

EPHESIANS #51 3:20-21 8-26-12

PRAISING THE POWER

(Ephesians 3) Last Sunday someone spoke well of my sermon and told me I was getting better week by week. I told this person, “Wait till next week. Next Sunday, (which is now this Sunday) will go beyond anything you could ask or think.” I watched her response, as I’m watching yours, to make sure she didn’t take me too seriously. I wasn’t boasting about my sermon but referring to the text on which I am preaching. It is a well-known and wonderful word. And if our meditations today fail to edify, it is certainly not a problem in God’s word. In Ephesians 3, from verse 14 on we have Paul talking about his prayers in which he asks the Father to strengthen us by His Spirit in the inner man so that we **18-19** *may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.* That marks the end of Paul’s petition, but not exactly the end of his prayer. He closes with this **20-21** *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.* That sounds familiar doesn’t it? What do we call that kind of expression? What is the name we give for it in the church? Some of you are wanting to say, *That is a benediction* aren’t you? You aren’t quite sure, though. There are some terms that get used rather loosely in religious circles. So, I’m gonna use my position this morning to learn you how to speak gooder.

I got a call last year around this time from the mayor’s office here in McCandless, asking me to come to the McCandless Day Celebration and give an invocation. Do you know what an “invocation” is? Most people think of it as a short prayer at the beginning of something. Lots of meetings you’ve been to begin with something called an “invocation.” But an “invocation” is not just any ole opening prayer. The word comes from the Latin root for “call.” A person’s vocation is their calling, and to invoke something or someone is to call for them to come. Technically, and properly, an invocation is a calling for the presence and power of God. What does that have to do with our text? Nothing really but my next word study does because many of you would have called our text for today a benediction. But it is not a benediction. It is properly referred to by another name - a name which you know. What is it, someone? It is a doxology. The difference between a benediction and a doxology is simple. Follow me, here. Most folks connect the word “benediction” with the end of a religious meeting, just as they would connect “invocation” to the beginning of one. The reason is simple. The term “benediction” comes from the combination of

two Latin roots: “bene” which means “finally” and “diction” which means “we can go.” Put it together and you have, “finally, we can go” which is what most people think at the end of a religious meeting - right? I’m getting some strange looks here and for good reason. That was just a lame attempt to be humorous. *Benediction* does not mean, *finally we can go*. In actuality it means, *good word*. *Bene* is Latin for *good*. *Diction* refers to speech. A benediction then is a good word, or a blessing pronounced over a people. You hear *benediction* think *blessing*. At the end of our services I typically pronounce a *benediction* which is a blessing or brief prayer for those assembled. But what you find in Ephesians 3 is not a brief prayer for anyone. This is an ascription of praise to God and therefore is rightly called a “doxology.” “Doxology” is a word taken from two Greek terms, “doxo” which means “glory.” And “logy” which means “word.” Joined together it means “a word of glory.” Isn’t that cool? When we sing the chorus known as the “doxology” what are we doing? We are praising God, giving Him glory. And that is exactly what Paul is doing here. He ends his prayer with praise and says, “Now to Him.” Benedictions are addressed to men, doxologies are addressed to God. They ascribe glory to Him and so the apostle does in verse 21 *Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

Have you ever, in your reading of the writings of Paul, read anything else that sounds like that? I bet you have. Several times in the epistles we find Paul doing this. It seems, in fact, as if he can only go so long without a doxological moment. Look at some of these with me. (Romans 11) This chapter comes at the end of the greatest discourse on Christian theology ever written, those first 11 chapters of Romans. Paul has expounded the gospel for us, revealed the plan of God for individuals and for the ages. He has told of the manifold grace of God and before he shifts gears in chapter 12 where he begins to tell us how we need to live, he concludes his magnificent teaching with this 33 *Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! 36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.* And we call that a..? Doxology. Similar to Ephesians 3, this doxology is the conclusion of one part of the letter. But it doesn’t end the letter. Romans 16:25 *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ...27 to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.* There you have the end of Romans. Most of Paul’s letters end with benedictions. This one ends with a doxology. You are familiar, I think, with the doxology of I Timothy 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.* The book of Jude ends with a doxology 24-25 *Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the*

