

# ***“Super Way More”***

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***Before you start doing Gospel things you have to know Gospel truth.***

***Ephesians 3:14-21***

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***Super!***

Linda and I just returned from two weeks in Hawaii visiting our grandson and his parents. A three-year-old boy is a constant paradox: exhausting and exhilarating, independent and dependent. He’s so smart and knows so little about his own world.

Linda and I took him on a field trip to Sea Life Park between Kailua and Honolulu and as I turned onto the highway he said, “You’re going the wrong way.” A 3-year-old giving directions! I insisted I was following my GPS. A few days later we were coming home from the Dole Plantation and he chimed in again from his car seat: “You’re going the wrong way,” and, after a short pause: “Just kidding!”

I find myself amazed at how big and how small his world is. One of Arlo’s favorite words right now is “Super.” We shot foam rockets “super-high.” He runs “super-fast” around the kitchen island. The kid has flown around the world with one or both marine science parents, but he’s been grounded since he was two so he remembers none of that. Arlo can’t grasp that his giant world is a teensy dot on the globe in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He has no idea how fast light can travel, much less how many light years it would take to reach the edges of the known universe.

***Done!***

Arlo’s limited understanding of his size and situation is comparable to how believers tend to read Ephesians 3:20. This is our key verse for the week: “Now to him

who is able to do abundantly more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

Wow, that’s so cool! God can get me not only to make the varsity team but be the Most Valuable Player. God can get me through college with no debt. God can not only get me a date with that hottie but help us get married and live happily ever after. Right. And God can make foam rockets go super-high.

In order to find out what Paul’s talking about at the end of Ephesians 3, we have to go back and review what Paul’s been writing about in chapters 1-3. The great apostle has seemed almost frustrated with the limits of human language. He piles on synonyms, coins new words, and strings them all into run on sentences, one of them 200 words long. If he were talking about my Confirmation class this year, he wouldn’t be satisfied with saying “They’re my favorite class ever.” He would say, “They’re the most remarkable, beloved, brilliant, cooperative, persistent, fantabulous, group of Middle School kids I ever saw and I can’t get enough of them because they shine like stars making my heart glow with pride and giving me confidence in the future of America because there’s no limit to what they can accomplish.”

He uses the word “riches” five times in three chapters. He’s obsessed with “power” – God’s incomparably great power, Christ’s power over every other power. He can’t just talk about “fullness” – it’s “fullness that fills everything in every way.”

Another one of my grandson’s favorite words is “Done!” What’s truly remarkable about Ephesians 1-3 is that Paul speaks as if Revelation 21-22 is “Done!” God has already given us every spiritual blessing in Christ and guaranteed our future. Jesus has already been seated in the heavenly places, fully in charge of the church and, oh, by the way, everything visible and invisible. Believers were dead, but they have already been made alive. Walls have been broken down and Christ has created true unity between Gentiles and Jews. God’s mystery in Christ has been made plain. Done!

### ***Outer world & inner being***

As we come to the last part of chapter 3 it’s as if Paul doesn’t really think his readers get this yet. They have a hard time believing it has happened or can happen. He needs to pray for them, for the second time in his letter.

He doesn’t pray for what I’m going to call their outer world. Nor does he ask prayer for *his* outer world. That’s remarkable because in the run up to this prayer he tells them he’s in prison (3:1), and he knows they are discouraged because of his suffering (3:13). Now the question is not only what’s going to happen to him but what’s going to happen to the whole movement he founded.

If you ever get discouraged about your outer world, or about the progress of truth and justice in the world, this is a great passage of Scripture to read and pray. It’s

written to and for you in that situation. “For this reason,” Paul says, referring to his suffering and their discouragement, “I kneel before the Father.” He’s not the only one in the Bible to kneel when he prays, but it’s rare. The more common way to pray was standing. Those who kneel to pray in the Bible are passionate, even desperate.

He kneels before the Father, the initiator of every family. The whole idea that we should have relationships where we are loved and known comes from our Father in heaven. From eternity past he knew perfect unity and love with the Son and the Spirit, and he created us in his image to enjoy that.

This Father, Paul says, is gloriously rich. I’m asking him to use his riches for you – but not to buy your way into a better outer world. I want his power to strengthen you.

I want you to be “rooted and established in love.” “Rooted” is a biological metaphor, and “established” is an architectural one. Like an oak tree with roots deep in the soil or a skyscraper with a foundation 20 stories down, I pray for you to have power to grasp God’s love in Christ. Last night I was reading a book by Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey, *What Happened to You?* Perry, a child psychiatrist, says that a newborn’s neural pathways are formally rapidly in the first two months of live. He uses this same metaphor – the newborn is forming a “foundation” for the brain’s awareness of relationships. The awareness of being loved unconditionally is critical to that foundation. If a child isn’t loved in those early weeks, the foundation is compromised.

