

September 30, 2012  
 Psalm 148:1-14 / Colossians 1:3-14 / Ephesians 3:20-21  
 Praising the God who is Able

Today's text brings us to the climax of a section of Ephesians that began in Chap. 2 verse 11, and reaches its highest heights here, with Paul's emotional outburst of praise to God. An outburst of praise where Paul ties together four interconnected and inseparable things (in this order):

- 1.) The Magnificence of God   2.) The Necessity Faith in Prayer   3.) The Power of the Holy Spirit   and   4.) The Church as a Body Created and Brought Together in order to Bring Glory to God.**

And since it deals with prayer, let me begin by asking you a few questions about your prayer life. Because our prayer life (more than almost anything else) is the best indicator of what we believe about God. / It's not the creeds we affirm / or the church we attend / or what we say / buy how we pray.

---

So I ask you:

- 1.) When you pray (and I trust all of you do), with what attitude do you go before God?
- 2.) What understanding of God dominates your thoughts when you pray?
- 3.) What do you ask God for? Little things, big things, or things beyond what the human heart and mind can even imagine?
- 4.) And when you do ask, do you ask primarily for external and material things (like prosperity, physical health and material blessings) / or do you ask primarily for internal and spiritual things (like growth in godliness, the fullness of the Spirit, a heart emptied of prejudice, the conversion of unbelievers, revival in the Church, or opportunities for witness)?

And I ask those questions, because Paul will actually give us some guidance regarding the answers for each one in this passage. So, let's see what our text has to tell us in relation to those 4 necessary and inseparable things, beginning **FIRST** with what it tells us about God. Or better yet, what it tells us about the attitude or understanding about God that we should have when we go before Him in prayer.

And the answer comes to us in verse 20: "**Now to Him who is ABLE...**" That was the attitude that pervaded Paul's prayers and should pervade ours every time we go before God in prayer: **God is ABLE -- ABLE to do whatever he or we ask.** And he says it with no indication whatsoever that there is any doubt or any question in his mind in regard to this fact!

In fact, Paul believes God is so capable, that He "**ABLE to do IMMEASURABLY MORE than ALL we can ASK or IMAGINE.**"

---

So what does that tell us? It tells us that Paul understood the Majestic, Immense and Powerful nature of God as He really is! In fact, to him God was not only powerful, He was powerful beyond what the human mind was capable of imagining! He can do anything! Not only the things we ask, but "immeasurably MORE than all we can ask or imagine!"

And don't forget (as I pointed out last week) that this prayer is written to the ENTIRE CHURCH BODY IN EPHESUS as a collective whole -- and NOT simply to individuals. Which means that Paul is really saying that God is ABLE to do IMMEASURABLY MORE than ALL that WE AS AN ENTIRE CONGREGATION together could ever ASK or IMAGINE! / Or better yet, ALL that HIS ENTIRE CHURCH WORLDWIDE could ever ASK or IMAGINE!

---

Thus we can see that Paul believed in a God who was Infinite in Being and Power! It's a fact that led the English scholar, J. B. Phillips (when translating the Bible) to see the vast difference between how people viewed God then as compared to now / and to write an insightful little book (still well worth reading), entitled, "Your God is too Small."

A book where he states that the need of the hour in any church is NOT great amounts of faith in God, but faith in a God who is great! It's NOT the size of our faith, it's the size of our God!

As Jesus pointed out, all one needs to move mountains is faith as small as a mustard seed. For when one trusts in the immense and all-powerful God of the Bible, they don't need large amounts of faith. Better faith the size of a mustard seed in the all-powerful God of the Bible / than faith the size of an ocean placed in the weak and finite god of much contemporary Christian literature.

That was precisely why A. W. Tozer could once write: ***"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."***

---

So I ask in you all honestly: Does your view of God line up with Paul's? Is that incomprehensibly grand view of God present in your heart and mind when we go before Him in prayer?

The view of God that says: ***"My God is so big, that no request is ever too outrageous for Him. No request that I or we together or the church world-wide could ever ask or even imagine is beyond the ability of God to do it!"***

And if we think otherwise, our God (to use J.B. Phillips words) is too small. In fact, if we think otherwise, our God is not the same God as the God Paul worshipped, served and prayed to.

---

You see, I've heard people say: *"God stopped doing miracles after the first apostles passed away, because they were no longer necessary."* But I'd like to suggest a different explanation. I'd like to suggest that if God stopped doing as many miracles after the first apostles died, it was more likely due to the fact that when the apostles passed away, faith in such a majestic, holy, all-powerful, personal and miracle-working God -- for whom no collective group could imagine a request that was too large for Him to answer -- passed away with them (if not in theory, at least in practice).

*Imagine*, if you can, the difference it would make in the Church at large if everyone believed as Paul believed! Imagine if every time we prayed we did so believing with all our hearts that GOD is the way Paul says he is! *Imagine* the difference in how we approach God and what we ask for when we do!

*Imagine* the difference in the way we pray and the things we pray for!

