friend, God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think because he is able to use his sovereign power to accomplish what he wants to do.

### *B. God Is Able to Do It Personally (3:20d)*

And second, God is able to do it personally.

Paul said in verse 20d, “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 is something that should cause us to rejoice. God does not work in impersonal ways. Instead, his sovereign power is **at work within us!**

Do you believe that? It seems to me that we love heroes. We look at the heroes of the faith, people like R. C. Sproul, or Jonathan Edwards, or Amy Carmichael, or Elizabeth Elliot, and we have no trouble believing that God is work within them. But **God at work within us?** Now, that is when we have trouble believing God and his word, isn’t it?

But, think of a woman at the Crisis Pregnancy Center

counselling a young teenager not to abort her baby; a dad who teaches young children in a Sunday school class what it means to know Jesus as Lord and Savior; a wife who has determined to love her husband even though he has betrayed her love through adultery; a man who refuses to be dishonest in his work despite his boss's pressure to do so; a woman who plays music to enable God's people to worship well despite her own back pain. From their perspective they may not believe that God is at work within them. But, dear friend, God is powerfully at work within them. God is powerfully at work in every Christian who lives in obedience to God and his word.

So, how is God able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think? He is able to do so according to his power at work within us. He is able to do so sovereignly and personally.

### III. Why Is God Able to Do It? (3:21)

Finally, the third question is: Why is God able to do it? Paul stated that God was able to do it for two reasons.

#### A. *God Is Able to Do It to Be Glorified in the Church (3:21a)*

First, God is able to do it to be glorified in the Church.

Paul said in verse 21a, “...to him be glory in the church....” The church is of course the fellowship in which God is gathering believers from every corner on earth together. The church is God's chosen instrument through which his purposes for this earth and for eternity are accomplished. It is in the church where people come to know Christ, grow in Christ, serve Christ, share Christ, and worship Christ.

Jesus Christ himself said, “I will build my church, and the

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gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). God will glorify himself in the church because God’s sovereign power is at work within each believer.

### *B. God Is Able to Do It to Be Glorified in Christ Jesus (3:21b)*

And second, God is able to do it to be glorified in Christ Jesus.

Paul said in verse 21b, “to him be glory in the church **and in Christ Jesus....**” God will be glorified not only in the church, but he will also be glorified in his Son, Jesus Christ. John Stott says, “The power comes from him; the glory must go to him. To him be glory *in the church and in Christ Jesus* together, in the body and in the Head, in the bride and in the Bridegroom, in the community of peace and in the Peacemaker.”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, God will be glorified “**throughout all generations** [that is, in history], **forever and ever** [that is, in eternity]. **Amen**” (3:21c).

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Ephesians 3:20-21, let us praise God for his greatness.

I close with the following story from Bryan Chapell:

At this year’s Thanksgiving service, I listened as the wife of one of our pastors gave glory to God. She spoke in the light of the recent murder of her brother. For some years this brother had lived in rebellion against God but, through the

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<sup>5</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 140–141.

witness of his family and others, a glorious transformation had occurred. She reported how her brother had one day come to her father and said, “Now I know where I am going and whom I trust.” After that, the brother changed and the circumstances surrounding that change were already more than the family could ask or think; God had worked sovereignly and personally to bring the young man to himself. After so much pain before knowing the joy of his salvation, one would think that the murder of this young man would totally devastate this loving family. Of course, in many ways, it did. But this dear sister reported how, after her brother’s death, and even while her father held his dead son in his arms, the father said that he was at peace. He knew that God had preserved the son until the time that his eternity was secure with the Lord. But even this promise of eternity was not all that caused the sister to rise to her feet to give glory to God.

She rose to her feet to give the glory to God that her family was now praying for the salvation of the man who had murdered her brother. The Lord is using the family of a man recently saved to pray for the eternity of the man who killed him. Is this senseless? To the world, yes, it is. It is even more than I would normally ask or think could be right. But in the church, and for those who are in Christ Jesus, such amazing love is but another reason to give glory to God, for we know it is more evidence that he is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. We give him glory not only because he is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, but also because in Jesus Christ we know that our God is willing to give supernatural blessing so that there will be glory due him in the church and in Christ, throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, 179–180.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can  
be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons).
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp).
3. [www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz).

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