

He Is Able – *Ephesians 3:20-21*

Introduction – You can let the text of the doxology just run by you, lots of superlatives, exaggerated religious hype with no feet down here in your reality. It can be a nice set of propositions to believe when you are asked catechism questions about the nature and character of the god you acknowledge. At the end of one of Paul's most powerful prayers, this doxology tests us and our profession of the Christian faith in ways that challenge the way we see everything, from the entire cosmos, to the story of the church, to each and every individual event in your personal life. Enter in and let it reshape you.

The Text – *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."*

Overwhelmed with the Powerful, Gracious Glory of God – Paul, continuing to look back at all that is declared in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and believing that his prayer (vv14-19) will be answered, both in individual lives and over the course of a thousand generations, cannot find enough adjectives to describe the power and wisdom of the ability of God. He is able. He is able to do. He is able to do above all. He is able to do exceedingly above all... - and so on. Paul ends this half of his letter with a doxology because he could do nothing else.

He is Able – When God makes clear His intentions, even those with faith cannot begin to fathom what He is able to do (1 Cor 2:9, Isaiah 64:4, 65:17). Like Abraham's wife, Sarah, we are often guilty of believing and trusting that God is able. Israel could not believe that, with God, they could take out the giants in the Promised Land. Mary staggered in unbelief, *"How can this be...?"* (Luke 2:34). The apostles were astonished at Jesus' teaching, after declaring that it would be more possible for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, but Jesus said, *"The things which are impossible with men are possible with God"* (Luke 18:27). So, if you find it hard to really believe what God is able to do, you are in good company.

More Than I Could Ask or Imagine? – We are tempted to think Paul has gone too far, carried away by his own rhetoric and eloquence. But he does so, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in many other places (i.e. Rom 8:28, 31-32), as do the other Apostles (i.e. 1 John 5:14-15). Of course, we don't always receive what we ask, and this teaches us that God is not a vending machine or a genie in a bottle. However, in the context of confessing the true, sovereign God to Whom we have an intimate and immediate access, we are disciplined in our prayers such that we grow in praying according to His will, learning to give thanks for the better answer, far beyond what we can imagine (2 Cor 12:7-10). James tells us that we do not have because we do not ask; the Psalms give us innumerable examples of arguing with God over the answers or lack thereof, and in all of this, He grows us up in Him, fitting us to ask for the things we really, most deeply want.

How Does He Do This? – Sovereignly – *"...according to the power..."* These words already have a rich history in this epistle. We have forgiveness *"according to the riches of His grace..."* (Eph 1:7), that is, it is expressed to its full extent. "Power" is God's sovereign force of creation, bringing all things into existence, bringing us from death to life, and transforming this world into a new creation. "Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases" (Psalm 115:3).

How Does He Do This? – Personally – *"...that works in us..."* In Christ, God is perfectly working out our salvation (Phil 1:6) and our sanctification/glorification (2 Cor 4:16-18). Some enjoy times of security and prosperity; some endure times of great affliction, hardship and sorrow. In each person, in each circumstance, God is doing more than we could ever imagine. And this is where faith comes in: *"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Heb 11:1). God's purposes and provision may not always be what we ask and often stretches us beyond what we can imagine. But He always gives to prepare us, to strengthen us, to grow us in greater dependency on Himself and to lessen our attraction to the world and the flesh.

To Him Be Glory – There is the point of it all, the chief end of man. He is doing all of this to the praise of His gracious glory (Eph 1:6, 12, 14), His grace-filled glory. It is revealed *"in the church"* and *"by Christ Jesus"* and it will exist *"to all generations of the ages of the ages."* You are a personal part of His story and the church triumphant is singing His gracious glory.

Application – How should this change my Monday?

No One Is Beyond the Power of God – Do you doubt that God can save that loved one who has steadfastly resisted your prayers and witness? Remember your own salvation; remember it in light of the story of Ephesians 1-3.

No Struggle is Beyond the Power of God – Do you doubt that God is able to make good out of your struggle, your affliction, your circumstance? Can't imagine it? God's Word says otherwise (Paul says otherwise while sitting in prison). Every time you come to the Table you are to see that of course He can – and will.

No Era is Beyond the Power of God – The nations will flow to the mountain of God. There are no "footnote" eras where God was not at work – where nothing happened. Often, the dark days of volume 2 in a trilogy are the necessary setup for the great eucatastrophe. Always pray this prayer watchfully.