

## THAT IS ONE LOUD WHISPER

7<sup>th</sup> in a Series on the Character of God Called, “Indescribable”- Topic: The Power of God  
Ephesians 3:20-21

Writer A. W. Tozer said that the most important thing about a person is what they think about God. That impacts every aspect of who they are. One of the things we see in the Bible is that the most life changing thing that can happen to a person is to see God as he is. If we see and know God as he really is it will set us free, give us peace, hope, confidence in life, fill us with joy and love, and give us great power.

We have been having trouble with the water dispenser on our refrigerator. We both love having a dispenser on the front of our fridge that allows us to get either ice or water. It is so convenient. The ice dispenser has been fine, but lately the water dispenser has not been operating properly. It struggles to get out a weak dribble of water. We have the problem diagnosed. We thought we had figured out a way to fix it, but we just made it worse. We reversed our fix, but the problem stayed just as bad. We believe we need to replace a part. But one day recently Laurie came upstairs obviously frustrated. She said, “The water dispenser has now quit altogether. Nothing at all comes out.” But that wasn’t all. Another convenience we have is our kitchen faucet has a sensor on it so to turn the water on all you have to do is wave your hand in front of it. Laurie told me that wasn’t working either. She figured that maybe the battery that powers the sensor had gone dead, but it was kind of frustrating to have both of those nice conveniences give up altogether at the same time. A little later she came and told me the kitchen faucet was fine and the water dispenser was working again, albeit still not properly. It turned out that we had a guy upstairs working on putting in a new faucet for our bathtub and he had turned the water off to the house. Those things weren’t working because they had been cut off from the supply of water.

These days we hear a lot about power. There’s lots of discussion about people being “empowered.” What is power? The dictionary has several definitions. One of them was “the ability to produce extra base hits.” This is a baseball reference, one that is a bit of a sore spot for me because among my many limitations as a baseball player was a near total lack of power. But perhaps the other definitions are more germane today. Webster says power is “the ability to act or produce an effect. It is possession of control or influence over others.” In other words, it is the ability to control things and people so that you get what you want. Everyone wants power. Everyone would like to control life, to make it go the way they want. But where does power come from? How do we connect to that source? If we are cut off from the source of power we are going to have a problem just like our faucet and dispenser did when they were cut off from their necessary supply. Today I am going to discuss power. Let’s look at Ephesians 3:20-21.

## PREMISE: GOD IS POWERFUL

In Ephesians 1:19 Paul had prayed that our eyes would be opened so that we could see God's "incomparably great power." God doesn't just have power, he has great power. Not only is it great, but it is so great that there is nothing that compares with it. There is no power in existence like it. In 3:20 Paul gives us a glimpse of how powerful God is. He says his power is so immense that he is "able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine."

The words "immeasurably more" actually translate one compound Greek word. The root of it means "overflowing" or "abundantly more." It usually meant "extraordinarily more." But Paul added a preposition on to that word that strengthened it, made it more extreme. So it meant something along the lines of "super extraordinarily more." Oh, okay, we got it. He meant way, way more power than needed. Actually Paul then said, "I don't think you do get it." So he added another preposition onto the word. It was a preposition that in English comes out "hyper." So he says God has the power to do hyper, super extraordinarily more than we ask.

We should also pay attention to the word "all." Paul says God can do extraordinarily more than anything we could ever ask. His power is so great it is able to accomplish far more than not only all we can ask, but also all we can ever imagine. Literally Paul said God can do more than we could even think or dream up. In other words, there is no limit to the power of God.

This is not the only place we see this message. Revelation 4:8 refers to "living creatures," angels, around the throne of God calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." The word Almighty is a translation of the Greek word *pantokrator*, which means "all powerful one," or "omnipotent one." God is all powerful. In Matthew 19:26 when the disciples were stunned by something impossible Jesus said, he responded, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Everything is possible because God has all power. Jeremiah 32:17 says, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you." In Psalm 62:11-12 David wrote, "One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard: Power belongs to you, God, and with you is unfailing love." Last week we learned about God's unfailing love. Now we see it is coupled with power.

Power belongs to God. He doesn't just have some. He has it all. He owns it. Every bit of power that exists anywhere in all of creation, belongs to him. The power of the sun, belongs to him, the nuclear power of the atom belongs to him, the power of a hummingbird

to hover in flight and dart through the air, belongs to him, political power belongs to him. Think of power, anywhere it exists, as a franchise, and God owns it.