presence of His glory blameless with great joy,²⁵ to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Why do you think these apostles wrote like that? I mean, this was not the normal way to end letters in those days. They didn't do it just out of form. No, the motivation goes much deeper than that. These outbursts of praise came in the context of gospel truth. Paul and Jude had been, in every case, expounding the glories of Christ and the wonders of His grace. And listen, when you do that rightly, praise is a natural by-product. It must come! There is something terribly wrong with us when we can talk about Jesus and His work and not be moved to worship. Do you know what dead orthodoxy is? "Orthodoxy" is another neat word we can break down. "Ortho" means straight or right. An orthodontist makes your teeth what? Straight. An orthopedic doctor makes your bones straight. So, "orthodoxy" technically means "right worship." But we typically use it to mean "right doctrine." So, the dead orthodox are those who have right doctrine but lack any real spiritual life. They say the right things, but a certain spark is missing. It is dead orthodoxy that allows men to preach the truth without passion. It is dead orthodoxy that allows people to hear about the blood of Jesus and not be stirred. It is dead orthodoxy that makes some of us so disinterested in sermons and so careless during singing. It is a religion of head without heart and it is just as damning as heresy. AW Tozer says, "Whatever is done without heart is done in the dark no matter how scriptural it may appear to be. By the law of just compensation the heart of the religious trifler will be destroyed by the exceeding brightness of the truth he touches. Tearless eyes are finally blinded by the light at which they gaze." ® What is worse than the priest who repeats his religious bantering with all the heart of an assembly line worker? That kind of mindless, heartless, mouthing of religious words is an abomination to God. And yet we so easily slip into the same patterns of dead orthodoxy. Wake up to this and hate it! GC Berkhouwer has well said that the beginning and end of all theology must be doxology. ® What he means is that we must never talk about God without worship. We must never engage in doctrinal gymnastics. We must engage the heart along with the mind. We must teach and worship. We must learn and praise. This is why we will end today with a time of worship, in order to make sure that the water of truth will flow thru us and not become stagnant within. In doing this we follow Paul who truly did let the truth lead him to praise.

Alright, to this point we have looked at the praise of God in our passage. This is a doxology. Now, let's get into the major point of the doxology, which is about power isn't it? The Greek word is *dunamis*, from which we get our term "dynamite" or "dynamo." The translation in our text is simply that God is able ®. Romans 16:25 and Jude 24 are two doxologies that begin in this same

way. God is able. Here we read that He is able to do exceedingly abundantly, or immeasurably more than all that we ask or think. I love this description of God's power. It essentially says that His power is unlimited doesn't it? Interestingly, it relates or compares that power to our level of expectation. Some believe that having proper expectations is the key to happiness. You know what that means? It means that if you expect to spend the day working and you are given the day off you will be happy. But if you expect to spend the day jet-skiing on the lake and instead you end up cleaning at home you will be disappointed. Our expectations set us up either for good feelings or bad feelings. For instance, maybe you hear great things about a certain movie. Someone says it was the greatest movie they have ever seen. So you go and watch, and although the movie is really just fine you leave feeling let down, why? Because your expectations had been unreasonably inflated and don't we often do this in our marriages. One woman I know is on a crusade to convince ladies that their expectations of their husbands and their marriages are just entirely too high and unrealistic. For the most part, I think she is absolutely right. I know women who have very fine husbands but they are miserable because they expected so much more out of marriage. And there are men like that too. Are you one of those? You expected Prince Charming and a castle, and got John Doe and a split-plan. Lots of us would be thrilled with a spouse like yours, but not you - your expectations were unrealistic. That man you married, the woman you wed is not able. Not able to be your Savior, not able to make you happy. Listen, the Scriptures say that we are cursed when we put our trust in men: spouses, politicians, pastors, you name it. They are not able. One key to happiness among men therefore is to keep your expectations low. But that is just where men and God are so different. God wants us to raise our expectations of what He can do for us. This doxology is really a celebration of the One who will never disappoint us, of the one whose power never falls short. The better you get to know men, more often than not, the more you are disappointed. The better you get to know God, the more you are blown away by the magnitude of Who He is. No one has overstated the greatness of God! ® Do you remember the story of the Queen of Sheba there in I Kings? This famous queen had heard all about the incredible wealth and wisdom of Solomon and just had to see it for herself. So she came to Jerusalem as a royal tourist with great expectations. And she was not disappointed. I Kings 10:4-7 *When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵ the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. ⁶ Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom.*

⁷ *Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard.* She says, “the half was not told to me.” I expect that on the day we see the Lord that will be our sentiment as well. You’ll say, “Hey, that preacher in Pittsburgh said you were an awesome and holy God, but I had no idea. You, O Lord, are immeasurably greater than all that I have imagined.” When we think our best and highest thoughts of God, we have only understood a fraction of His greatness.

