

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Heaven on Earth_ Ephesians 3 An Opportunity To See Immeasurably More

Joshua Symonette

Well, it's great to be with you, again, NCC love you appreciate you and it's always an honor to share with you also to our extended family wherever you are in the world. Thank you so much for tuning in, again, this weekend. Hey, just an update, before we jump into the message, wanted to let you all know that we are still continuing our work in Baltimore. And so we will have a launch team gathering in a few days for our new church plant, Hope Baltimore. So we just wanted to extend any of you an invitation, who would be interested in what God is doing in Baltimore. Just go to the link that's on your screen and we look forward to engaging in what God has called us to do in Baltimore. Thank you all again, so much for your support.

This weekend, as we continue our series 'Heaven on Earth', I wanted to do something just a little bit different. Normally, I would open up with a story and some sort of lead in into whatever it is that I wanted to talk about, and then transition from there into the text that is associated with the message for that weekend. But I wanted to switch it up a little bit after reading and processing through Ephesians over the last several weeks. And honestly over the last several years of just reading one of my favorite letters and also processing all that's been going on around me. I decided that I want it this weekend to just be a little bit vulnerable. I think the statement is kind of maybe letting my hair down a little bit. But maybe that's a little bit easier to do when all you have is a stubble.

But what that means for us what that means for this message this weekend is I want to turn part of this little monologue into a moment of confession. Because I think sometimes as pastors, as communicators, we are just a little too polished in this moment. Now, that's not an indictment against anyone because I do believe that many of my co-laborers in the Gospel and those who do what we do are sincere in what we do. But sometimes we come across a little bit I don't know, like we have all of the answers or we have everything together and we don't. We struggle, just like all of us.

Secondly, I wanted to also kind of share this circling thought that I've kind of had in my mind that's been orbiting as I've been processing and all of it is related to Ephesians. So don't be nervous, I'm not going to go off road here. And I'm not going to make some big announcement, I just want to just deviate just a little bit from the style and rhythm to which you're used to from me and we'll end up in the second half of Ephesians three. So if you have a Bible, that's where we'll land, we'll put the words up on the screen as normal, we won't leave you hanging.

So here we go. If you ask how Joshua is doing, you might get the typical good, fine, everything is straight and that wouldn't be inaccurate. And if I wanted to maybe go beneath the surface just a little bit like a scratch that doesn't bleed, I would say I'm managing which kind of lets you know I got a few things going on but still doesn't really tell you anything. But underneath the real raw, uncut, unedited

version of what's going on is I don't think that I've ever felt this insecure since I was at Southwood Middle School in Miami, Florida. Now that was a very different time, a very different kind of insecure, I was changing, going through puberty and feeling awkward liking girls romantically wanting to be accepted by certain groups of people and friends. And some of us remember what that's like because, hey, maybe you're presently in middle school or maybe you feel like your life still is middle school, metaphorically. But this insecurity that I feel is not that and my self esteem is good. I don't feel depressed, I don't feel anxious and I don't feel like I don't measure up. It's none of those things. But it's related to three words that are bigger, louder and more prominent in my life than I can ever recall, especially at a time when the stakes are extremely high. And those three words are? I don't know.

Now, there are always things that I don't know. And there will always be things that I don't know. But in this season, it's different because the number of I don't knows seems to be so much bigger than I can ever recall. And I can really break it down into two lists, there's two there's. There's a collective 'I don't knows' which I think we're all sharing in right now. Coronavirus and virtual learning if you're a student or you are the parent of a student or everything that's happening with the government leading up to an election. And there's gonna be a Supreme Court justice nomination and then how do we respond to the civil unrest that we continue to see between police officers and black men and our response to that in the culture? And then the economy? Like what's happening with my job? Will I have a job? And how can I provide and all of these things that are associated with our our money and how we take care of ourselves? And then just general stuff? Like, is it safe to travel? Can we go on a trip, and feel safe, all of these things, contributing to our insecurity?