I was looking at our SDG&E bill recently. I reflected again on how dependent we are on electricity. It powers our lights. It enables us to wash our clothes and our dishes, it keeps our food cold in the refrigerator, it enables us to cook, it enables me to work on my computer, even our cell phones are dependent upon electricity to charge them. That's just a few things. All that power that sustains our lives actually is owned by SDG&E. Should they desire for some reason to cut off our power, they could do so. But even the power of electricity is owned by God. Should he decide for whatever reason to cut it off, he could do so in the blink of an eye. The power of life itself, the power that causes our hearts to pump blood through our veins and our lungs to keep inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide, the power that keeps driving the electrical impulses in our brains, all belongs to God.

God's power is crucial. We have seen in the past weeks that God is good, he is wise, he is loving, he is holy, he is faithful. These are all beautiful attributes. But if God were not powerful, if he were not all powerful, they would be empty. Several years ago we tried to buy a clothes dryer from a local store. It was an epic fail on the part of the store. They kept telling us they would deliver the dryer to our house during a given four-hour window, then they wouldn't show up. We would wait for them, and they never came. It happened repeatedly, until they finally showed up with the dryer, but the delivery guys who were supposed to install it pointed out that it was damaged and they couldn't install it, so they had to take it back. With that final flop I went to the store and complained. I explained to the employee what that store had done to us. I said, "This has been extremely frustrating for us, and you have wasted many hours of our time waiting for you to do what you said you would do." He was apologetic. He said, "You have every right to be frustrated. This should never have happened. There's no excuse for this, and we should remunerate you in some way for our failure. We should make this right." But then came the crucial statement. "Unfortunately, I don't have the power to do anything about it." He had the right instincts. He had the right intentions. But without power, they were useless. I asked to see the store manager. He had the power to do something about it, but he didn't have the right instincts or intentions, so nothing was done. God might have all the right qualities, but if he didn't have power, they would not help. In order for his holiness, goodness, love and wisdom to ultimately win and create an eternal heaven, he has to have power over everything in the end. Fortunately he does.

## WHERE DO WE SEE GOD'S POWER?

### **We see it in creation**

Genesis 1:1 said those famous words, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Theologians like to try to sound smarter than your average bear so they throw around Latin terms that no one knows, to prove they have arcane knowledge hidden from others. In this case they like to say God created *ex nihilo*. That means “out of nothing, or from nothing.” Uh, then why don’t they just say God created from nothing? Because anybody can understand that. They want to say things in ways others can’t understand so people think they know more than everybody else.

Nothing existed other than God, and God said, “Let there be light,” and bada bing, bada boom, there was light! It suddenly existed, just like that. Ditto with the stars, the sun, the moon, the earth and everything else that followed. How did he do that? He used his power, such awesome power that out of nothing he is able to make something simply appear. I have no idea how that works.

Have you ever tried to create anything? It is really hard to think up something that has not existed before. I look at the cell phone I carry around and mostly take for granted. I am astounded by it. I recall the days when I was in college and first learned how to program computers. I wrote programs for machines that had entire large rooms and buildings dedicated to them because they were so big. And this little phone that I carry around in my pocket is more powerful than those machines were and can instantaneously do things those old computers couldn’t even imagine in their wildest digital dreams. At one time no such instrument had ever existed, then someone thought it up and figured out how to make it. That is truly impressive. But that person did not make it out of nothing. It was made of elements that already existed and was even built on ideas that already existed. God created *out of nothing!*

The only things I have created are a bunch of sermons and a couple of novels. I thought them all up. But those sermons were not created out of nothing. I built them on ideas that already existed. My novels told stories that did not exist previously, but I built them using language that already existed and experiences I’ve had in the past. God created all that exists out of nothing.

That awesome, super extraordinary, incomparable power can be seen in the nature of the creation he made. Think for instance of the power of the sun. Every second it emits enough energy to power a billion major cities for a year. It does that every second of every day, without stopping! Perhaps at some point you have been outside on a clear night away from the city. You have looked up into the night sky and been astounded by the dazzling display

of stars. But across the sky you have seen what looks almost like a wispy cloud. What you saw was our galaxy, the Milky Way. Our galaxy alone contains 100 billion stars! That's billions of stars, many of them producing as much or more energy than our sun.