Here is one other important thing to note from Paul’s doxology. Our powerful God is not just some distant deity who has nothing to do with us. Some of you will think, “Oh sure, God is really, really powerful. He created the stars and the oceans, but that makes no difference in my life.” You listen. After saying that God’s power is beyond the limits of our imagination, Paul says that this is the same power that works where? Within us! Isn’t that what it says? There is a power at work within us who believe in Jesus. And that power has no limits. We sing, “Greater is He that is in me than He that is in the world.” And we mean that there is really nothing greater than the Spirit who indwells us. There is no demon, there is no addiction, there is no sin that competes in power with God. What a mind-blowing thought this is! You fill your mind with these truths and it will lead you to three life-transforming practices. Get these down. First it will lead you to Big Praise. Big Praise. You won’t mumble your way through the hymns. You won’t be so flippant, so careless, so paltry when you pretend to worship. You worship the Almighty God and that requires the best you can bring. So, you come here on Sunday, you stand before Him on Tuesday and you say, “To Him be the glory in this church, in this life.” You let the big truths of a Big God lead you to big praise.

Secondly, these truths of which Paul sings should lead you to big prayers. I get asked all the time to do things that I can’t do - things that are beyond my ability. That has never happened to God. Raise your conception of God. You can pray to Him for big things. You can ask Him for little things too and for the same reason. So great is God’s power that for Him one is no more difficult than the other. Little prayers, big prayers, His power invites them both.

Thirdly, this power of which Paul writes should lead you to big plans. As I suggested, when it comes to God, you can safely raise your expectations of what He can do. Would to God that some of you would be awakened today and would dust off your dreams and renew your goals. Many of you have grown discouraged. You are so disappointed with yourself and with others. Your delight in life is waning. Your hope is diminished. Believe me, I know what that is like. On Tuesday morning, when I was working on this message, I was right there exactly. Jonathan and Kristina Shirk knew I was having a tough time and so they bought me a gift to cheer me up. They got me

these prunes from Aldis. I really appreciated it and I think it was the first time anyone had gifted me with some prunes. We don't usually think of prunes as comfort food. But Jonathan understood that when things are tough you have to keep moving. You can't get bogged down. Anyway, here I am preparing to preach on this text and my wife and I were neck-deep in a situation that was beginning to feel utterly hopeless. We didn't know where to turn; our energy was spent and our hearts were broken. I know that I, for one, was fearful of what lay before us. And yes, I say that as a confession of weak faith. What do you do when you find yourself in that position? Despair is an option, I suppose. Greater hustle, greater effort is another possible response. You can look within yourself for untapped reservoirs of strength. But, if you are like me you've already hit the bottom of that tank and discovered it wasn't so deep after all. Where do you turn? Who you gonna call? Possibly, you can turn to words, soothing words, the kinds of nice sayings that fill coffee-table books. Those can truly help if your problems or your fears are really small, really puny. But, against the more formidable obstacles of this world, you need something stronger than mantras and quaint sayings. AW Tozer, in *The Knowledge of the Holy*, writes: *The effort to conquer fear without removing the causes is altogether futile. The heart is wiser than the apostles of tranquility. As long as we are in the hands of chance, as long as we must look for hope to the law of averages, as long as we must trust for survival to our ability to outthink or outmaneuver the enemy, we have every good reason to be afraid.* And those good reasons to be afraid, those reasons to despair box us in until, looking to every side, we see no escape, no solution, no deliverance. Until --- we look up. Not around, not within, but up, to the One who cannot be overrated, who cannot be over-trusted, whose power is without measure. Listen to what Paul says about your God. He can do exceeding abundantly beyond all that you ask or think. And it is His power that works in you! Whatever it is that is draining the joy and the energy, I promise you, it is nothing beyond the power of God. He can turn your mourning into dancing again. He can dry your tears and put a smile on your face and wind in your sails. His almighty power, that power that works within us who believe, lifts us up to big praise, big prayers, big plans that are all designed to give Him big glory for time and for eternity. Would you say it with me 20-21 *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,* ²¹ *to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*