

Ephesians 1:15-23
Uncovering the Power of Christ

Eph 1:15-23 [ESV] For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, [16] I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, [17] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, [18] having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, [19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Paul knows God's power is at work in Ephesus because he has heard things about the saints in Ephesus. In v. 15 "*I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...*" Paul knows that whatever they believed before they have changed and now believe in the Lord Jesus. And Paul knows they have believed Jesus because they are serving and loving *all the saints*, that is, saints of all kinds. The cultural and social barriers have been broken! This is the transforming power of God at work! That is *HOW* God reveals His power, in the lives of his chosen people *WHERE* they live. Paul knows this is the power of the true and living God because this is what he has experienced in his own life. It is more than knowing facts about Jesus—it is the very risen life of Jesus in action.

Because Paul knows the power of God, he prays. And in this prayer from vv. 15-23 he is asking God for three things for the Ephesian saints:

1. v. 17 *that God ...may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation (the Greek word apokalupsis) in the knowledge of him.* Paul is actually asking for the Spirit already *in us* to *lead us* into greater spiritual wisdom as we gain an understanding of what God is revealing through Paul's message.
2. v. 18 *...that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...*
3. v. 19 *and [that you may know] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...*

Paul asks for all these things so boldly because we come to God as a Father with an inheritance, which is what we saw last week; *hiotheisia*, being placed as a Son in a New Family. We need wisdom, insight, hope and power, so Paul needs to pray for these things for himself and for us. Paul is drawing on the ideas in the book of Proverbs that says, "*The fear (honor, respect) of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge, understanding and ability to live a righteous life.*"

What Paul is doing is bringing our minds to focus on the HOPE, both future and present. Our future hope of course is the ultimate inheritance blessing. That is why Paul calls it the "*glorious blessing*". And notice in v. 18 the way he words it; "*the riches of **his** glorious inheritance in the saints,*" **WE ARE** God's inheritance in the age to come. Think

of it—we bless God by being His inheritors! And that really adds a richness to the wonderful promises we look forward to enjoying. Paul is praying that God lights up our minds to see that great future ahead of us. But what about now? Not only does he want us to know the hope of the glorious inheritance that awaits in the future, he wants us to know the hope of the “*immeasurable greatness of his power*” in the present.

This *great power* in v.19 becomes Paul’s real focus in vv.19-23—It is *HOW* God is revealing this power to the world and to the heavenly kingdom as well. Paul is well aware of the Powers of this Evil Age, but Paul has experienced the Power of the Age to Come—the *Resurrection!* The complete restoration of all things. Paul has experienced this because the power of the resurrection of Jesus is already at work right now. It is a foretaste of the Age to Come. The problem is, Christians have many different views of what power means. This is a problem Paul must confront not only in Ephesus but in every city where he preaches the Gospel of Christ. Paul wants every Christian to understand and experience the true power of the Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus in the here and now.

That brings us to two main questions:

How? And Where?

HOW does God uncover (reveal) the True Power of Christ?

WHERE is this Power revealed most clearly?

So Paul is writing to all the saints in Ephesus, but he is also looking at a much larger picture, or rather, a much larger *BODY*. A body of people that make up what he calls the *CHURCH*. Paul doesn’t even use the word Church in this Chapter until v.22 right near the end of his prayer; “*And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all..*” To ask “*What is the Church?*” might seem like an obvious question. The most likely thing to pop into our minds is the church building where we went to church with our parents as a child. Or it may be the church we go to now, as we picture the building and the sanctuary or the auditorium we go to on Sunday morning. The point is, when we hear “church” we usually think buildings.

But that really is the wrong question. Paul would ask “*WHO is the Church?*” And v.22 answers that question. The Church is Jesus. It is the risen, exalted, glorified Jesus who is now Lord of the entire universe. But it is *NOT* Jesus alone, by Himself, operating in some far off place we call *HEAVEN*. Jesus has a *BODY* and we all together are in that Body in the world. And this is where the power dwells that is most important to the Father. He gave His Son “*as Head over all things TO the Church*”. All the power is in The Son and the Father is giving The Son *TO* the Church. This power cannot be found or accessed anywhere else. It is only in the Church!