But then there's the personal list, all of us have a personal list, right, a list that maybe we're not really talking too much about. And I have one, and I'm going to share it with you this weekend. The truth is, I don't know how well, I'm going to be able to lead a launch, a new church in a city called Baltimore. I just don't know, and I also don't know that if this nonprofit that we launched called Blueprint, which we want it to be a forerunner to this church plant that will help, us build relationships in the community and do outreach and establish ourselves before we started. I don't know if that strategy is going to work. I also don't know if this book that I've been working on and these stories that I have in my head will actually be able to come out onto the page and accomplish and reach the audience that I hope. I don't know if this business my wife Erica, is running is going to be all that she envisions and accomplishes the things that she wants to accomplish. I also don't know how to explain to people how it is we left this comfortable situation that we both were in and left our jobs at the same time pursuing what we feel like God has called us to do and still not knowing how these things are going to shape up. How do I explain that to people and it makes sense? I don't know.

It just seems like there are very few tangible comforts that I can hold on to right now. And I kind of feel like Usher right now; these are my confessions, although Usher had some other stuff going on. But then there's this circling thought the circling thought has just been constantly orbiting in my mind. And it comes from me asking myself these questions like when I feel what I feel and I'm regularly asking

myself, why do I feel what I feel and where is this coming from and what is the cause? Is there a correlation? I think I've found the correlation to my current feelings of insecurity. And it's the circling thought that is one word and its 'power'. Power.

See, I realize the reason that I feel insecure is that right now, in this moment, I have less power than I had a year and a half or two years ago. And overall, I'm just feeling like, I have less power. And maybe it's because I felt a little bit more comfortable in the situation that I was in. But specifically, the word power is this Greek word called 'dunamis'. And it means my ability to make things happen. It's my ability to exert my will onto something or someone and it manifests what I want. It's my ability to both create and access resources to do what I want to do; my ability to go where I want to go see who I want to see, enjoy it, how I want to enjoy it. And I just don't have the power to do that, right? I don't have the 'dunamis' to do it the way that I want. And it makes me feel insecure. Not inadequate, but insecure. Because I'm not in control, like I want to be, even though I say to myself, God is in control. But really on the inside, I'm feeling like it's really me who is not in control and that's the problem because power comforts me by helping me answer the question, how? But what do you do when you don't have the power to answer the how? Or you think, you know, how, if you had the power that you want it to have? But what if the how is not supposed to be answered with the power you are seeking.

Now, at this point, this might not make any sense to you. You're like what has happened to Pastor Joshua. Where's he going? But it all leads me to Ephesians. Because power is a major thread running through the book of Ephesians. Specifically, seven times and more times than that, if you count the times that it's being alluded to, Paul is talking about power. And I would also say, by the way, that all that we're experiencing, and constantly in the middle of all day, every day is really a power struggle. Come to my house, and I'll show you with my two and five year old.

But this guy, Paul, who has written this letter to Christians, in Ephesus, he's trying to get them to understand that there are powers at work, powers of principality and dominion in this world. And he says that they're at work in the people of disobedience. He says this in chapter two. But then he says that there's this almighty power of God far above any power in this world yet is it is accessible to us. And if I'm being honest, I'm feeling convicted because much of my operation and my thinking, has been according to my power. And my thinking about power has been the thinking in the terms that the world defines power. And so I'm looking at how am I going to make these things happen? How am I going to make this work? How am I going to find these resources to do the things that I feel like I need to do? And now I'm in a position where I'm really in over my head, because there's no way I'm going to ever be able to accomplish these things in my own power, these things that God has called me to do.

Yet every time in these moments of insecurity, if I really just take a deep breath, and I think and I just unplug. Despite these raging feelings of insecurity, I can see where God has opened the door, set the reminder and shown me that Joshua, your perspective is off. Because it's not about your power, it's about mine. It's about my 'dunamis'. And so actually, I should feel insecure if I'm trying to do what I'm trying

to do in my own might. And here's the thing, if I am fully empty of myself, then I'm fully available for his power to fill me.