Paul knows how important that foundation of love is. Not everyone has it in equal measure. But Paul prays for his readers to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. His love is wide enough to embrace every person and eradicate racism. It is long enough to last forever and ever. It is high enough to stand untouched above the world’s problems. It is deep enough to reach right into the middle of them.

Paul wants his readers, and by extension, us, to know this love that surpasses knowledge. He wants them to experience the infinite, unconditional love of God and be filled up with his fullness. Paul really believes that if others who believe in Jesus can grasp how much God loves them regardless of who they are or where they came from or what they’ve done, and if they can see every human being they met through those same lenses they won’t be discouraged.

If that happens they will be filled with all God’s fullness. What does that mean? It means that this grand vision for all the world in time and eternity to be under the control of Christ, a perfect world, will exist right inside of us and we’ll live in peace and security and with joy and hope and confidence.

So let’s go back to a phrase I skipped over. Paul is praying that God’s power through his Spirit will totally transform their inner being, that Christ will dwell in their hearts through faith. This is very different from how we usually pray, isn’t it?

We pray for the outer world – for ours and that of others. By outer world, I mean we pray for better circumstances – for jobs and health and family and school and friends and politics and temptations. Those are outer world things.

God cares about them because he cares about us. I don't want this sermon to sound like a scolding for selfish prayers. There's lots of precedent in the Bible for praying for your daily bread, for praying for protection and healing and relief and comfort in suffering. This is not about judging bad prayers.

But Paul is praying very differently here. He is praying that his readers will be strengthened in their inner being to deal with their outer world. He believes if they can grasp God's power and God's love they will be encouraged no matter what happens.

If God's love can take Jesus to the cross for a world that rejected him, and if his power can raise Jesus from the dead, and if God has already in Christ broken down every barrier that divides and has already seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms, then I can be encouraged when nothing good happens in my outer world.

Paul wants his readers not to let their inner being be filled with fear and despair because of the outer world, but to let God's love and power so fill their inner being that they can find strength no matter what happens in their outer world.

It's not only that God will make everything right in the end – it's that God has already put that trajectory toward a perfect world into motion. It's only a matter of time until all that we long for – a world of perfect harmony and unity and justice and beauty – is all we know. The vision of the Bible from one end of the other for God's will to be done on heaven and earth, for every knee to bow and every tongue to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, for there to be no more death or crying or pain – that vision is unfolding and cannot be stopped.

Some of you are thinking what Paul believes his readers are thinking – that it just can't happen. Are you crazy, Pastor Bob or Apostle Paul? Do you not read the news about the craziness in Washington or Tel Aviv or Elizabeth City or at my house? This world of unity and truth and hope is not happening and I don't believe it can. That's why Paul adds our verse of the week: "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us..."

"Immeasurably more" is one of those words Paul coined. It's been called a super-superlative. Paul could have said God will do "more" than we ask or imagine. He adds a prefix that means "way more." Then he puts "super" in front of that. I really like the King James Version, the version in which I first memorized this verse. "Exceeding abundantly above." God is able to do super way more than anything we can ask or even imagine. If God's love and God's power possess your inner being, you will never see your outer world in the same way.

In addition, God will shine high and bright in the church and through Jesus Christ, in every generation from Paul's time to ours and beyond, now and forever. Amen.

### ***Not afraid of grace***

And that's how the first half of Ephesians ends. I find it remarkable that in these first three chapters Paul hasn't once told his readers (or us) to do anything. There's only one command in the first three chapters, and that's to "remember" what God has done (2:11). He tells us only what God has done – he's chosen us, included us, raised Christ from the dead and put him in charge, seated us with Christ, prepared good works for us to do, destroyed the barriers that divide us, revealed the mystery of the gospel.

The message of chapters 1-3 is that in Christ you have every spiritual blessing. You don't have to do anything. Accept that you have been accepted, that his love has been lavished on you, that his power is at work in you. Some of you are thinking, "Pastor Bob, you're making this too easy." I'm just summarizing what Paul says in Ephesians 1-3. Paul's not afraid of preaching the riches of his grace. Neither am I.

When we flip the page to chapter 4, we're going to find dozens of items on our "to do" list. Chapter 4 begins, "Therefore I urge you...." We pick it up there next week, and we're going to see all sorts of implications that need to change our life and priorities. But Paul has restrained himself from going there yet.

Before you can start doing gospel things, you have to know Gospel truths. You have to know you are chosen, accepted, loved, included. You have to remember that God's power and love not only can do anything but already has done everything necessary to set the world on course toward its destiny of unity and perfection, all that you and I and creation were intended for. He's going to keep working in you.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." Amen.