

Above and Beyond

Ephesians 3:20-21

In just a few days, we will mark the end of what has been the strangest year in my lifetime and maybe for you as well. As we anticipated the beginning of a new year 12 months ago, no one could have fathomed the challenges that the whole world would face with the COVID virus or that here we are all these months later still dealing with it all.

As a church we had just completed a lengthy study on our strategic plan exited to roll out what we hoped would take our church well into the next decade. Some plans changed; some are on hold. You may have had personal plans and goals for the year that were changed.

Businesses were hoping to expand under an economy that was growing. Unemployment was dropping.

But all those plans came to a screeching halt in the middle of March. News of a virus coming out of China flooded the airwaves and newsprint.

I was down in Florida at a pastors' forum enjoying some early warm weather and learning about the ministry of Ethnos360 when we heard of five cases of the virus being identified on the west coast hit the news. I remember sitting in the airport watching a segment of the morning news telling us all about the importance of hand washing and hand sanitizer to combat the spread.

It was an unprecedented time, a time of uncertainty, dare I even say a time of near panic. Product began to fly off the shelves with a frenzy. With national concern on how to best combat the rapid spread, government officials began to address the growing uneasiness regarding what would be identified as a global pandemic. Even before the national lockdown was mandated, our Church Board discussed options and made the decision to cancel the services for March 15. The following week began the national lockdown.

Businesses closed.

Restaurants closed.

Schools closed.

Doctors' offices closed, except for emergencies.

We were told to shelter at home.

We were told not to travel.

Sports were cancelled.

Graduations were cancelled.

Vacations were cancelled.

We were told to work from home if possible.

Schools learned to hold online classes.

Through much trial and many errors, we learned to stream services on Facebook.

Businesses slowly opened. Things seemed to be returning to some semblance of normalcy. Then the second wave hit in September and although there was not the national lockdown as at the beginning, still, there was a collective groan from across America. Local, State, and Federal governments all seemed to have varying opinions of how best to handle this crisis. People are on edge and tired of the bombardment of information and to some degree, the conflicting and sometimes even erroneous information. Many have just turned their TV sets off, not sure what or who to believe.

Through it all there have been certain professions that have had to bear the brunt of the workload, people like first responders and mail carriers whose services we rely on. After this year, mail carriers will have to change their motto to say something like "neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor hail, nor COVID shall keep the postmen from their appointed rounds, although we may be a bit late."

I was at the post office this past summer to buy stamps and an irate customer couldn't understand why his package hadn't arrived when expected even though the postal worker tried to explain that the central hub in Detroit was short staffed from a number of the workers out with COVID. They were working longer hours to process the volume of mail and packages as quickly as possible.

And then I would be amiss if I didn't acknowledge the medical personnel who worked long hours and extra shifts, often short staffed to care for patients. I have shared with you the staffing and scheduling challenges Robyn faced throughout this year. Many have gone above and beyond the call of duty in providing their particular service.

Rightfully so, people are exhausted emotionally, mentally, and physically and that is how we enter 2021. But there is something about the newness of another year in which we anticipate that things will somehow be different and better. Even a return to what is normal would be welcome.

If we have learned anything this past year, it is the truth James stresses that even though we may make plans, we really don't know what tomorrow will bring because there are no guarantees. As we have learned, plans can change in a moment.

I think there is something else we have learned this year or at least something the Christian should have learned if not known already and that is the power and provision of God even in a pandemic. Take your Bibles and turn to **Ephesians 3**. God always goes above and beyond.

It is my prayer that this passage will challenge you to see all that God is able to do in the year ahead, no matter what trials or challenges we face. I hope that in this coming year you see that God's power is amazing. This is the prayer I would have for you.

I. GOD'S POWER IS AMAZING – v. 20

In the opening verses of **Ephesians 3** Paul writes to the church there that he has been called to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He was to make known the mystery that they would become heirs of God's kingdom along with the believing Jews combined by faith into one body. We see that in **verse 6**. **“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”**

As part of the body of Christ, Paul then offered a prayer on their behalf beginning in **verse 14**. He begins by stating that he knelt before the Father. Kneeling signifies a couple of things.

It's a sign of submission. In this case it's a willing acknowledgement that God is supreme and the One to whom he could bring his requests. Looking back in **verse 12**, Paul wrote that in Christ and in faith in Christ he could approach God with freedom and

confidence. He didn't need a special invitation to approach God. Remember that in the book of Esther, no one could enter into the presence of the king unless he had summoned them and held out his scepter for them to approach to make their request.