So how does this have anything to do with Ephesians the series 'Heaven on Earth'? You guys are so curious, thank you for asking. The same insecurity that I'm feeling maybe some of you are feeling it too is the same drama that the people were experiencing in Ephesus. The same I don't know that are swirling around in our in our chaotic world and the same tensions that that we feel it's the same stuff they were feeling in Ephesians. It's the same drama on all levels politically, socially, economically, and even theologically. There were tensions and Paul knew that. And he knew he needed to pen this letter to encourage these Christians. And God knew that 2,000 years later, he needed me to read these words to be encouraged, also because what's at stake here is an opportunity to experience the immeasurably more. But here's the thing insecurity often fuels a pursuit of inferior power that causes us to miss the immeasurably more, because the immeasurably more is connected to God's power, not ours. We're thinking about our gain, God is thinking about his glory.

So Paul says, I've been praying for y'all. I've been praying for you, and I kneeled before the Father. And this is what I said; Let's pick it up in verse 16 in chapter number three of Ephesians. He says...

"¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now unto him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

What jumped out at me, a couple of things. First and foremost, is the word power, I've touched on that already a little bit. It's mentioned three times in the verses that we read here in the NIV, and then about seven times overall in the letter. But the second thing is not as obvious is this relationship to the pronouns, the pronouns have to the power, or this proximity of the pronouns to power, I want to touch on that a little bit and then ultimately, the purpose of the power.

Well, first, I want to just circle back for a second, because I can argue that everything that we are experiencing around us, as I mentioned early is a power struggle. And it started way back when we were created in the beginning of humanity, everything was provided for us in the garden, yet there was still a desire for supremacy. And today, it is manifested in all that we see in this jockeying for position it's the haves and the have nots. And those who have the power, they're trying to keep it they're trying to leverage it, and they're trying to shape the world from their vantage point. And the people who don't have it, they're trying to get it or they're trying to get around it, or somehow take it to leverage their position or to get what they feel like they want need and deserve. And then that leads to all kinds of

sides as a result of that. We've got the red side, we've got the blue side we've got the Black Lives Matter side we've got the All Lives Matter side. In sports, we've got the kneeling anthem side; we've got the standing anthem side. I mean, even in fast food, we've got the Chick Fil A chicken side, we got the Popeye's chicken sandwich side. Everybody's jockeying for position, including the church, which is being pulled into this power struggle to define their side.

It's interesting to me because I realized that I sometimes lose sight, that my power and any power associated with anything in this realm is limited. And I get caught up into my emotions and into the psychology of the world around me, when, as a believer in Jesus, as a believer in Jesus, I'm already connected to the greatest power, to the God of the Most High or the Most High God. And it means that it will be a mistake for me to align myself with any lesser power that will never have the juice, that's what we call it the power, the juice would never have the juice to redeem, restore and fully reconcile. That role has been given to us, the church, those who are aligned with Jesus in partnership with Jesus.

This is why Paul says in Second Corinthians, chapter 10, verses three and four, he says,

"³ For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴ The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world."

We've got access to a different power. And this is why in the pronoun, 'you' we see here in this part of the letter that's writing. Paul is writing, he is saying that you are connected to a greater part. Notice in verse 16, he says that the strength of your power is the outflow of God's glorious riches through His Spirit, not your riches, not your networks, not your economic power, not your affiliation to a particular party, not your family name, but his riches and his spirit. So the power that you have access to is not of your own, but a direct correlation of God's resources and his spirit. And the purpose of the power is so Christ may dwell in your heart.

This little cycle here is repeated again in verses 17, 18 and 19. He says...

"¹⁷ I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Here, the power that Paul is mentioning, is connected to this foundation of love, the word agape this unconditional love that comes from God, not love on our terms, not love that says you have to agree with me not love that is circumstantial. And then he talks about how this power that we have is communal with other believers. There's a connection that we have with other believers. And why is this? So that you can feel the width, the breadth and the depth of Christ's, love.

So we become empowered, and strengthen in relationship with other believers. And as a result, we can be filled with the knowledge of love that is not of this world, and experience the fullness of God, not the fullness of our perspective that we think is right, as we try to operate in our own power, it doesn't work.

Finally, Paul, he ends this prayer with something that many of us are familiar with. And he says...

"²⁰ Now unto him (just in case you didn't get the first two times, it's now unto him, not you) But now unto him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine."

