
Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

The Knowledge of the Holy

Ephesians 1:15-23

18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about 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 every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection 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.

This is the third time I have read this text at the start of a sermon. I wonder if upon hearing it now three times if you have noticed a perplexing problem our text presents us? Whatever that problem may be, Paul's overall point is obvious; it is the mighty power of God; the power that saved us, that raised Jesus from the dead and has exalted Him far above all rule and authority in the universe; the same power that has placed Jesus as head of His body, the church, and of which we are members if we have believed on Him; it is this great power of God, that has done all this and more, that it is at work, is presently active in us and for us who believe.

So what is the problem? Even as I speak of this surpassing power at work in us, there are many in the Church who often live in defeat because of sin. Some of you in here may well be enslaved; enslaved to pornography, to sexual immorality, to alcohol or to drugs. There are those who are ruining or have ruined their marriages and families because of anger, because of arrogance, because of apathy against doing things God's way. There are those among us who may well be more worldly than holy, wasting their time and energies in meaningless activities that do nothing to promote the kingdom of God – that do nothing to reflect a commitment to Christ. There are those who spend their money no differently than the world; who give no attention to Jesus' command of laying up treasures in heaven; people who occupy themselves with selfishness rather than with the seeking first of God's kingdom and righteousness; those who are so filled with the world they would rather feed their minds with godless TV shows and movies than with reading, studying and knowing God through His Word.

And when we see such things in light of what we read in Ephesians 1:18-23, we must ask, "How is this surpassing greatness of God's power toward those who profess to believe being manifested in our lives?" How can we reconcile what Paul says here about God's mighty power toward us who believe with what we see all around us? What do these words mean and how do they apply to us? How can we legitimately experience the reality of God's power in our personal lives?

Let me remind you that this is the motivation of Paul's prayer; that God's people may know; truly know the certainty and reality of God's power. In verses 18-19 he prayed, *...that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.* We learned last week that until God opens the eyes or our hearts, we will not be able to know the surpassing greatness of God's power. And so Paul's prayer must continually be our prayer, "Lord, give us understanding of Your power!"

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Too often we want instant gratification; we want things to come easy; and yet we are reminded that knowing and experiencing the power of God in our lives is a lifelong quest. In Philippians 3:10 Paul says that his quest is, *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection...* And then, just two verses (3:12) later he adds, *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.* Paul wrote these words while under house arrest, having been a Christian for some 25 years and notice that he says in effect, "I am still in process, I am still learning about the power of Christ's resurrection at work in my life and will continue to do so until I meet the Lord!" God's power is in process. This morning I wish to address with you this aspect of the knowledge of the Holy – knowing what is and how to live in the power of God so that we might have victory over sin and be glorious monuments of the grace of God to all who look at our lives. So then, what is the power of God?

I. The power of God – its Ability (19-20a)

19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead...

Verse 19 sets the stage for us, informing us that the subject is now the utter greatness of the power of God by which the believer is to live his life. You might notice that our NASB text stops the sentence here in verse 19 and adds two words not found in the Greek text saying, "These are..." as if to suggest that all three things that Paul wants these believers to know, "*the hope of His calling*"; "*the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints*"; and, "*the surpassing greatness of His power*" are in view. The problem is that a literal reading of the Greek suggests that Paul only has the idea of God's power in view. The English Standard Version does a better job translating the Greek and reads, *and [to know] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...* If we desire the NASB to read more correctly, we might say, "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." And then, say, "*This is in accordance with....*" The point being that Paul wants believers to know, God wants you and me to know, the surpassing power of God that saved us and this power that saved us is in accordance with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