Paul didn't need to wait for a certain time of the day. It was with confidence that he could boldly bring his request on behalf of the Ephesians to God. We read the same in **Hebrews 4:16** that we can enter into God's presence boldly, with confidence. That means we can come before Him trusting that He will receive us and be assured that He will hear our request.

Paul showed submission by kneeling to God coming into the presence of one who is supreme. Kneeling also reveals an attitude of passion and emotion. You may remember that when Ezra heard about Israelites who had intermarried with their pagan neighbors, he fell on his knees before God in a display of great emotion and confession. Kneeling was a spontaneous act before God.

So what did he pray about on behalf of this church?

Let me just say that as you read this and the other prayers Paul offered, they are about the spiritual well-being of believers. Notice in **verse 14** that what he asked in prayer was out of God's glorious riches. He drew on the vast source of God's riches to answer his prayer on behalf of these believers.

If I were a millionaire and I gave you \$25, that would be giving you out of my riches. But if I were to give you \$25,000 that would be giving you according to my riches. That is the extent to which God riches are available, according to not out of.

He prays for them to be strengthened with power by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Simply put, he's praying for spiritual enablement. This is not a prayer reserved or requested for a special group of super Christians. This is not a prayer that they be given more strength, but rather a prayer that they experience the strength in Christ they already possess.

How tragic it is that many Christians live more like

the English eccentric Julian Morris who would dress up as a tramp and sell razor blades, soap and shampoo door-to-door. After a day's work he would return to his mansion, put on formal clothes, and have his chauffeur drive him to an exclusive restaurant. Sometimes he would even fly to Paris to spend the evening. Many Christians do not avail themselves of the riches they have in Christ but choose to live in spiritual poverty and only once in a while enjoy those spiritual riches Christ has so readily made available to them.

Paul wanted them to be strengthened by the indwelling Holy Spirit and that only comes through our yielding to Him. **John MacArthur adds that "Spiritual power is not the mark of a special class of Christian but is the mark of every Christian who submits to God's Word and Spirit."**

Paul then prayed that they be rooted and established in love. Again, this comes, as we see in **Galatians 5:22**, through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit as we yield to His control in our lives. When He is in control the evidence of His love in us is that it is seen through us.
John 13:34-35

God's love in us is evident to others.

He prays that they would understand the breadth of God's love. **Could there be any greater love than for God to send His only Son to die for sins He didn't commit? Do we understand the depth of that love?** Perhaps the only one who knows such depth of God's love is Abraham who was willing to give up his own son as a sacrifice.

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!

**It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.**

This would be my prayer for you as together we enter into this new year 2021, that you would experience the power of God in your life to live godly in Christ Jesus. As Paul concludes his prayer in **verses 20-21**, it's a benediction and a doxology. As he thinks about his prayer for these believers, he is reminded of God's amazing power.

People have expected the government to come up with solutions to rid us of the virus. They demanded a vaccine, which was delivered in record time, but even in trials was not 100% effective.

They wanted government assistance but even that is limited in scope and amount.

They expect the government to go above and beyond what it can, but it can't because it has limited power and ability. But God's power is amazing.

The first thing I want you to notice from this verse is that God's power is unlimited.

A. God's Power Is Unlimited

His power has no limits. There is anything that He can't do. The theological term is omnipotence or all powerful. It implies that He can do anything that is consistent with His nature. In His power, He won't do something evil because that would be against His holy nature. In His power, God can never make wrong right, because wrong is not in His nature.

Philosophers like to wax on in spirited debate about whether God in His power can create a rock that even He could not lift. If that were possible, God's power would be limited, but it's not.

In our text we read a very small but powerful word. It's the same in the KJV, NIV, ESV, NLT and the Amplified. It's the word **"able"**. The dictionary defines it as having enough power, skill, etc. to do something and sometimes suggests superior power.

We just finished our study in Genesis and saw the power of God demonstrated throughout. From the opening verses we see His power repeated as He

spoke and things that were not came into existence.

John 1:2 “Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.”

Hebrews 11:3 “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

So in the opening chapter when we read that **“God said ‘let there be’”** whatever He spoke came into existence by the power of His spoken word.