We'd stop doubting (as we often do) and stop asking for such small things! We'd pray more daring prayers! Faith-filled prayers! Prayers full of earnest anticipation and expectation! We pray more God-sized prayers, because we'd know that the God we are praying to not only loves us, and listens to our prayers, but ***"is ABLE to do IMMEASUREABLY MORE than ALL that we ASK or IMAGINE."***

We need to memorize that phrase! Repeat it over and over and over again until the truth of what it implies about God comes to transform our view of God's infinite immensity and Grandeur, and with it, the content of our prayers and the size of the things we ask for and the confidence with which we ask -- knowing that nothing we could ever ask for or imagine would even come close to being too hard for our God to bring about!

---

Which brings me to the **SECOND** thing alluded to, but not directly spoken of, in this text -- FAITH. The entire passage is saturated (it drips from beginning to end) with a faith that goes beyond hoping, to absolute assurance and internalized conviction.

***"To Him who is ABLE to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine,"*** is a faith statement! For it's only by faith that we believe that our God listens to everything His people ask, and believe (or should believe) that He could do far more than all that His entire Church could ever ask or imagine!

Thus my question to you is this: Do you have such a faith? / Do you believe that God hears every request you'll ever utter / and is so Infinitely Immense and Powerful (beyond anything you can even imagine) that He is able to do more than all that we as a congregation (or His Church worldwide) could ever ask or imagine?

And if we do believe that (as we should), then why do we ask Him for such little things? Why do our prayers for His moving in us and through us not involve requests for far greater things?

And why are they not offered up with greater earnestness and greater anticipation and a greater conviction and expectation that we will receive what He has promised to do for us and in us and through us? In fact, if we believe that God is so big and so powerful, why do we ask for such little things, and question even then if He is able to do them?

Why don't we pray as William Carey did, who in 1792, encouraged his fellow believers with a message from Isaiah 54:1-5 entitled: "Expect Great Things From God, Attempt Great Things For God."

And then climbed on a boat and headed for India as England's first missionary, where his personal accomplishments boggle the mind!

Like translating the Bible in 34 Asian languages / compiling dictionaries in Sanskrit and three other languages which are used even today as authoritative / starting the still influential Serampore College / establishing 19 mission stations / forming 100 rural schools encouraging the education of girls / starting the Horticultural Society of India / serving as a professor at Fort William College, Calcutta / printing the first Indian newspaper / introducing the concept of the savings bank to assist poor farmers / and fighting to outlaw the Hindu practice of burning of widows alive at their husbands funeral ("SATI").

And the phrase "Expect Great Things From God" was a reference to prayer. He was asking people to do what Paul asks US to do -- believe that God is ABLE to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine -- and then being convinced that He is able, ask Him ask our Great God to do great things through us! Not great things for us, but great things for Him!

That needs to be stated from the start: This is not a health and wealth "ask God to make you unimaginably rich with mansions and Masseratti's" text. This is a God-centered and God-honoring text. / It's a text that says, "ask God to empower us and use us as a church to bring him glory"! / In fact, it's not even a, "God will do whatever you ask for" text.

Paul doesn't say: "*Now to Him who WILL do immeasurably more than all you can ask or imagine,*" He says, "*Now to Him who is ABLE to do more than all you can ask or imagine...*" And there's a big difference.

I know that God CAN do ANYTHING! NOTHING is too hard for Him! But that in no way means that He WILL do "anything we can ask or imagine." For James tells us that when we ask amiss / or ask seeking to spend it on our own selfish or sensual desires / we will not receive it.

That's why Paul concludes this text with: "***to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen!***"

It's Paul's way of saying that although God IS more than ABLE to do all that we could ever ask or imagine, He reserves the right to say "no" when what we ask for is contrary to His will or will not glorify Him.

When Paul pictures the Church at prayer, he assumes they are praying for the Church and the things the Church was called to do -- like making disciples of all nations!

And you know what? We sometimes forget how ridiculous and unimaginably huge that task seemed to the first century Church -- when believers made up less than one percent of the population! Yet they believed they had a all-powerful and sovereign God and thus they prayed BIG and imagination-shattering prayers, and within 300 years had done what entire foreign armies had not been able to do for 800 over years! They essentially conquered the Roman Empire!

---

***"Imagine," says Alexander McClaren, "how dusty and toil-worn the little group of Christians looked that landed [on the shores of Italy] and toiled along the Appian Way [the main road leading into the city of Rome]. Think what they must have looked like as they entered Rome! How contemptuously emperor and philosopher and priest and politician would have curled their lip [in disbelief ] if they had been told that in that little knot of Jewish prisoners lay a power before which theirs would cower and finally fade!"***

How did they do it? They prayed and then persevered through trials and opposition and persecution and martyrdom because they believed in a great God who was "able to do immeasurably more that all they could ever ask or imagine!"