Just a couple of weeks ago a devastating 6.8 magnitude earthquake rocked the nation of Nepal, unleashing enough power to kill more than 7,000 people and to displace more than 65,000 people. The power of the quake was enough to move earth's mightiest mountain, Mt. Everest, causing avalanches that also killed a number of people. And yet, whether we speak of earthquakes, hurricanes or even the 9-11 terrorist attack that brought down the two World Trade towers and killed nearly 3,000 people; whether we speak of the power that spoke all things into existence in the space of six days; or destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; or parted the Red Sea; the greatest power ever unleashed upon this earth was when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead never to die again! And let me remind you, that upon the cross, while Jesus was suffering the full wrath of God for the sins of His people, Satan and all of his evil minions were on a full court press to keep Jesus in the tomb. If there was anything Satan could do to have prevented Jesus from rising from the dead, he would have done so. In light of this, in typical Pauline fashion,

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Paul piles word upon word to convey to his readers that when God raised Jesus from the dead, it was the greatest display of power the world has ever known.

For Paul, it was not sufficient to speak of simply God's *power*, a word that alone reminds us that God is omnipotent, but he adds to superlatives; it is the greatness of His power, and, *the surpassing greatness of His power!* You know the word *power* as *dunamis* in the Greek, from which we get our word, dynamite. It speaks of miraculous power. Paul calls it "surpassing" that is "hyper" and "greatness" or mega power. But Paul takes even further by reminding his readers that this power is *in accordance with the working of the strength of His might...* The verb, "working" is "*energia*" in the Greek, from which we get our word "energy." It speaks of the exercising of power, or the unleashing of power to obtain a result. This is working energy that accomplishes what it sets out to do. And then he adds, "*strength*" – a word that means "vigor" and speaks of the overall power of a person to maintain control – speaking here of God's power being irresistible. Sometimes it is translated "dominion." We see this idea in 1 Timothy 6:16 where Paul describes God as the One, *who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion [strength]! Amen.* But Paul is not done as he next uses the word, *might* – speaking of God's inherent ability to do whatever He needs to without being stopped – think about the might of the ocean which no one can hold back its tides – that is might. No one thwarts the power of God.

Let us stop here and consider something that Paul is not praying for. This prayer is not that God might give such a mighty power to believers – that is not to be found. What Paul prays for is that God's people, in the very depth of the being, heart, mind and volition, would know that this extraordinary power – has already been revealed in us if we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The very next section of Paul's letter, in the first part of chapter 2, informs believers that when we were dead in our sins, God raised us up and seated us with Christ in the heavenly places – He had the power and ability to do this. Paul's point in leading up to this is that the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at God's right hand is the very same power that has saved us. Paul prayer is that believers would know that if they have believed on Christ, such a faith did not come as a result of human will-power or reasoning. Rather, it is a God-thing, stemming from the awesome power of God, the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

When we consider why there are many who attend Church and yet many of these simply are not living in accordance with this mighty power of God, such persons are forced to answer this question, "Do I possess "new life" in Jesus Christ? Do I know myself as once being dead in my sins, but being made alive to God because of His resurrection power?" There is not one genuine Christian who has not experienced his or her own resurrection from the dead; being brought to life by the power of God.

We speak today of people coming forward and "making a decision for Christ." What obnoxious language, as though we can decide anything for Jesus, as if to say, "Jesus, I have decided that you can save me; I have purposed that I will let you do something for me." Dead people don't decide anything. There is a vast difference between a person's "making a decision for Christ" (a term never found in the bible) and being born again (this being a biblical term – John 3; 1 Peter 1). Let me tell you something; everyone who is truly born again believes in Christ – but not everyone who professes to believe in Christ is born again. To be sure, because of emotions,

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peer-pressure, a sense of great need, a person can come to believe that following Christ will give them what they need – it is not so much about God but about them; but such a decision does not save. According to the Word of God, being born again requires an act of God whereby God raises a person from death to life. Did you decide to be born, anyone of you? Not one of us did or could make such a decision. Can anyone, or has anyone ever decided, “I think I will be raised from the dead!” In all of recorded history there is not one person outside of the God-Man, Jesus, who has decided that. According to our text; in fact according to every verb, every action, and every purpose of God in Ephesians 1, we are not even able to assist or cooperate with God in the process. God blessed; God chose; God predestined; God adopted, God graced; God redeemed; God forgave; God lavished; God illuminated; God made us His inheritance; God sealed us with His Holy Spirit of promise. Then comes the most humbling of words concerning any possibility of helping God in our salvation in Ephesians 2:1 – “*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.*” What kind of power do you need to get out of this predicament? What do dead people do? NOTHING. Paul prays that believers would know that it was God's sovereign, mighty power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at God's right hand – it was that power alone that has saved the believer.

