

Sermon – 27/07/2008 am

Great and Glorious

Study Text: Ephesians 3:20-21

The disciples saw Jesus perform many miracles while he was on this earth. He turned water into wine and walked on water; he healed the sick and raised the dead. Through these signs and wonders he revealed the glory of God. He did these works that people would believe in him and have life in his name.

Before his departure Jesus said that those who believed in him would do even greater works than he did. *Whatever you ask in my name that I will do that the Father may be glorified in the Son* (John 14:13). He went on to say that the Father would give them the Holy Spirit, the divine helper to abide with them forever.

God is Great

Paul's prayer for the Ephesians concludes with a doxology, a brief outburst of praise, giving glory to God. We find other doxologies in Romans 11 and Jude. 'Doxology' is actually the Greek word we translate as 'glory'.

This doxology arises primarily from contemplation on the love of Christ and the power of God, power that comes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is power that works in us, power that transforms us to the very depths of our being, power that makes us a new creation in Christ Jesus.

In this prayer, as in his earlier prayer (1:19), Paul asks that they would know the mighty power of God in their lives. Open your eyes and see the love of Christ and the power of his resurrection. The love of Christ surpasses knowledge. It is too deep for us to fathom its depths. Jesus laid down his life for us while we were still sinners. He gave his own blood to save rebels like us. He took the charge sheet that was against us, the law that condemned us, and nailed it to the cross (Colossians 2:14). He set us free; he gave us life, abundant eternal life. That is something to give thanks and praise to God for!

What is this new life that Jesus gave us? It is a life of power in the Spirit of God – power to see with spiritual eyes, power to see our enemies for they are spiritual enemies. Power to overcome our enemies just as Jesus overcame the world. 'Be of good cheer for I have overcome the world' he said. Rejoice in the Lord for you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Remember the power of the resurrection.

'Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God', is what William Carey said as he went to serve the Lord in India. He said that because he knew God is great. He knew it was God's will for all people to hear the gospel, and he knew the power of God to save. The power of God was working in him as he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, just as it was working in the Apostle Paul who preached the same glorious gospel.

Let no one think that having been saved they can sit back and relax in life. Paul prayed that they would be strengthened, that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith and that they would be filled with the fullness of God. These are active pursuits; these are works we must attend to in the power of the Holy Spirit. Work out your own salvation for it God who works in

you. We must keep on keeping on in the Christian life. Do you know that power working in you to which the apostle is referring to in this prayer?

As Paul prayed for these believers to be filled with the fullness of the Holy Spirit, of Christ and of God, he was overwhelmed by the greatness of God, of his love and his power revealed in Jesus Christ. Paul knew that power in his own life. No power in this world could have changed this archenemy of Christ into a servant and minister of Jesus Christ. Only the power of God could break the heart of this man and make him anew as a vessel for the love of Jesus Christ to overflow to many.

The power of persuasion, of money, and of pain is great. People can be convinced by arguments, they can be bribed with money and they can be threatened with a gun to change their religion, but for the heart to change the power of God is essential. Is there anyone who you think is too hardened for such power? Certainly there are hardened sinners. There are many caught up in the worship of idols and false gods. They despise the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ and chase you off when you share it. But God is all powerful. He can break such hearts as he chooses. He did it with Saul of Tarsus – and he did it with you and me!

Jesus said *ask and it will be given to you* (Matthew 7). It will be given by your Father in heaven. He said ‘if you ask anything in my name I will do it’ (John 14:14). God is great. God is love. He wants us to depend on him. He wants us to ask him – anything. God will give only good things to us – which is best because we do not always ask for what is best. Ask according to his will and you will receive, a full measure pressed down and running over.

Even your thoughts and imaginations are known to the Lord. In your Christ – filled heart you will imagine wonderful things. Tell such thoughts to the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in your prayer when you struggle to express your thoughts. The Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for us according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose (Romans 8:28).

The power of God is working in us by his Spirit. We do not have to go on pilgrimage to some holy place to find this power. We do not have to go to the priest to find this power. *The word is near you, it is in your mouth and in your heart* (Romans 10:8). Christ is dwelling in your heart by faith.

What might Paul have been thinking as he prayed this doxology? What was it that so overwhelmed his heart. Where did he see the God’s great love and power displayed? Firstly, in the Cross. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. God who is rich in mercy, because of his great love made us alive together with Christ (2:4). No man believed that Jesus would die and rise from the dead. It was beyond human imagination. But God in his great power did raise Jesus from the dead. Do you believe that? If so why do you doubt the power of God? With God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37).

Secondly, God’s power is seen in the church, particularly in the coming together of Jew and Gentile. Not only was Paul overwhelmed at the amazing grace and power of God that changed his own life – he was overwhelmed by the purpose and power of God to break down the wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. In Jesus the two were made one. *Both have access by one Spirit to the Father* (2:18).

If God is able to break down such a barrier he is able to break down all barriers between human beings. This fallen world is littered with broken relationships – between husband and wife, between parents and children, between employer and employee, between neighbours and friends. Is there any relationship which cannot be healed?

You sometimes imagine how wonderful it would be if a broken relationship could be healed even in your own life. Some you think are broken too deeply to be healed. But is any break deeper than the love of Christ? *Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think!* That is how Paul prayed – what about you? The deepest hatred, the deepest hurt – the love of Christ is powerful to fill all in all.

Glory be to God

God delights to hear the praise, as well as the petitions, of his people. *Not unto us Lord not to us but to your name be the glory* (Psalm 115). This power of the Spirit is not bought with money as Simon the sorcerer found out – it is the gift of God. All thanks and praise therefore goes to God and God alone.

‘To God be the glory great things he has done, so loved he the world that he gave us his Son’. ‘To God be the glory in (not ‘by’) Christ Jesus’ said Paul as he concluded this prayer. *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!* This is the chorus being sung by all creatures around the throne in heaven. *Blessing and honour and glory and power be to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb forever* (Revelation 5).

Paul was not in heaven but his heart was so full of praise and thanksgiving that he could join in such heavenly praise. Glory be to God and to Jesus Christ through whom his great and eternal purpose for this world has been accomplished. Christ has ascended on high in triumphant procession having disarmed all principalities and powers. Satan has been vanquished. The power that works in you, the power of the risen Jesus is greater than any power on earth or in heaven.

Glory in the Church

To God be glory in the church. The church is the holy temple of the Lord (2:21). You are part of this holy temple in which God dwells by his Spirit. As a living stone that works and shares and loves, together with all the stones, the temple grows and shines with the glory of God. People saved by Jesus Christ, people filled with the love of Christ, people filled with the fullness of God. This is the church which brings glory to God. It is a holy church because God is holy. It is a loving church because God is love. It is a glorious church because God is the God of all glory.

The church is the bride of Christ as Paul will explain later. Christ loves the church and gave himself for her to make her clean and holy, that he might present her to himself as a glorious church. Male and female, people of all ages, people from all socio-economic groups and all ethnic backgrounds come together as one in the church to the glory of God.

Generations without End

The Bible is not an outdated book of past generations, as some try to tell us. It is not a book that has to be updated as society changes and knowledge increases. Society does change and the presentation of the gospel will adapt to that change, but the message remains the same. ‘Abraham saw my day and was glad’ said Jesus. Paul met the risen Jesus and was glad. What about you? What about your children? Do you believe that this gospel is for all generations? Can you say with the apostle ‘glory be to God and amen’?

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