

THE POWER OF GOD

Ephesians 1:16-23

I trust that as a result of our times together on Sunday morning, talking about the attributes of God that you are noticing the attributes more as you read your Bible. This past week I was reading through the book of Nehemiah and in one of the prayers that comes toward the end of the book, there could not have been the prayer that was there if those praying had not been aware of the various characteristics of God. I think you will notice in the prayers that are recorded in Scripture that the attributes of God, the characteristics of God continually come to the forefront. This is what gives us encouragement to pray, to know that God can answer as we have just heard this message in song, to know that God does care for us, to know that He does meet our need, to know that He is aware of our needs, conscious of our needs even before we come to Him in prayer. And so I do trust that the Spirit of God is doing that for you as you read through your Bible and in your own prayer life the attributes of God will be mentioned more and more. Psalm 62 which I won't ask you to turn to this morning where David is doing as he often does in his psalms, considers the hope that he has concerning his enemies, he makes this statement which the Word of God supports from start to finish and it is a familiar verse I think to most of you. It goes like this, "God has spoken once, twice have I heard this that power belongeth unto God." It is interesting to take the Bible and to notice how many different ways God has chosen to manifest His power. He displayed His power for example in creation. Again thinking of ~~the Psalms 33 in~~ Psalm 33, you have this statement, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast." In the very first chapter of the book of Romans where Paul is showing man's need of salvation he gives us the testimony that every man has received concerning God from creation and in the 20th verse you find these words, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made even his eternal power and Godhead so that they are without excuse." So He has manifested His power in creation

and we see evidence of that everywhere we turn. But He has also shown His power in His dealings with His people. When all hope for example humanly speaking was gone that Abraham and Sarah could have a son the Lord appeared to Abraham and told him something that revived Abraham's hope though it made no change as far as their circumstances were concerned and you find this good word in Genesis 17:1, "For God said, I am the almighty God, walk before me and be thou perfect." And along this same line the promises of God, the prophecies of Scripture which are just another form of promises, the purposes of God, all of these things which are so vital in God's dealings with us would be utterly impossible apart from the power of God. God manifests His power also through miracles. The Apostle John as most of you know has taken seven miracles to show that these were evidence of the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and He has written them that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. All of us who are saved are evidence of the power of God. Again Paul says in Romans 1, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." So everytime you see another Christ^{ian} you have evidence of the mighty power of God. And of course answers to prayer would be utterly impossible if we did not have a God of power. Jeremiah 33:3 gives us those words, "Call unto me and I will answer thee and show thee great and mighty things which thou knowest not." And I could go on and on this morning citing other evidences of the power of God. But with all that I have said about creation, about God's dealings with us, about His promises, about miracles, about salvation, about answers to prayer, I have not yet mentioned the main place where God has seen fit to demonstrate His power. And you have that in the text that we read together this morning. The greatest display of the power of God is to be seen in the resurrection, the glorification, and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let me read these words to you again if I may from verse 19 of Ephesians 1 which is the third request that Paul mentions in his prayer. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe

according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named not only in this world or age but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church which is his body the fullness of him that filleth all in all." So though God has exercised great power in creation, great power in the Gospel, every time a person is saved, great power in transforming us from what we were to what we will be when we become like the Lord Jesus, yet in the resurrection and the glorification and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ you have the greatest display of His power.

Now I want you to note some of the significant things from our text this morning if you will just keep your Bible opened. One is that this was one thing that Paul prayed for in connection with the saints and he prayed continually for this. I think often we perhaps sense our shame when we place our prayers along side of the prayers of Scripture. It is not that we shouldn't pray for the things that we do pray for but we fail to pray many times for the things that we find mentioned in the Word of God. And when you find Paul praying as he does here this should be a lesson for us in praying and it ought to help us to see that God does this in answer to prayer. Now there are three requests here. In the 18th verse you have the first two, "That ye may know what is the hope of his calling," that's the first one. The second, "and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," and then the third one which he enlarges upon to the end of the chapter "and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe." Now as far as I know there is no other passage in the New Testament where you have such an array of words having to do with the power of God as you do in this passage. And I am thinking especially in verse 19. "What is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe according to the working," and I could just as easily translate this, "according