There's no comparison to what you can do, versus what he can do. And it's according to His power that's at work in us. Again, it's the power that we have access to. And it's God working through us that is the immeasurably more power. And the purpose of that power? It is for His glory, not yours. And that glory is reflected through the church. Not a building, not a gathering, but you individually.

This is a place where I feel personally convicted again, if I'm being honest because the personal pronoun at the source of my movements a lot of times is 'I' when it shouldn't be 'him'. And it has to be him because I am the church; we should be a reflection of him. And what Paul is praying for is that the supremacy of God is reflected through the church and is not co-opted by some alignment to a lesser establishment or lesser power. The church should testify that God is the source of power greater than any power in the world. That's how we should show up.

This is why Paul prays again, if we hit the rewind button in chapter one I'm going to read it for you starting in verse 17. He says...

"¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, (He wants you to see) so that you may know him better. (And then) ¹⁸ I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms"

Let me just leave you with this because research says you won't remember most of what I said so I'll give you these couple of things. The insecurities that I feel as a result of feeling like I have so much that I want to do, and either don't know how, or I have an idea of how, but not how it's going to happen. It can't be resolved by what I'm bringing to the table, it will forever be complete, if that is how I'm approaching it. I need the insight, the inspiration and the power that comes from God's Spirit, because it is in that that I experienced the immeasurably more than I can ever ask or think. But it's not until I realized that I cannot do it. I have to empty myself.

The second takeaway is a little bit more general as we kind of generally look at the book of Ephesians. New Testament scholar and author Timothy Gombis, says that Ephesians overall, is a letter about the triumph of God through Christ, which ultimately means our triumph if we're connected to Christ. And he says we must realize that we are engaged in a war and a struggle for power. And he says, "And the enemy in the churches, warfare so if you are a believer in Jesus, that church mentioned, is you." He said, "And the enemy in the churches, warfare is not the world, or the people in the world, but the powers in the world. And as a result, what we really need is a radical reorientation of our vision of the world." And listen, that radical reorientation is not something that you can buy at target, or you can figure out how to get delivered to you by Amazon, or you can just somehow just get... No, that comes from a relationship, and a communion with God. So he gives you his download and he reveals to you as Paul has been saying, I've been praying for you to experience this and see this. And ultimately, I want your eyes to be open, so that you understand what's really at work here. Because when we have that we can be in the fight with proper vision, and the right kind of power that God desires for us to have that will produce the immeasurably more. And we will have less insecurity. As a result of the idle no's in our lives, that comes about as a result of our natural vision.

Our worship team is going to come in, lead us in a time of worship. And as they're preparing to do that I just want to say that I realized that it's not bad, that I feel insecure. It's bad if I act out of my insecurity, to try to pursue or gain or reach for some power or solution or way to make things happen. It will always fall short. But if in my insecurity I bring myself before God like I do every time, I'm going to speak. And I say God, I don't have anything. I have nothing if you don't fill me. I have no power; I have nothing, which is so opposite of how the world thinks. And when we look at the Bible story it doesn't make any sense for the God of the universe, to invade earth, as a baby in a manger that makes no sense. Who wrote that story? But it shows us how God operates through weakness. And His ways are not our ways and his thoughts on our thoughts.

And so wherever you are, this weekend, wherever you find yourself, I want to offer you two things. Maybe you need to connect with Jesus; you need to establish a relationship with him because that is where our power comes from. It's in him and through him, as Paul mentioned. Or maybe you just need a moment of reflection and time of prayer, someone to pray with you. We have people standing by to pray with you online, you can just tap the button on on the screen for someone to pray with you. And then I just want to pray for not just you I want pray for me too that we would experience the fullness of God and what he has for us through Christ Jesus.

Let's pray. God, we thank you for access to the immeasurably more. And God I pray that you would help me deal with these insecurities that seem so huge right now. And God, although I feel uncomfortable, don't allow me to let that influence a pursuit of an inferior power that you don't intend for me to pursue. And God let it push me and propel me and whoever feels like I feel that they would pursue you. And that you would give us glimpses that you're working over here and you haven't forgotten about this and that this thing that is hanging out over here you you've got that covered too.

And even if it takes a little while help us to just hang in there. Help us to hold on because help is on the way. Jesus name we pray. Amen.