How then, how can you know if you are born again? That seems to be the question of first importance. Well, let me ask you, do you truly believe in Jesus Christ – that He is the Son of God, come to this earth from heaven; the one who shed His blood for you on the cross as your only hope for eternal life? If you believe this, that belief did not originate in you. The Bible tells us that such faith comes from God; that He has opened your blind eyes to see your need for Christ. It is God, who according to Philippians 1:29, grants faith and belief in Christ. So, have you truly believed in Jesus?

As a result of such a belief, if God has granted you new life in Christ, then I promise you this, your desires will be changing. How can you know if you have been born again? Is your life changing? Before Christ you might have enjoyed a dirty joke, but now such jokes repulse you. Before Christ you might have loved watching steamy sex scenes in movies, but now you do not want such filth to defile your mind. Before Christ, you never read the Bible or considered it as God's speaking to you, but now, you find that it feeds your soul. There are many more changes, and you ought to note how God has and is changing you; but the point is that such changes, while sometime coming slowly and painfully, are evidences of God's power at work in you; revealing you to be a Christian. A genuine Christian should be able to say when asked about his or her life, “Here is how God has changed my heart, my thinking and my behavior – and here is how God is changing my heart, my thinking and my behavior.” God does not start something and not finish it – if you are not being changed today you might have to question if you were ever changed in the first place. This is not to say that a true believer will not experience setbacks; but can you tell me ways in which you have changed and are being changed by Christ; that is the question we must answer.

So then, Paul prays that believers would know, understand with certainty the surpassing greatness of the power of God that saved them; reminding them that it is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. But there is more Paul wants believers to know about this power...

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II. The power of God – an Authority (20b-21)

and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

If verses 19-20a speak of power as God's ability to do for us what was necessary, then verses 20b-21 speak of power as authority. This same power has seated Christ at God's right hand in the heavenly places and has given Him all authority to rule. The idea of Jesus being at God's right hand speaks of the power the Father has given to Jesus that He may rule in His name the government of heaven and earth.

Jase and I will meet for breakfast or lunch on occasion and sometimes our discussions turn to thing political, national; you know, the big picture kind of things. At the end of our discussion, after coming up with all the answers to the problems, one of us might quip, "This world would be just fine if people would listen to us." And why is it that relative few person listen to us; particularly on a worldwide scope? Because we do not have that kind of authority. And, if I were to say to Jase, "Jase, I hereby appoint you as prime minister over all the nations of the world and grant you the authority to put into effect all the programs we have discussed," How far would that take Jase? Not far, not even in the realm of Chick-fil-a where we are eating breakfast.

Whereas verses 19-20a speak of power as ability; verses 20b-21 speak of power as authority. And again, Paul piles word upon word to make this point using the words, note them, "*rule, authority, power, and dominion.*" Paul uses these words to inform his readers that whatever kind of powers or authorities exist; whether on this earth or even in the spiritual realm; Christ has authority over them all! What Paul says in effect here is that there is nothing and no one so elevated or so excellent; regardless of any name by which it may be named that is not subject to the majesty and rule of Christ. It would seem that Paul here has specifically in mind the spiritual forces that move and shape things on the earth. Christ is over them all!

