

Ephesians 3:20

The Spirit in Us, To Us and Through Us

Context

Ephesus was one of the great cities of the ancient world. In the peak of its prosperity and influence it sat on the intersection of major global trade routes by land and by sea. Previously forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel in the province of Asia (Ac.16:6) Paul had seemingly walked into a unique season of visitation for the city of Ephesus which would eventually lead to the entire region of Asia receiving a powerful witness of the Truth (Ac.19:10). Jesus Himself called the church in Ephesus a lampstand ministry (Rev.2:5). He had purposed that this city was to be a light in the darkness to an entire generation. This was a special calling. This city was to have a global impact as a revival center, using today's terminology (Ac.19:35) The Lord worked uncommon miracles among the Ephesians through Paul's ministry (Ac.19:11-12,13-19) which served to fuel the infectious growth and belief of the word in their city (Ac.18:20). Ephesus was also unique in that certain disciples of John the baptist were a crucial formative pillar in the early orthodoxy of some of the first disciples (Ac.18:24-28, 19:1-7). This leads us to imagine the many glorious implications related to their early messianic perspective, hope and eschatology.

As we read the New Testament we find a prevalent Ephesian narrative throughout. We know more about this church than any other. 1 and 2 Timothy were penned to Timothy in Ephesus about the Ephesian congregations, John writes from Patmos to the Ephesians (Rev.2:1-7) and writes his gospel as well as 1,2, and 3 John from Ephesus, where he later lived and died.

As we mentioned earlier the Lord worked unusual miracles through Paul in order to establish what we might call, the Ephesian movement. But that's only half the story. Paul also endured incredible difficulty while ministering there, too (1 Cor.15:32,16:8; 2 Cor.1:8; Ac.20:18-19).

The biblical story of the Ephesian congregation is one of high standard and unique calling. Unique in the sense that the impact of their calling had much greater reach than that of most congregations and high standard as the Lord entrusted them with much and consequently tailored their discipline in keeping with that trust. As we read through the letter to the church in Ephesus we need to be mindful that the Lord is seeking to establish more than just a functional orthodoxy, but a theology and doctrine that would secure the heart of God's people in the midst of great spiritual awakening.

Often the Lord releases great manifestation to affirm that He is seeking to establish something significant and this causes people to take notice and to want to participate. But the Lord knows that often the process will be long and the opposition significant and so His manifestations are given as a means of encouragement when all hope seems lost later on. He does not give the manifestation of the Spirit for our entertainment but always for a purpose and often for a sign.

The Ethnic Storyline

In order to fully understand the words of Ephesians 3:20 we need to recognize the current of ethnic struggle taking place throughout the storyline (Eph.2). Paul, a Jew, is in prison because he has been accused of bringing a gentile into a forbidden area of the Jerusalem temple, a crime punishable by death (Ac.21:26-36). While not taking the time here to fully develop this controversy we might consider the racial tensions and segregation of the early 1960's in the deep South of our nation. Lines had been drawn and enforced even unto death (Eph.2:14-15). And so it was in Paul's case. He was fighting for the legitimacy of every race of man to be joined to the Jewish Messiah by the Spirit and into fellowship with the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service *of God*, and the promises belonging to the seed of Abraham (Rom.9:4). Linking our story here with the more detailed account in Ac.21-28 we see a tale of racism, police brutality, religious superiority and corrupt public officials. Leaders in positions of religious and political authority sought to enforce age old traditions that promoted segregation, social injustice and an interpretation of the scriptures which lent itself in many cases to oppression and disqualification (Mt.23:1-4,13).

Understanding Ephesians 3:20

In order for us to grasp the main ideas associated with this verse we must see it as part of a larger text. In v.13 Paul encourages the church not to be discouraged because of his imprisonment, ongoing legal proceedings and assassination attempts against him as he contends for their ethnic inclusion into the family of God. Secondly, in order for the church to navigate the rise in social and spiritual pressure Paul prays for them. His prayer includes specific requests tailored to fit their circumstances. Paul prays for the release of supernatural might within their spirits. Next, He asks for the increase of the gift of faith at work within them in order that the love of Jesus might reign in their mind, will and emotions (see Rev.2:4), finally he prays for dynamic unity within the city-wide family of God which allows them to function together in ways that promote the release of the Spirit's power and presence within them (Jn.17:20-23). I imagine that for the Ephesian believers this included regularly meeting to worship and pray together. Paul writes to them in Eph.5:17-20 that they are to be filled with the Spirit as they sing together. Their focus is to be on the beauty of Christ and their context as a prophetic culture is to understand the unique dynamics related to the hour in which they live and the nearness of Jesus' return. In his absence, Paul is exhorting them to be a prophetic community who hears [and obeys] the word of the Lord (Jer.23:18) and relates to one another in worship and prayer, focusing on the beauty of Jesus and the glory of His return (1 Pt.1:11).

Doxology

Ephesians 3:20-21 is a doxology, or words of praise to God. These verses describes particular attributes about God rather than give an exhortation to the saints to do something. But in describing God this way it gives us hope about who He is and how He desires to work. First, God is able. He possesses all power to do all that He wants whenever He wants to do it. Second, His

ability to do is directly related to the prayers of the saints. This teaches us that's God has knit His sovereign omnipotence to the faithful prayers of the saints (Jn.14:12-14; 15:7-8). In other words, even though He can do anything at any time, He does much of what He does in response to our prayers. Third, He tells us that His power to answer prayer is already dynamically at work inside of us. God releases the Spirit's power in answer to our prayers both to us and through us. Not only does He answer prayer, He uses us in partnership with Himself as the vehicle by which they are answered.

Paul's Intercession and Worship

I believe it is important to understand the placement of Paul's worship in relation to His intercession. As mentioned earlier, Paul prays for five verses asking that God would give something to the church in Ephesus. Now, in verses 20-21, He encourages the Ephesian congregations to give something to God. Paul's imprisonment no doubt lent to a particular gratitude for God in the midst of obvious weakness and ministry limitations. He is in prison for a crime he didn't commit (Ac.21:29), trying to avoid an execution he doesn't deserve and as he leads the church in asking for help, He trumpets the glory of God's great strength and ability to and through His people.

Our intercession is to be fueled by the revelation of God's great beauty and strength which often shines brightest in the midst of the revelation of our great weakness and inability (2 Cor.12:9). Paul understands that he does not have the power to remedy his own set of circumstances, nor does he possess the power to shift the heart of the Ephesian church, but he confesses that he knows the One who does. And it is to this One, who is able to do exceedingly above all that they ask or think, to Him be glory in the church. Our revelation of Jesus in the midst of our weakness ought to lead to our fervent intercession to Him so that he might manifest His power and presence unto His own glory.

One of the main perspectives that we want to take away from this letter to the Ephesians is the picture of a weak church with struggling oversight, a great call and powerful formative story, positioned in the midst of rising regional ethnic, social and political pressures. In the wisdom of God, their self-revelation communicates to them that that they are completely unable to accomplish the will of God for them in their own strength. God gives them a leader who moves in tremendous spiritual power alongside great physical weakness and suffering. This is the way forward for the church in Ephesus. They have a revival calling and an apostolic mandate. They are planted in the middle of a postmodern society in desperate need of spiritual awakening and without a culture of dependency of Jesus, worship, and intercession they are completely unequipped for the task. This is why Paul declares so marvelously, ***"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."***