The sky

Dry land and sea

Vegetation

Light, which included the sun and stars

Sea creatures

Land animals

Man in His own image

His power was evident in giving Abraham and Sarah a son when they were well past their years to have children. Sarah was told that nothing is impossible with God.

His power produced plagues to deliver Israel from their Egyptian bondage.

His power parted the Red Sea.

His power destroyed the Egyptian army.

His power produced manna for Israel to eat and they did so for 40 years.

His power caused the walls of Jericho to collapse, stopped the rains from falling for 3 ½ years, destroyed the Assyrian army and caused the Aramean army to go blind.

In the New Testament Mary was told that nothing was impossible with God when she questioned how she as a virgin could conceive a child.

We see the power of God evident when Jesus healed lepers, the deaf, the blind, the mute, the lame, fed thousands, calmed stormy seas, raised the dead, and then raised Himself.

God’s power is unlimited in what He can do.

So while God can do anything, in the context of the passage, God’s power is able to produce in you a godly life. **Is that your desire for this new year?** In

the past as I have prayed for you, I have prayed that we might grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This verse is a great benediction to that prayer knowing that He is able to complete the work He has begun in us.

“Philippians 1:6 “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

He has saving power.

He has sanctifying power. Work refers to God’s activity in the believer to bring about the completion of their salvation through glorification, to fit them for eternity for heaven. That is the culmination of salvation. As we yield our will to the will of God’s Spirit, He can do His work in us through His power that is able to bring about a change in each of us.

We should never say that we can’t overcome some temptation or that we can’t overcome some sin or that we can’t overcome some habit. And we would be right if we attempted to do so in our own power. But God is able because His power is unlimited. God has the power to save us (**Romans 1:16**). God has the power to keep us (**I Peter 1:5**). God has the power to resurrect us (**I Corinthians 6:14**).

God has the power to help us in daily life to live godly (**Ephesians 1:19**).

The same power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power at work in us because He is able. **Jeremiah 32:17-19 “Ah, Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You...O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty, great are your purposes and mighty are Your deeds.”**

God’s power is unlimited, and then we also notice in our verse that God’s power is unfathomable.

B. God’s Power Is Unfathomable

Take an Isaac Newton or an Einstein and any other smart person and put them in a room and they’ll never be able to come up with a formula to calculate the power of God. They’ll never be able to

understand it because they are finite in knowledge while God is infinite.

We have visited the Air Force Museum in Dayton, Ohio a couple times. As we have looked at the cut away section of a jet engine, Robyn has wondered about who thought of taking a bunch of thin metal fins of different sizes to put in a cylinder along with some other gizmos to create power for a jet. All that knowledge to create such power is far beyond me.

How can we ever comprehend the power of God, to say that we understand how He created the universe from nothing? How does He suspend all of it in space and how does He keep it all going? His power is too wonderful, too awesome for me to begin to know and understand. The only thing I can understand is that He can because He's God, even though I don't understand anything else about it. If you want to get a glimpse at the unfathomable nature of God's power, read **Job 38-42** as God questions Job.

Even David was left to wonder at God's power in his own form.

Psalm 139:14 "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well."

His power is unfathomable.

Our text goes on to tell us that God's power is unmeasurable.

C. God's Power Is Unmeasurable

"[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

When I am having some trouble starting my car, I take it to a place where they can hook up the battery to a device that measures how many amps are being put out. It tells me how much power the battery has. My car battery will eventually one day run out of power.

If you use a flashlight, you know that eventually the batteries will run out, sometimes at the most inopportune time.

Your cell phone power is measured by a percentage indicator on your phone.

The power of your phone to receive or make calls or access the internet is measured by a series of bars.

The available power of your car is measured in the gas gauge or we talk about engine size.

Doctors have devices to measure the power in your heart or your muscles.

Some sources of power are able to be refreshed or recharged.

To my knowledge I'm not aware of any energy or power source that is self-sustaining, meaning that it will never run out.

Scientists have been measuring the power of the sun and determine that someday that power will run out and we'll be left out in the cold.

But God's power is unmeasurable. He doesn't need a nap to recharge. He doesn't need another source to sustain His power. His power is within Himself and He is never drained.

Isaiah 40:28 "He will not grow tired or weary."