And this is not only a now thing; it is a forever thing as our text says that the authority of Christ is "*not only in this age but also in the one to come.*" Believers are to know that Christ is exalted to the place of absolute, supreme and sovereign power over all the universe. This authority of Christ is not for one term, or two terms like a president, it is for all eternity. But some may say, "We don't see all things subject to Christ like this, so how can this be?" The Scriptures inform us that God the Father has given God the Son this authority but it will be realized over time. Look with me at 1 Corinthians 15:23-28 where we see this very thing taught...*23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET. But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.* We might be tempted to ask, "Why is God doing it this way?" Beloved, I believe this "process" of all things realizing the authority of Christ over time is the grace of God for a multitude of people who are yet to be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. For in the end, there will be no more sin, no more faith, no more hope; only love and service God. In this interim, we have been called to be ambassadors for Christ, appealing to the lost, "Be reconciled to God through His Son, Jesus Christ!"

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In Acts 19:11-20 we learned something about the Ephesian believers to whom Paul is now writing. They were a people who were head deep in idol worship and the occult. It is said that demon possession was so common in Ephesus that some actually made a living by trying to cast out the demons. When some of these Ephesians were saved, we learn that they burned their magic books of spells and enchantments, media that would have amounted to a small fortune. When Paul's first readers considered the words of our text, they would not have regarded them as some interesting point of theology or Christology. For them, these words were intensely practical. For they had known and had been fearfully enslaved by the power of Satan. But now they had a new Lord and Sovereign; one who was seated in the highest place of authority over all rulers, authorities, powers and dominions. In other words, Paul wants his readers to know the power of the risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ is available to them in their struggle against the forces of wickedness in the heavenly places, something to which Paul will address in Ephesians 6:10-17. This is the power that is available to us if we are in Christ. But there is more...

III. The power of God – an Appointment (22)

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church...

God the Father has appointed Jesus as Head of the Church. When Paul says that "*He [God the Father] put all things in subjection under His [God the Son's] feet,*" he is pointing us back to God's original intention for man, something that was adversely affected by sin. David reflected on this Psalm 8:4-6 declaring, *4 What is man that You take thought of him, And the son of man that You care for him? 5 Yet You have made him a little lower than God, And You crown him with glory and majesty! 6 You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet,* This is what God had intended for man in Adam. In Genesis 1:26-28 God commanded Adam to fill the earth and rule it and have dominion over all the animals (Genesis 1:26-28). Adam lost all of this because of his sin. But Christ, the second Adam, has regained it. And while we await the ultimate fulfillment of this with Christ's return and final victory over Satan and death (1 Corinthians 15:24-27); the truth of His resurrection, ascension, and present position at God's right hand guarantees this outcome – this is what Paul prays we would know with certainty. All things are even now under Christ's feet.

But Paul wants us to know something else about the authority of Christ. Reading on in verse 22 we read that God *gave Him as head over all things to the church...* Believe it or not, this is the first time the world "church" is used in this letter; and yet the "Church" will be a major theme. The Greek word "church" is "*ekklesia*" and literally means, "the called out ones." The "church" never refers to a building we go to, but rather to the people of God we cling to. We have been called out of this world and its ways of thinking and acting in order that we might follow Jesus Christ.

I know I have been big on pointing out that Ephesians 1 is all about what God alone has done rather than what man had done; but note that this is true even for Christ. Paul does not simply say that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, but that God "*gave Him as head over all things to the church.*" Did God give the church to Jesus or Jesus to the church? Yes, both, but we are to see here that the ruling authority of Christ over all things, including the Church is actually yet another gift of God to us – God has given Christ to us to rule and reign. God has appointed

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Jesus as Head to the Church. But there is one more consideration about this power and with this last point, let us consider what all this means practically speaking...

IV. The power of God – an Ambassadorship (23).

...which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

With reference to the church Paul closes this paragraph with the words, *“which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”* The use of the word “body” is a familiar analogy – the church is the Christ’s body. Paul is the only one who uses this picture in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 12 the idea of the body is developed even more not only designating our relationship to Christ, but also our relationship to one another, each having different spiritual gifts by which to build up the body.