So when we look at the Church we can answer *The How* and *The Where* questions. The Church is the revelation (or to use the Greek word: *APOCALYPSE*) of the plan, the purpose and the very heart and mind of God (v.17). Paul asks God to reveal to the Church [19] “*what is the immeasurable greatness of his **power toward us** who believe, according to the working of his **great might** [20] that he **worked in Christ** when he **raised him from the dead** and **seated him at his right hand** in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.*” This is fully comprehensive statement about resurrection power! It pulls together past, present and future; it

describes the bridge from our world to the next world; it speaks of Jesus being dead, then raised alive, then ascending to God's Throne, where he is supreme ruler above all the powers that God ever created, both in this age and the next age. Jesus ties all of time, space and authority together! Paul is actually pulling together three ideas that the writer of Hebrews makes explicit when he quotes the Hebrew Scriptures:

1. Jesus is the Name above all others—*"For God never said to any of his angels, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"* Hb 1:5 quoting Ps 2:7 which clearly shows the Son is also King *"I will announce," says the king, "what the LORD has declared. He said to me: 'You are my son; today I have become your father.'"*
2. Jesus is reigning in Glory over all things as He waits for His Father to tell Him to return and take what Adam lost—*"God never said to any of his angels: 'Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies as a footstool under your feet.'"* Hb 1:13 quoting Ps. 110:1
3. Jesus will return and restore God's Kingdom and His rule will last forever—*"Your kingdom, Oh God, will last forever and ever! You rule over your people with justice."* Hb 1:8 Quoting Ps 45:6-7 which goes on to say, *"You love justice and hate what is evil. That is why God, your God, has chosen you and has poured out more happiness on you than on any other king."*

Paul may also have had Daniel 7 in mind as he pictures Jesus reigning in the heavenlies—*"I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man (a human man), and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."* Dan 7:13-14. Clearly Jesus saw Himself in this way because during His trial Caiaphas the High Priest asked Him *"Are you the Messiah? (are You God's Anointed King?)."* Jesus told them, *"So you say. But I tell all of you: from this time on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right side of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of heaven!"* Matt 26:64.

So why do I tell you all this? Because all of these Scriptures point to a person who is human, who has great power, who is going to rule over a powerful Kingdom. Paul brings his prayer to a close with the focus on the Church in vv.22-23 *"And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."* The Church is His Body. It is Jesus in the world. He is high above at the Throne, we are down here, in the trenches, but we are one with Him. The writer of Hebrews says He is our Anchor that goes up into the throne room. The power that is working in the Church comes from the Head. It is the same power God used to raise Jesus from the dead. The same power He used to exalt Jesus at His ascension. Do you see what this means? This makes the Church the supreme power in the world, greater than all other earthly and, yes, even heavenly powers. Jesus fills the Church with His power, but there is something else. Paul closes with this in v.23 *"the fullness of him who fills all in all"*. The fullness of Him Who fills! What does that mean? I like the way the GNB puts it *"The church is Christ's body, the completion of him who himself completes all things everywhere."* As the church grows it completes Christ, until one day the Father will say, *"It is finished! Go! Gather all the people that I have given to you!"* But it also means that Christ fills the Church NOW with His presence and His gifts. His gifts provide everything we need to reach the world and to fill the Church as we go out with the message of Good News. That answers the

WHERE question, but what about the *HOW*? *HOW* does God reveal the Great Mystery of the True Power of Christ? Paul tells us in Romans—*“I am not ashamed of the Gospel (the Good News I proclaim about Jesus), for it (the Gospel) is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*Rom 1:16.

How does God uncover (reveal) the True Power of Christ? Go back to v.15 *I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...* The power of the Gospel seen in the acts of love for the people around them. The power is the message of the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus working in and through them.