Several years ago, I needed to replace my car battery. As the mechanic was testing the battery, he put it under different loads, by turning various things on in the car, the lights, the wipers and so on. Now I had a GPS that I kept plugged in but not on. The mechanic found that even when it was plugged in, there was just enough draw on the battery that it shortened the life of the battery by over a year. He could measure how much power was being drained from the battery.

God's power is unmeasurable, unfathomable and unlimited. And His power is unending.

D. God's Power Is Unending

"[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

John Phillips writes that God's power is inexhaustible in its ability and its availability. There will never be a day or a time when His power will cease. His power is the same today as it was on the first day of creation. His power was the same before creation and will be the same for as long as eternity lasts. Because He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, His power is unending.

Paul understood God's unending power when he earnestly prayed and pled with God to remove a thorn in his flesh, something that really sapped him of his own spiritual power, but he learned to rest and rely on God's sustaining power.

II Corinthians 12:7-10

We have no idea what's going to happen in the year ahead, but one thing we can have the utmost confidence in is the power of God in every situation. His power is there to help us through so that through whatever the circumstances we encounter, we know that God's power will be at work in us to mature us in our faith. He wants His power to be at work in us to bring us into His likeness. God's power is amazing.

And as we see God's mighty power at work in us, our response is like Paul's as he concludes his benediction with a doxology, an anthem of praise. God's praise is appropriate.

I. GOD'S PRAISE IS APPROPRIATE – v. 21

It is appropriate to give God praise because of who He is and for His mighty power at work in us. Even before Paul's prayer is answered, he's giving God praise because he knows God's power will be at work in them.

Notice two things here.

A. Praise Is To Be Unified

Praise of God is evident in the church. Paul prays for the church at Rome to be unified so that with one mind and one voice they can glorify God (**Romans 15:6**). My encouragement to each of us is to look beyond the physical challenges that have occurred in this past year and praise God for all the wonderful things you see evident in the lives of others who are growing in their faith.

B. Praise Is To Be Unending

Our praise should be and will be forever and ever.

Each generation should look at the preceding generation and see evidence for them to carry on the anthem of praise for leading their generation into

spiritual growth so that every generation is immersed in giving God praise.

This past year has been incredibly difficult as we have witnessed so many changes in our country. Yet during all the challenges of the past year we have seen God's amazing power at work and for that we give Him all the praise, all the glory.

Through the efforts of some of our congregation we have been able to connect through streaming our services live. We have had hiccups along the way, but they have only served to strengthen our resolve to connect digitally with people who are opting to continue to shelter at home. Through technology we have been able to encourage people to grow in their walk with God. Beyond that we have been able to connect with others who are too far away to come in person. We've connected with people in Ohio, Florida, Texas, Waterford, and Ann Arbor.

Though there aren't as many who are part of our live stream of the service, the service is still available for people to watch during the week or for others to stumble across as they do some web search and find our service. It's a way to encourage people to find faith in Christ through our stream or to grow in the power of God at work in them.

Another area that I have seen the power of God at work is in your continued faithful generosity. A year ago, pre-COVID, we were looking at a significant deficit in our budget. Once we had to shelter in place and do all our services remotely via technology, we weren't sure what was going to happen, but we ended our fiscal year in June quite strong and half way through this fiscal year we remain in good fiscal health. That is the power of God who is able to do above and beyond what we could imagine. The evidence of God's power in you as your faith grows is to see you give faithfully. But not only that we weren't sure what was going to happen with Operation Christmas Child. We were locked down for 2 ½ months. I was going to be grateful for whatever God did, but your gifts exceeded my expectations as we surpassed last year's total. For that God deserves the glory for His work in your lives.

He has done and will continue to do exceedingly beyond what we could ask or imagine.

Someone put this passage into proper light with this rendering of the verse: “God is able to do all we ask Him to do; He is able to do all that we dare not ask but merely imagine; He can do more than this; He can do far more; He can do very far more.”

What will we trust God to do in us and through us by the power that is already at work in us? How do you want to grow this coming year in faith? Ask Him and watch him do more than you can imagine, and then don't forget to give Him praise.

Let me close by reading our passage from the Amplified Version.

“Now to Him Who, by or in consequence of the actions of His power that is at work within us, is able to carry out His purpose and do superabundantly, far over and above all that we dare ask or think infinitely beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, hopes, or dreams – To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen, so be it.”

This coming year what will you ask God to do in you that can only be done through the power of His Holy Spirit?

God is able to go above and beyond what you ask or think.