Here Paul is simply conveying the idea that Christ is the head over we are His body. When we think about a human body we think about that which is living. There is a living, active relationship between Christ and His body, the church. We are connected to Him by God; and once again we are to note nothing we have done has produced such a relationship. How do we enter into this relationship with Christ as the head? You already know the answer. It comes to us from God’s resurrection power. With Christ as the head, there is the expectation of our submission. It is not the body, not the hands or skin or toes that command the head, rather it is the head that commands the parts. The point is this, if God has saved you by means of the surpassing greatness of His power, then by that power at work in you, your aim, as one subject to Christ who is your head, is to increasingly obey Jesus Christ as Lord in “every” area of your life. Is this your aim?

As the fullness of Christ, we are to be actively engaged in manifesting that fullness. We are ambassadors for Christ. As a church, and individually, each of us who is part of the Church, is to be an extension of Christ; to reflect in our hearts, our minds, our actions, the will and purpose of the head. Paul’s prayer is that we would know that because of the power of God at work in us, we now have the duty and privilege of expressing Christ to the world. This is how we are the fullness of Christ.

By saying that the church is the fullness is not said to get the church full of itself, for Paul brings us right back to Christ. We are the fullness of Christ; and it is Christ *“who fills all in all.”* This is to remind us that if we were separated from Christ for even a moment, we would not have anything. It is Christ who gives us all things. It is this filling of Christ by which we not only are gifted by Christ for service to Him, but also granted the assurance of His presence and power with us.

The bottom line is this; Paul prays that God would open the eyes of the hearts of believers so that they might be in awe of the power that has saved them and in turn seek to properly represent Christ on the earth. For here is what it true about each one of us if we are truly born again; while not one of us; or even our unbelieving family or friends have ever seen the risen and exalted Christ; they are to see His body, the Church; which is to be as awesome and dramatic a display of God’s power as if we stood at the tomb of Christ and watched God raise Jesus from the dead. How powerful is that? That means our lives must be changing; miraculously changing; powerfully showing people that we understand this; this life is not about us; it is about Christ and Christ in us. Do people see the majesty of our risen, exalted head as truly Lord over this church and you His people?

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The story is told of William Randolph Hearst, the late, wealthy and influential newspaper publisher and builder of the Hearst Castle in California. One of his passions was collecting costly art treasures from around the world. One day he found a description of some valuable items that he felt he must own. So he sent his agent abroad to search for them. After months of searching, the agent reported that he had finally found the treasures. They were already in Mr. Hearst's warehouse. Hearst had been searching for treasures that he already owned!

Beloved, if you are truly born again, then the surpassing greatness of God's power is already your possession. But too many of us are like Mr. Hearst. We are unaware of that which is already ours. So, let me ask you, are you experiencing the mighty power of God? You ask me, "How do I know if I am experiencing it?" To which I say to you, are you overcoming the temptations of sin in your life and increasingly living a holy life unto God? If you are not experiencing this, then I call you to pray to God, asking Him to enlighten your eyes to know with certainty the life changing power of saving grace. And let me warn those of you who have no desire to be changed; to overcome sin, and to rightly and boldly represent Christ on this earth; it may well be that you have never experienced the power of being raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Would you call upon the name of the Lord and be saved; be reconciled to God and then watch Him change you so that you can live according to His might power.

I close this morning with the words of the Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter who said, *As we paid nothing for God's eternal love and nothing for the Son of His love, and nothing for His Spirit and our grace and faith, and nothing for our eternal rest... what an astonishing thought it will be to think of the unmeasurable difference between our deservings and our receivings. O, how free was all this love, and how free is this enjoyed glory. . . . So then let DESERVED be written on the floor of hell but on the door of heaven and life, THE FREE GIFT.*

Application Questions

1. What are some evidences that you have experienced God's mighty power in salvation? What signs should raise some doubts about this?
2. How would you counsel a person who was living a very worldly life, but who said, "I'm going to heaven because I believe in Jesus"? Should you give him assurance of salvation?
3. Which is a more certain evidence of God's saving power: Performing miracles or a godly life (see Matthew 7:21-23)?

Soli Deo Gloria

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