---

Yet, compare that with many today where believing Christians make up 34% of the world population, and yet say: *"There's no hope. Things are going down the tubes. They'll never get any better. And there's nothing we can do about it."*

Is that what Paul said? Is that what Peter said? Can you imagine ever hearing the early church say that? NO! Why? Because unlike us, they were convinced that God was sovereign and all-powerful and could therefore do anything! And because they did, they asked Him to do the unimaginable! To

conquer what was called the eternal city and the unconquerable empire! A measly little band of itinerant preachers from Jerusalem!

---

Before us, we could say, lies the unplumbed depths of the Atlantic Ocean, and we tend to take a tea spoon and try to fill a little juice glass. Before them lay waters from a similar ocean, and with their prayers they built a canal into which the waters of the ocean of God's being could flow through them continuously.

And that canal was their faith in the superabundant and unlimited power of God, which I dare say is somewhat absent from the contemporary church (at least, if how people talk is any indication of what they believe).

---

Can God turn things around? Paul would say, "more able than you can ever imagine!" And if so, why don't we live and act and speak and pray as if we believe it's so? / Why not speak words of faith, instead of words of fear. / Why not advance, instead of retreat? / Why not pray, instead of complain?

After all, is God not with us and on our side? Do we not believe, as Paul said in Eph. 1:10, that His purpose in Christ is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under Him"?

And if we know that's what He's determined to do -- if we know it's His will for the world -- can't we therefore pray BIGGER prayers / and ask for things IMMEASURABLY GREATER than all we can IMAGINE? / Can't we pray for things to turn around trusting that our God is able to do it - and do it by the power that is at work within us? (v. 20)

---

Will He do it overnight? Did He do it overnight in Rome? NO! It took over 200 years! Yet we are so impatient and easily frustrated that if it doesn't happen right away we give up or turn pessimistic. Not them! They knew He could do it, and prayed toward that end and kept on praying until by faith that canal is dug that connected them to the inexhaustible power and unlimited resources of the ocean of God's Being -- just as we should!

**LISTEN:** The Church not only has "*the right,*" as McClaren says, "*to enlarge our desires and stretch our confidence [in light of this verse] that we may*

***possess the boundless bounds of God"*** -- she also has the responsibility and obligation to do so!

God wants us to stop asking pitifully small prayers and start ask God-sized prayers which show we actually believe that He is what He says He is -- a Being of infinite power and immeasurable might!

---

Which brings us to our **LAST** point -- combining the other two into one: The **SOURCE** of power which is at work within us, the Church / and the **PURPOSE** of His working within us, the Church.

And what is the source? He's already told us up in v. 16: ***"I pray that out of God's glorious riches (that is, out of the fullness of all that He as God is) He may strengthen you with power, through His Spirit, in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."***

The power source of the Christian life is the Holy Spirit. The more we experience of Him, the more we will sense Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith and the more we will come to resemble Him. So pray for it my friends! Pray for the power of the Spirit to fill ALL of us, that Christ may be seen as in us and working through us -- as a Church!

Pray that we as a group, ***"may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*** And pray for it knowing that, ***"God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask and imagine."***

And don't just pray it once! Pray so continually that by faith you dig that canal which connects us to the ocean of His unlimited being and power.

---

And then in **CONCLUSION**, Paul sums up all He's said up to this point and writes: "to Him [that is, to God our Father] be glory in the Church, and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen." And that phrase "to Him be glory in the Church," does not mean the offering of mere verbal praise. It means through the lives of God's people. It means through how we worship, live, give, love and pray.

And in the context, you know one of the primary things Paul is thinking of? It's what **"no human or angel could ever have imagined,"** as Hoehner puts it, **"that Jews and Gentiles could function together in one body."** It's the infinite and matchless power of God's love manifested in the Body of Christ enabling them not only to function together as a group unified in its tasks, but to love each other deeply from the heart as they do.

NOT a forced love that says, "if we have to," but a Spirit-implanted love that wants to and can't help but do so because their hearts have been "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" - the God who is Himself love. It's a miracle of such unimaginable measure, because then, like now, ethnic and racial prejudice is still so deeply rooted in the human heart.

But that's the Church's calling: **To be THE PRIMARY SOURCE of the glory of God's nature to the world!** What God said of Israel in Is. 43:7 is now true of the Church. We are part of the "everyone," mentioned in that text, "who are called by my name, and created (says God) for my glory..."

---

Thus we see, that next to Jesus Christ Himself, the Church is the divinely place where the infinite and matchless power of God's love is to manifest itself to the onlooking world. A place where prejudice in all of its ugly forms (and not just between Jew and Gentile) has been replaced with the accepting love of God.

A place where the impossible is both possible and prayed for, because the God we petition is known to be **"ABLE to do immeasurably more than all that all His people could ever ask or imagine!"**

So what is our calling: To so believe God for the impossible that we pray for things, *"no human or angel could ever have imagined."* Things like ungodly sinners "loving one another deeply from the heart." Things like powerless people like us being so empowered by the "Spirit at work within us," that we could be used to quite literally change the world.

---

Do you believe it? And if you do, will you not only, "Ask Great Things of God," but, "Attempt Great Things for God" -- and do it all to the glory of His name.