If you could somehow drive to the edge of our solar system, obeying the speed limit, so traveling at 65 miles per hour, without stopping it would take you 6,500 years to get there. It would take longer because I absolutely would have to stop and hit a restroom somewhere on the way. That is how enormous just our little solar system is. The nearest star system is 6,800 times farther from us than the edge of our solar system. If you could drive there it would take over 44 million years. That's the nearest stars! Do you begin to get at least a small taste of how hyper extraordinary God's power is?

In Job 26 Job talked about some of God's activity in creating all that exists. In verse 7 for instance he said, "He spreads out the northern skies over empty space; he suspends the earth over nothing." It is a bit surprising that thousands of years ago Job somehow knew that earth is just suspended in space. But then in verse 14 he said, "These (meaning God's works in creation) are but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"

Have you ever been in close proximity to a lightning strike? On 2 occasions I have been close enough to a lightning strike where I could see where it actually hit on the ground, in one case it was less than 200 yards away, probably closer to 100. I can assure you, if you ever experience that, you'll never forget it. Seeing lightning strike is awesome and impressive and scary. But what I remember most is the thunder that came with it. It was an explosion of sound, so powerful that I felt it as well as heard it. Compare that ear-splitting detonation of sound with someone whispering. The incomprehensible massiveness and power of the universe is just God whispering. What would his thunder be like?

### **We see it in Scripture**

Abraham was 99 years old and his wife, Sarah, was a few years younger. In Genesis 18 a heavenly visitor informed the elderly couple that within a year God would fulfill a long standing promise to them and Sarah would have a son. Sarah laughed. She wasn't laughing in a happy, tickled way. She was laughing a bitter laugh. She was laughing a "oh, what a joke" kind of laugh. When it came to having kids Sarah was decades past her "use by" date. Having kids was simply not possible. That part of her original equipment had stopped working long before. But in verse 14 the response of the visitor was, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Oh, it's a theological quiz! It's only one question. It's pass/fail, a yes or no question. The correct answer is....NO! Nothing is too hard for God. Within a year God did the impossible, and Isaac was born to Sarah. Nothing was too hard for the Lord, because he is the Almighty.

God has the power to actually part the waters of the sea, as Moses and Israel learned when escaping slavery in Egypt. The disciples of Jesus were in a boat crossing the lake. Unfortunately that day the National Weather Service whiffed on the forecast. They completely missed that a violent squall was going to hit. Some of Jesus' guys were veteran sailors, and they knew after that storm hit, that it was all over for them. They'd done everything they could, and it wasn't enough. They were going to go down with all hands. Jesus was sleeping in the back of the boat. They woke him up because apparently they figured they ought to all die together. There was no solution to their problem. It was an impossible situation. But nothing is too hard for God. Jesus looked around and said, "Look, I'm trying to get a little rest, so could I have some peace and quiet please?" Instant calm.

The worst thing they could ever have imagined had happened. Jesus, the man who had consistently displayed divine power in dramatic ways, the man they knew was the hope of Israel, their hope, had been arrested, tortured and finally executed. They had kept hoping that he would do his incredible power thing and put a stop to all of the horror, that he would create a victory that would astound them all. But he didn't. He just died. It was over. There would be no powerful miracle. There would be no astounding, mind-blowing come from behind win. He was dead. Nothing more could be done. It was too late. And then Jesus came out of his tomb, alive again after having been dead for a couple of days. But that's impossible! Yes, with man it is. But with God, nothing is impossible, not even defeating death.

#### HOW SHOULD WE EXPECT TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S POWER?

Fine, God has unimaginable power, but why doesn't that translate to today? You tell me stories that happened thousands of years ago, but I can't verify their reality. Why don't I see that being displayed? How come in my life things pretty much go along like they would if God had no power at all? I don't see miracle babies born, ocean waters parted, weather patterns changed, people healed, people conquering death. So where's the power?

