

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 3:20-21 - Doxology: Praising God for His Power

This morning I want to slow down a little and spend some time on this little doxology at the end of the first half of Ephesians. It is so rich and powerful and convicting and comforting that I think we would do a disservice to blow right by it.

What is a doxology? Doxa in Greek means praise or glory. And logos means word. So a doxology is a word of praise, a word of glory to God.

There are quite a few of these doxologies throughout Scripture. We'll be seeing them more because we're now closing our service with benedictions. Benedictions - meaning a good word - and doxology are synonymous in many ways and it's worth taking a look at a few of these so you recognize them as you read.

Turn to Romans 11:33-36. I want you to notice some themes as we read these.

First, usually the reason for the doxologies is the saving work of God. Here in Romans 11 it's similar to Ephesians 2-3 where Paul has just talked about God saving Jew and Gentile into one body - the Church - through faith in Jesus.

Second, they exalt God far above anything or anyone we can comprehend. **Read**

Paul is giving God highest praise, highest glory and this is almost a spontaneous overflow of praise.

In sports if a player has an amazing play - a walk off home run, an amazing catch to win the game - the crowd spontaneously erupts into praise. That's kind of what these doxologies are. Paul or Peter or whoever is proclaiming such amazing truths about God they can't help but just overflow with praise to God.

Turn to Romans 16:25-27. This is interesting. What Paul praises God for - again - is that he has made known to us the mystery hidden for ages. What's the mystery? It's that the Jews and Gentiles are one new man through faith in Jesus. There is no more distinction. **Read 25-27**

Again, this is almost parallel to what we've seen in Ephesians. A prayer for strength according to Jesus. The mystery that was hidden for ages, which is what Paul was talking about in Ephesians also. What's the result of that amazing mystery? Praise and glory to the only wise God.

Turn to Philippians 4:19-20. Again, Paul here is talking about God's provision. Not so much for salvation, but for material provision. God has supplied for Paul's needs through the Philippian church. And he says this. **Read 19-20**

But you see the themes. God's provision. Could be material, could be salvation. God's wisdom and purpose. And God's glory.

Heb. 13:20-21: Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Back in Eph 3 those same themes are present. This is really - in my mind - the quintessential doxology. This is the doxology that you'd frame on your wall because it puts every amazing element together in one shot ending in the glory of God.

Big Picture: Praise God for his power.

The glory of God is really a constant theme throughout Scripture. It's really everywhere and the glory of God should always be on our mind.

1 Cor. 10:31: whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to what? The Glory of God.

Whether you're cereal or steak, or taking of communion or scrolling your phone or mowing your yard, all of our lives are to be lived to bring God glory. To show how amazing and awesome he is.

In fact, this theme of the glory of God is so prominent the very first question in the Westminster Catechism - the question and answer teaching used by our Presbyterian friends - is: What is the chief end of man?

What's the primary reason we're here for? Why did God make us and why do we exist? What's our chief end, our chief aim of life?

Answer: It's to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

When I was saved at 14, my church didn't really talk about the glory of God. That wasn't in our vocabulary at all. I remember going to Bible college and after a month or so hearing a lot about the glory of God, I was having lunch with a friend and just straight asked him: Why do we have to do everything for God's glory? Why can't we just do things because we want to do things? Why do I have to drive to God's glory? Why do I have to write 10-page papers to God's glory? Why do I have to exercise to God's glory? Why can't I just do things because I want to do them? Why do I have to have God in mind when I do everything?

Do you know what the answer is? It's because God created me for his purpose. He fashioned me in my mother's womb like a piece of equipment. And like a piece of equipment I have one job: to show the world how amazing my Creator is.

Imagine a hammer asking: Why do I have to keep hitting nails? I want to cut wood like a saw.

Imagine a drill saying: I don't really want to poke holes in things, I want to weld metal together.

That would be weird. Why? They weren't made those things. A hammer is made to hit nails. A drill is made to poke holes.

And humans are made to bring God glory. To show the whole world how amazing he is.