Where is this Power revealed most clearly? Hopefully, this has become obvious to us—in the Church. The Church with all of her flaws and failures still has Christ as her Head and we are His *ONLY* Body. This power of the resurrection and ascension dwells nowhere else. We have the message and it goes out into the world on our feet and is proclaimed through our voice. Far too many of us are unaware that this power is readily available to us. I have said to myself, *“I don’t see the power of Jesus in my life or in the world.”* We really need to pray as Paul prays here! That God may open our minds to see his light. That God gives us wisdom to know His will, and for power to do His will.

Resurrection power is available to us right now! This doesn’t mean we look for the spectacular. False teachers use tricks and skills simply to impress people. The truly miraculous works of God’s power are working through the Church, from inside to the outside world. God uses what we have, through the things we find in our lives everyday. Luke gives us an account that makes this point very clearly. Jesus is with Simon and his brothers on the shore of the Sea of Galilee—

Luke 5:3-8 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. [4] And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” [5] And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” [6] And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. [7] They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. [8] But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

I like Charles Spurgeon as he comments on this passage—

“Means by themselves are utterly unable. Simon said, “Master, we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing.” Were they not fishermen using their special calling? Yes! They were no raw hands, they understood the work, they were skillful in it. Had they lacked industry? No, they had toiled. Had they lacked perseverance? No, they had toiled all the night. Was there a deficiency of fish in the sea? Certainly not! As soon as the Master came, they swam to the nets until they broke. What is the reason their means failed? There is no power in the means apart from the presence of Jesus?”¹

The danger for us, like many in the time when Jesus did this great miracle, is we want the spectacular. We get bored and distracted. We get used to our doctrines and traditions and the “way we do it”. Do you know the greater miracle that occurred that day? It took place in the heart of Peter. Peter fell on his knees, right in front of the other men! These rough and burly fisherman see the blowhard Peter proclaiming himself a sinful man and bowing before Jesus. And the other miracle? All of Peter’s friends were

affected the same way! Jesus told them He would make them “*fishers of men*” and yet they were the first ones caught in *HIS* net! What a blessed day that was for them!

The other danger is to turn the power of the Church into a political mandate, a triumphant world power that says, “We are better than those people over there.” Triumphalism, colonialism, and party divisions have plagued and affected the reputation of the Church since the very beginning. The power of the Church is not political strength. The power of the Church is in the power of service and humility. A humble attitude that says, “I give my life so that you can live.” They way Jesus did it. Like Peter’s boats and his nets, God does provides the Church with means and methods, like the simple ordinances of Baptism and sharing the Lord’s Supper. By those acts we proclaim to the world, and to ourselves, over and over, sometimes almost mechanically, our loyalty to Jesus. He provides talents and money and buildings and resources and He expects them all to be used for His Glory, not ours. And in the midst of our faithful work Jesus shows up and we then see His power working in us— He puts our secret sins to death, His power moves us to become people devoted to prayer. The Holy Spirit lights a fire in many hearts and the poor are lifted up, and the oppressed find freedom. We fall to our knees before Jesus and He smiles down and says, “*Follow ME!*” These are the truly great miracles that are often hidden from the world. And that is the *HOW* and the *WHERE*.

Paul prays because he is Redeemed. Redemption is the foundation of our relationship with our Father. Last week we saw that Forgiveness plus Inheritance plus Adoption plus Sonship equals Redemption. We are secure. Our future is guaranteed by our Comforter, the Holy Spirit. None of us has the power to bring this about by our own desire or ability. How is it possible that Peter and the disciples, who were from the ranks of sinners and tax collectors, and people just like us living 2000 years later, can be called to a redemption such as this? How is it possible?

That is where we will look next time—

Our Father, we thank you for all that you have done in our lives. All the blessings we have and the grace you have lavished over us. Father we also ask you to bless those we love with more wisdom, more hope, more desire to pray and seek your will. Finally we all pray that you fill our vision with Christ, so that the world’s goals and riches fade into the background of our lives. We pray this in the name of Our God, Father-Son-and Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹Spurgeon, CH, Morning and Evening KJV Edition 1991 Hendrickson Pub. Inc. p.564