to the working of the might of his power," and he doesn't use the same word twice. But he seems to draw together all of these expressions that are descriptive of the power of God and he says this is what I am praying for. Now along the same line if you look down to verse 21 you have words which describe the power of creatures. Some of these words describe the power of angels, some of these words describe the power of men. He is thinking mainly of the power of rulers and the power of governments, and the authority that angels exercise in creation and over men. And so when he speaks of the exaltation and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ he says, that "He has been exalted far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come. So in verse 19 you have a grouping together of all of the words that have to do with the power of God, in verse 21 you have a grouping together, an amazing assortment of words which describe the varied appointed authorities and power of men and the point that the Apostle Paul is making in the passage is that when you look at the power of God and then you look at the power of men it will leave no doubt in your mind but that God has no difficulty at all in exercising His power and that there isn't anything in the area of power or authority among angels or among men that can possibly resist or thwart the power of God. And this is what he prayed about. And he prayed about this because it can only be known as the result of God's revelation to our hearts. Will you look at the beginning of the prayer again when in verse 16 he says, "I cease not to give thanks for you making mention of you in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give unto you the Spirit," and this word Spirit probably should be capitalized so that this is one of those special verses where you have the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit mentioned, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding," or literally, the eyes of your heart being enlightened that ye may know." Now in other words I am not going to know the hope of His calling, I am not going to know what are the

riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, nor am I going to know the exceeding greatness of His power unless He makes it known to me. Now will you note that it is His calling, His inheritance and His power. These all have to do with God. Now I can be taught what is the hope of His calling. I can be taught what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And I can be taught what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe. But when I take that last one I am going to demonstrate that I have really been taught of God. That He has opened my heart and that I have been given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of Him. When in my circumstances I come to the place where I have nothing else to depend upon but the power of God and I take joyfully my place in submission to His will, waiting for Him to meet my need. It's nice to talk about the power of God when things are going calmly but when the storm starts and we go into difficulty of various kinds, and they are hitting all of our lives in one way or another then we demonstrate just how much we really know about the exceeding greatness of His power. And here is Paul putting all of these superlative expressions together and grouping all of these words that have to do with power so that he will impress the Ephesians and let us know that there is more to be learned about the power of God than you and I have yet been able to understand. We, in other words do not instinctively realize what we should know about the power of God. God Himself has to make it known to us if we are to understand it. And as the Scriptures indicate we don't learn this all at once. And my proof to show you that would be just the biographies of Scripture. You won't find a person in Scripture who didn't fail God in one way or another except the Lord Jesus Christ. And to a great extent the failure of men and women in Scripture was due to a lack of either understanding or appropriating the mighty power of God. Abraham didn't learn it at once and neither did Moses nor did David. The book of Job will tell you that Job didn't learn it all at once. The books of Isaiah and Jeremiah are very revealing concerning the needs that those men had. The whole history of the Old Testament indicates the truth

concerning Israel with respect to the power of God. And if we go into the New Testament do you remember up to shortly before his death John the Baptist was inclined to question what was going on and sent word to the Lord Jesus through his disciples, "Are you he that should come or do we look for another." And somehow he had difficulty reconciling an almighty God with the fact that he was in prison. The same could be said about the Apostles James and John and about the Apostle Paul. Afflicted with a thorn in the flesh he cried out to God for deliverance as though that were the only way out. And the Lord gave him that wonderful promise you remember, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And then the whole picture was changed for the Apostle Paul and he said, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." So everything that any saint has learned about the power of God, he or she has learned it from God Himself alone. And so as we look at this passage of Scripture it is good for us to be reminded that this is what we ought to be praying for ourselves and this is what we ought to be praying for each other. If you know of a child of God who is going through difficult times then there is nothing that is more important for them to know than the exceeding greatness of His power toward those of us who believe.