I quote **1 Pet. 2:9-10** a lot because it's so clarifying of our mission here on earth: We're a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession - he made us those things. Why? So we might proclaim the excellencies of him who called me out of darkness into his marvelous light.

That's the whole game here. Jesus took on flesh, lived out the law perfectly in our place, died in our place, rose for our justification, reigns in heaven now, and will one day fill the whole earth with his glory - not so we get some recognition. But so that he gets all the praise and honor and glory for how amazing he is.

Isa. 48:11: God defers his anger, restrains his wrath, tries us in the furnace of affliction, pours out mercy...not because he thinks we're so great. He says "For my own sake, for my own sake" - he doesn't want his name profaned because he will not give his glory to any other.

No one will ever share God's glory. God alone is worthy of all honor and praise and worship and credit for everything.

And in this little doxology we see 5 reasons praise God.

1) Because God is powerful. Read 20

We don't see it come through in our translations very well, but 3 times in verse 20 Paul uses words that relate to power.

To him who is able: that word “able” is the idea of powerful ability. Not just someone who can barely get the job done. No. Someone who has power to accomplish it easily.

I was filling up some paddle boards this week and the paddle boards come with a cute little air pump. And if you pumped non-stop for 15 minutes you’d probably fill it up. The problem is that by the time you’re done your arms and chest are absolutely jello because it takes a lot of work. Can I fill them up? Sure - but I’m worn out by the end.

So I brought an air compressor. They were filled and ready to go in 2 minutes and I didn’t break a sweat because this machine powerfully able to shoot air into the paddle board.

When Paul says that God is able to do far more, he doesn’t mean that God can just barely do something. He’s talking about the God of Wonders. The God who has infinite power and might.

Heb 11: By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

God is so powerful that everything in the universe - whether we see it or not - was made simply by his words. God spoke and it happened. If God can just speak and create billions of stars that are bigger than our solar system, I’m pretty sure he’s able to do anything he puts his mind to do.

Two more times in this verse Paul uses words related to power. So God is powerfully able. Then he mentions power twice more. **Read 20**

The phrase “according to the power at work” references two words that have to do with power. *Dunamis* and *energeo*: power and work. God is powerfully able to powerfully work.

And that’s really the primary reason for praising God in this passage: God is powerful. He has the ability to do absolutely anything.

And I think sometimes we forget that. When we’re contemplating life or wishing that things were different than they are a lot of times the limiting factor, if we’re just being honest, is we don’t think God can actually do something.

Now, obviously there are some things God can’t do or won’t do. God won’t sin, God’s not going to do something silly like make a square circle, or turn back time and change the past. That’s not a thing.

But God is powerful and we need to remember that. The context of our passage here is that God has raised spiritually dead Jews and Gentiles to life, gave us amazing promises and made us one in Christ. And not only are we one new body, but we’re now the Temple of the living God. God’s glory used to live in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem and was so bright and amazing and awesome that only the high priest could even see it and then only once a year.

But God’s glory now dwells in his Jewish and Gentile believers who are his temple. And Paul has just prayed that God would help us understand the massive love that God has toward us so that as his Temple we would be able to contain the power of the God that dwells within us.

“God, help them understand your massive love more so that you dwell in them more. So that more glory and more power flow through your church for your glory”

That’s what it means to be the Temple of God, right? God dwells in us in power. And now Paul wants **more** power to dwell in us.

And you have to ask: Is that possible? Is it possible that God is able to give us a knowledge of his love so much that we can contain more of the glory of God within us? I mean, that’s quite the prayer: God come live in us more. God fill us more with your glory. The same glory that destroyed Uzzah when he touched the Ark. The

same glory that made Isaiah fall down like a dead man. The same glory that caused all of Israel to shake with fear at Mt Sinai.

We're asking God to fill us with love to be able to contain that kind of glory. Is that possible?

What's Paul's answer? **Read 20**

Is it possible? Of course. He is powerfully able to do this and more. This is God we're talking about. The power is already at work in us - surely God can unleash more.

So we praise God because he is powerful.