We should remember that people have lived on earth for thousands of years. We have at least some traces of historical evidence of people going back maybe 5000 years. The current belief is that humans have been around for possibly 50,000. In all that time, for how much of it were miracles of God's power occurring? Not very much. What percentage of people have actually witnessed them? Recent estimates are that 100 billion people, roughly, have lived throughout human history. How many of those have seen first hand God's miraculous power displayed? Those miracles have occurred mostly in a few discrete periods, including Moses' life, that of Elijah and Elisha, then during Jesus' life and the lives of his apostles. It is certain that fewer than 10 million saw some of those miracles, but let's use 10 million to be generous. That means that 99.99 billion, out of the 100 billion

who have ever lived, have never seen any of those miracles first hand. That comes out to only a hundredth of one percent may have seen powerful miracles. Based on those numbers, what would you say are your odds of witnessing a miraculous display of God's power? I'm thinking the odds are pretty slim. Why doesn't God show off that power more frequently? I mean, it's not like he has to ration it or he'll run out, right? Here's my answer to that question: I haven't got a clue. Curiously, God doesn't seem to do things the way I would do them, and he also doesn't seem to feel it necessary to explain everything to me.

In 1 Kings 18 one of those rare, awesome miracles happened. Elijah had a contest against hundreds of prophets of Baal to see whose God was the real deal, the God of Israel or Baal. The God of Israel showed up in a big, undeniable, spectacular and miraculous way, while Baal was painfully and embarrassingly absent. It was the kind of thing we'd like God to do on a regular basis. Just show up big time and prove to those doubters out there who's boss. It was a huge victory, and Elijah expected it to result in his God winning over all of Israel and there being a huge revival. Unfortunately, instead, nothing much permanently changed and the miserable queen Jezebel threatened to kill Elijah if he stuck around. Elijah was devastated, his hopes were dashed. Disillusioned, discouraged and afraid he ran away. He went to Bakersfield. Well, not literally, it was to a place kind of like Bakersfield. It was a barren wilderness. There he got his mope on. He felt sorry for himself and he whined.

Here's what happened in 1 Kings 19:11-12. "The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.'" Oh, cool, this should be really good. God is going to show up with his great power! God was going to show him something big, so he needed to get ready for it. "Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord." Woohoo, God had arrived, and it was impressive. Oh, but wait. It goes on to say, "But the Lord was not in the wind." That's too bad, because it was impressive, the kind of thing we want God to do. Then it says, "After the wind there was an earthquake." All right, now we're talking. An earthquake gets everyone's attention. Excuse the pun, but I'll bet that will shake old Jezebel up good. "But the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire." Oh, right, like Elijah had called down fire during the big contest. A fire will for sure scare Jezebel out of her wits. "But the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." And God was in the whisper. The Lord showed Elijah the kinds of things he was hoping for, big, dramatic, powerful stuff. But God wasn't in them. He was working in the gentle whisper.

There is a message for us there. Most of the time, 99.999 % of the time, God is not doing impressive, powerful, intimidating miracles. He is in the gentle whisper business. His power works in quiet, not as impressive, ways. Perhaps he does it that way because it is the best way for him to actually have a love relationship with us. Perhaps it is because it is the

only way he can get us to live by faith. I think it may be because God knows it is only through the gentle whisper that people's hearts are really changed. Whatever the case, that's how we should expect to see his power work.

We should notice in the verse we have been considering, Ephesians 3:20, that God is working "according to his power that is at work *within us*." Those last 2 words are so important. Where is God's mighty power working? It is in us, inside us! It is not making hurricane winds, earthquakes and fires outside of us. It is working in us. His power should produce a new life in us. Romans 6:4 says we were "buried with him (Christ) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." It is a life alive to God, a life of hope, a life of peace, a life of grace and forgiveness, a life guided always by love, a life fashioned after the very character of Jesus Christ. It is a life we never had before and never could have without his power at work. It is a miraculous life.

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul talked about one of the ways God specifically wants his power to work in our lives. In verse 6 he said, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." So he's talking about God's extraordinary, incomparable power, the power he exercised in creation. He said that power is what gave us the light of Christ. That's what it took to bring us to Christ. It was an awesome miracle. Then in verse 7 he said, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us." There it is, that all surpassing power, that almighty power. It's in us. Great, that's what I'm talking about. It is going to do something awesome, something that will blow people away, right? Sort of. He tells us what that power will do. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed." That's it. God's power makes us able to endure, to stand firm, to be at peace even though we are pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted and knocked down. That is what displays God's mighty power.