Now let's take the example this morning that the Apostle Paul has given us in this passage relative to the Lord Jesus Christ and see what we can see in the resurrection, the exaltation, the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ that will help us to understand more about the power of God. And I want us to look at these verse carefully. Paul says, and let me read them for you again, "Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in heavenly places far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come and hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body the fullness of him that filleth all in all." Now what a transforming affect it would have on

all of our lives if we could grasp the truth that we have in these verses and according to the prayer of the Apostle Paul we can expect that God will enable us to grasp more of an understanding of the things that Paul is telling us here about the mighty power of God. Now let me point out some things from the passage that are indicative of different characteristics of God's power.

In the first place you will notice from his prayer that he is talking about God's power as it is now. Now I say this because often when we talk about the power of God we begin to think prophetically. And we love to dwell on passages of Scripture like this for example that the day is coming when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. We love to read in the book of the Revelation where the Lord says that, "I will make all things new." We love to think of Him as subduing the nations of the earth and the kingdoms of the earth becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. We love to think of a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness and nothing will ever be able to enter in that will defile. And we think glowingly of the day when the Lord Jesus Christ is going to be recognized as the One that He really is and when His role will be completely different from what it was when He came here on earth. But I want you to see in this passage of Scripture that when you talk about the power of God and the character of the power of God you are not talking just of the future, you are talking about the present. "That we may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power. " Now he is talking to believers in that day. And he is talking about what God did just a few years prior to this when He raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. And when He set Him at His right hand. But when he says, "He has put all things under his feet and he has given him to be head over all things to the church which is his body," you see this spans the whole age. So that what Jesus Christ did or what God did when he raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead in that mighty manifestation of his power He continues to do through

this present age in His sovereignty over the church so that we are talking about a power that was exercised in creation, it is a power that has been exercised in history. It is a power that God has displayed continually in answer to prayer, in the salvation of people in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. The power of God because of what He is, and this is where we need to go back and draw from some of the other attributes, the power of God being what it is, is this morning all that it ever will be, and all that it ever has been. God this morning can do anything that He has ever done. There is no limit to His power. His power in time past has been exceeding great. His mighty has been at work. It was when the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. It continued to work in the early church and it continues to this present hour and we will never come to an end. So that we are not talking about something that will be or something that used to be but is not now but we are talking about the power of God as it is this morning as you and I have gathered in this place of worship. So while we look forward to these great manifestations of God's power when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and as the prophetic picture is completed, don't relegate it to that time or you are going to miss the great blessing of knowing what God can do for you in the face of all the circumstances that you and I have from day to day. So it is power as it is now.

Will you notice a second thing about this passage. This is omnipotent power. Now power is obviously one of God's communicable attributes. You remember we have seen that God has some attributes that are His and can only be His, His eternity for example, His independence. He doesn't transfer these characteristics to you and to me. But He does convey to us His power. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me." But God does not give us omnipotent power. There will always be things that you and I can't do. And God demonstrated the uniqueness of His power when He raised the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. It says here in our text, "Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him

from the dead." Think what it would mean to raise a person from the dead. And to place that person at the Father's right hand. Why it is so far beyond you and me what we can do that we wouldn't even contemplate such a thing. When that was done by the Apostles they could only do it by the mighty power of God. But this is something different because the Lord Jesus Christ was not only raised from the dead but He was raised from the dead in to such a state that it is absolutely impossible for Him now ever to die again. If He were to come back to the earth, and He will come back to the earth someday, but if He were to come back as things are today it would be impossible for men to put Him to death. Romans 6 tells us, "Death has no more dominion over Him." So what if you face the prospect of raising a person from the dead seating him at the Father's right hand and raising him in such a way that death could never touch him again. Think of the forces seen and unseen that stood in the way of the resurrection of Christ. The forces of Rome, one of the mightiest governments that has ever existed on earth. The forces of Israel combined to see to it that all of their powers were exercised to make sure that His body stayed in the tomb. But think of the forces of Satan and demons which could never be measured. Think of how they would have retained Him on earth if they couldn't keep Him in the grave. And yet the writer of the book of Hebrews jubilantly, triumphantly says that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens so that everything that demons and Satan would have done in addition to what men could do were not sufficient to keep the Lord Jesus Christ in the grave. God exercised omnipotent power and when God was ready for the Lord Jesus Christ to come out of the grave neither men or angels could keep Him there.