2) We praise God for answering our prayers. I want to read this slowly and I want you to think about the superlatives here. A superlative is describes the most or the best. A tall tree, a taller tree, the tallest tree. Tallest is a superlative.

The fast runner, the faster runner, the fastest runner. Fastest is the superlative.

Here, God is the best prayer answerer. **Read 20**

This is amazing and I want to go through this in stair steps so you see it clearly. I want to give you the things Paul could have said. And I want this to be a little repetitive on purpose. I want you to think carefully about what Paul is saying here.

Paul could have said:

A) God is able to do what we ask. That's true, right? Do you believe that's true? That God can actually do what you ask? Do you believe that he's that good and that powerful that he might give you what you want?

Paul could have said:

B) God is able to do **more** than what we ask. Do you believe that? That God can actually do **more than** what you ask? Do you believe that God is that good and that powerful that he'd give you more than what you ask?

Can I ask you something? Has someone ever asked you for something and you gave them more? A friend asked for \$100 and you gave them \$400? Your kid asked for an Oreo and you gave them 3. Someone asks you to help them for a couple hours and you help them for a couple days? Have you ever done that? Sure.

Do you think you're more generous than God? If we're generous to our friends and family, how much more is God?

Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights with whom there's no shadow due to change. Every good thing in your life came from God who has always been that good and that generous. He's never changed. He can give us more than we ask or think.

Paul could have said:

C) God is able to do **far more** than what we ask. Not just a little more, not just double or triple. But boatloads more. Like to the point where you're getting nervous that maybe it's improper to ask God of such great things. But the reality is that he can give us far more.

When we had one child I asked God for one more. So far he's given us 8 more. That is far more than I could ever ask or think.

You see where I'm going here? Paul doesn't say that God is able to do far more than we can ask or think.

He also doesn't say that God is able to do far more abundantly than we can ask or think. No, what's he say?

God is able to do far more abundantly than **all** we ask or think. This is what I mean when I say God is the best prayer answerer. Paul is trying to help us understand that there are no limits to God's power to give us what we ask.

Imagine that every prayer request you make is a cup of water. And at the end of your life you can take all the cups of water and fill a dump truck with the requests. Or maybe you ask a lot and it's a dump truck with one of those trailers behind it. And you're worried you've asked a lot from God. Maybe you've asked too much.

And God says go take your dump truck of requests and go park it by the Pacific Ocean. And you park it there and he says "What you asked was a dump truck of requests. What I'm able to deliver is more than this ocean."

Let me ask you: Do you pray like God is powerfully able to do far more abundantly than **all** you could ever ask?

Just to push the analogy here: do you pray for coffee cups when what you really want is a swimming pool or a lake? I think there's a lot of times we don't actually ask God for what we really want because we can't imagine he's that good. Or we can't imagine he's that powerful and that he'd give it to us.

This same God who took on flesh when he didn't have to, suffered scorn and shame and death when he didn't have to, to purchase for his enemies eternal life of joy and pleasure in his presence.

That's why **Romans 8:32** says "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

This is the God we're talking about you guys.

That's why Jesus says fathers know how to give their kids good gifts. We'd never give our kids a scorpion or a rock if they asked for some food. We know how to take care of our kids. And yet we're evil. How much more will God give us because he's our good Father?

James says you do not have because you do not what? Ask.

We believe in God's sovereignty. We believe in God's decrees, that there's no alternate universe of what could have been had we done different things. Yet James makes it clear, there's a lot of things you could have if you just asked God in faith.

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

So we praise God for his power.
We praise God for answering prayers.

3) We praise God for answering our non-prayers. God is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or what? **Think**.

You guys, God is so good to us he even gives what we just simply think about. And not only gives us, but gives far more abundantly than we could even think.

Have you ever been driving along or walking along and just thought "Man, this would be so neat if God did this?" Or "This would be a cool thing"? And you just thought it. Didn't even ask God, and then it happened anyway?

You think that's by accident? You think that's by chance? No. It's because God knows our thoughts and our heart more than we even know it ourselves.