God's power means that we live every day in hope. We have hope because God's power is unstoppable, uncontainable, unconquerable. Is anything too hard for the Lord? It's that same quiz. We face it over and over in life, and the answer is always the same. The answer is no. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Whatever situation you and I may face, we need to remember that the power of God is at work. Nothing is ever hopeless. Somehow, God will manage to work good out of every situation we face. We are never alone, and we are never without power, because God's power is at work in us.

It is very common for believers in Jesus to want the spectacular, the obvious display of divine power that might allow us to control or change things in the world. So we are drawn



to the outwardly impressive, to dramatic healing or some other miracle. But what does God want to do with his power? Listen to 2 Peter 1:3. “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” He wants his divine power to work to produce a godly life in us. That’s what he’s aiming at.

Can God do the outward, spectacular today? Yes, he can. But that is not the main thing he is doing. People want the outward display because they want proof that God is real. Here’s the unfortunate truth, God wants us to live by faith, not by sight. We have a hard time believing this, but that gentle whisper power, that power that changes people, gives them new lives full of God’s peace, joy, goodness, love and hope, actually is what has the biggest effect long term. Consider, the ancient Israelis saw some of the most spectacular miracles ever, including that Red Sea thing. How long did that affect them? Not very long. Within weeks they were doubting God and worshiping idols. The first century Israelis saw a veritable flood of miracles by Jesus culminating in the biggest of them all, his resurrection. How did that affect them? Most of them didn’t believe in him. What will make the difference over the long haul is people with God’s power inside them making them a new kind of person, a godly person with a life of joy, peace, goodness, hope, love, living with that peace and confidence day after day even in the hardest of times.

## APPLICATION

How do we have God’s power in our lives?

### HAVE FAITH

We need to believe that God has the power to work in us, to give us the new life that he wants us to have, to make us like Jesus. We need to ask him to do that work in us and trust that he will. We need to trust that he is at work in everything that happens in our lives and trust him to do what is good. In Mark 9:23 Jesus said, “Everything is possible for one who believes.”

### BE WEAK

Wait, what about those verses that tell us to be strong in the Lord. Now you’re telling us to be weak? Isn’t that contradicting those verses? No, there is key phrase in those verses that tell us to be strong. It is the phrase “in the Lord.” In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul relates how he had some thorn, some ailment or disability that he felt made him much less effective in ministry. We don’t know what it was, but he repeatedly asked God to take it away. In verse 9 he said this about this weakness of his, “But he (God) said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” God’s power, his grace, will be sufficient for us when we don’t count on our abilities and our strengths. He’s telling us we

need to just be faithful to God and trust him, and that we will most experience God's power when we can't rely on our own brilliance, strength or impressiveness.

We need to ask about power, "power to do what?" We need to remember that we think in terms of power to control things, circumstances, people so life will go the way we want. God's plan is to use his power to change us, to make us ordinary people who live in an extraordinary way, a way that displays confidence in God, that is overflowing with his grace, that exudes his unconditional love, that brings honor to him no matter what may happen in our lives.

Philippians 3:10 says, "I want to know Christ, yes to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." We wish Paul had stopped after the first half of that verse. I want to know the power of his resurrection. Yes, that's just what we want. We love that kind of power. But you have to stick with the rest of the verse. "And participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." What does it mean to become like him in his death? It means to do what he did, to give up taking care of self in order to do God's will. We must empty ourselves as he emptied himself.

In his book, *Authentic Power*, John Avant wrote, "Our agonizing, life altering, deadly choice. To fill our own lives with all we can, to promote ourselves, to please ourselves, to grab for ourselves all that we can cram into these short years. Or...to die. To empty self into the container called Christ and disappear...That is the way God's power works."

## GIVE GLORY

Finally, notice where Paul goes after writing of God's power in Ephesians 3:20. The next verse says, "to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever." What is the natural response to some display of power? Maybe it is a powerful singing voice that fills an auditorium and blows everyone away, or maybe it is a prodigious display of athletic power by a baseball player who blasts a mighty home run that sails clear out of the stadium, or maybe it is a fireworks display that fills the sky with blasts of color and sound. The natural response is to cheer. It is the appropriate, deserving response. The appropriate, natural response to God's power is to cheer him. It is to give him glory. Oddly, to the degree that we live with that as our goal, we will see more and more of his power and glory.