This is how good God is as our Father. He loves us so much, he knows us so much that he often even gives us what we want when we haven't even asked him for it. In fact, he often gives us far more abundantly than anything we were thinking about.

If you've ever been to Silverwood you'll see people walking around with ice cream. So our first time there, everyone's hot and I'm like "Alright let's get some ice cream." And I get in the little shop and my jaw hits the floor because it's like \$4 for the small. The small. So everybody is getting the small because otherwise I'd need to take out a second mortgage to afford ice cream. But I notice they have cookie dough - my favorite - so I get some of that.

But here's the deal: it's far better than what I could have hoped for. Not only is the best cookie dough I've ever had, the "small" is 3 massive scoops of towering ice cream on an amazing waffle cone. What was provided for me was far better and far more than I could have imagined.

This is what God does over and over and over in our lives. He gives us far more abundantly than we could even think.

And we could just say God is omniscient. That God knows our thoughts. And that's true. But when the Bible talks about God's omniscience, it's not just that he's a super computer who knows a bunch of data. It's that God knows us and loves us and cares for us and gives us good things.

Psalms 139:1-4: O Lord you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, behold you know it all.

He's rejoicing that God knows him.

RC Sproul once said: My greatest comfort in life is that God knows absolutely everything about me, and he still loves me.

And I would only add to that loves us and loves to bless us as his children.

4) We praise God for his work in us. Read 20

So what Paul is saying is that God can do this amazing work of helping us understand his love more, so that more of him will dwell in us because he's already doing it. His power is already at work in us.

Now God's power isn't some weird voodoo mysticism. There are many Christians who want to turn the power of God into this weird spiritual experience completely unrelated to the truth of Scripture of walking in holiness. Our charismatic friends often want to **feel** God's power. But God's power is not a feeling. It's not like in Super Mario where to get a mushroom and you become big Mario. Or get a flower and now you're Fireball Mario.

No, God's power is shown primarily through our personal holiness. God saved us by his power and now he changes us by his power.

Are you more like Jesus now than you were 4 years ago? If so, that wasn't your power. That was God working in you.

You say, man it sure felt like a lot of work. It was. But do you know how that work was accomplished? By God working in you.

Phil 2:12-13: Therefore my beloved as you have always obeyed so now not only as in my presence but much more in my absence work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you for his good pleasure.

After I mow my lawn, I'm usually pretty warm and tired. But my lawnmower is one of those self-propelled jobs. Really, it does everything: it cuts the grass, it powers the wheels - I'm just kind of along for the ride.

That's kind of the Christian life. We feel like we're working - and there's a sense in which we are - but it's really God's power in us to change us to be more like Jesus.

If you're a Christian and your life is more like Jesus now than what it was when you were first saved, who gets the credit and the glory for that? God.

5) God gets glory through the Church. **Read 21**

I won't linger on this, because it's really been the whole theme of chapter 2 and 3: that God in his amazing wisdom created the church. God has created the one people of God made up of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus.

FF Bruce: "God is to be glorified in the church because the church, comprising Jews and Gentiles, is his masterpiece of grace. It is through the church that his wisdom is made known to the spiritual forces of the heavenly realm."

God's greatness is magnified through bringing Jew and Gentile together.

6) God gets glory through Christ. **Read 21**

The Father received glory from Christ the Son because Christ's mission was to glorify his Father.

The whole mission of Jesus as the obedient Son was to give his Father honor and glory. He was the perfectly obedient Son in every possible way.

Everything the Father gave him to say, he said. Everything the Father gave him to do, he did.

This is why God spoke from heaven twice saying "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

The Son who saved us and raised us and lets us reign with him does all of that to bring glory and honor to the Father.

And even in eternity future, in the New Heavens and New Earth, when all has been accomplished here we are in the eternal state forever with Christ as King, **1 Cor. 15:28** says this: When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.

Once Christ ascends to the throne, he gives it all back to the Father who reigns over all forever.

And it's that glory that will go on forever. **Read 21**

Pray

Benediction: 2 Cor. 13:14: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.