You notice it was also sovereign power, power which is now being displayed as the result of that where the Lord Jesus Christ has been raised above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come and hath put all things under his

feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church"so that,you have this wonderful manifestation of the mighty sovereign power of God. John Flavel one of the Puritans whom I enjoy reading was talking about the sovereignty of God over kings and especially with reference to Nebucuneezer and he said, "that God not only put the crown on Nebucuneezer's head but God put a head on Nebucuneezer's body so that he would have some place where he could wear the crown." Mention all the great leaders, any one of them, mention them all together the great powers of world history and over them all stands out blessed Lord Jesus Christ as the result of the exercise of God's power. The Lord Jēsus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords today and though as we look at the world with a mad rush for power and supremacy and military might and economic advantage and all of this the One who sits in the heavens laughs as He watches men exercise their delegated power and authority and most of them never stop to think that like Pilate they would have had no power over the Lord Jesus at all. They would exercise no power on the earth at all except that authority and power was given to them from above. So it is omnipotent power, it is sovereign power but it's also eternal power. I said a little about this this morning but notice the statement here. The Lord has been raised far above every name that is named not only in this age but also in that which is to come. That is through all of time and through all of eternity you will never find One Who has the authority, the power that the Lord Jēsus Christ has. Now I have never been a king obviously but you know every once in a while you can read where a king or a dictator opens his heart and they will say that one of the things that they fear is the possibility of being overthrown. All of us listened to the news this past week in which the dictator of Samosa was assassinated. And one of the news reports that I heard said that Mr. Samosa lived in the fear that his enemies would eventually get him and they did. May I say to you this morning something which all of you know to be true that Jesus Christ has no such fears. Jesus Christ does not fear the uprising of men. Jesus Christ does not fear human rebellion, He does not fear angelic rebellion. The possibility that

He could be overthrown does not even exist. There never has been any such possibility and there never will be any such possibility. He is eternally sovereign over Kings, nations, every individual, angels, demons, even Satan himself. And there isn't the slightest possibility that His power is going to wane so that He will not have control any longer because we have among other statements in Scripture that delightful little expression in Isaiah 40 where Isaiah is describing God to us and says that He fainteth not neither is weary. Where could you and I go for any greater encouragement than in a passage like this to look at the power of God linking it with all of His wonderful attributes, His love, His mercy, His wisdom, seeing that He exercises all of these things. That His power is sovereign, His power is omnipotent, His power is today all that it has ever been and His power will endure exactly the same throughout all eternity. Now those are marvelous truths aren't they. Now how does this apply to us. Now let me come right down to the problems that you and I face.

One writer says that there are probably four different excuses that we give for not trusting the Lord as we should. One is that our troubles have lasted so long that now there is no hope that they will either be changed or taken away. The second is previous hopes that we had didn't materialize. The third one is that when we look at conditions now the conditions that we face we can see no signs or evidences that there is a change in the making. But instead in the fourth place it seems that everything is working against us and things are getting worse not better. Now how does the resurrection of the Lord Jesus help us. How does knowing the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe going to help us in our present circumstances. Now I must be quick in giving you these answers but I want to relate them to what we have seen in this passage concerning the resurrection of Christ. First of all we see in this passage when God raised Jesus Christ we see the complete undoing of all that our Lord's enemies had done. We see how quickly things can change. Abraham waited for 25 years for the fulfillment of a promise. The children of Israel wandered in the

wilderness for 40 years, in the desert for 40 years before they ever got into the Promised Land. You can take other examples. Moses was in exile for 40 years before God brought him back to lead the children of Israel out of the Promised Land. So much in Scripture says wait, wait, wait, wait. But isn't it amazing that when God raised His Son from the dead He was only there for three days and three nights. That comparatively short period of time. Why was it that the Lord didn't stay in the grave for a year or two years or ten years or a hundred years. God could have raised Him from the dead that way. One answer to that certainly is apart from prophecies that you have in Scripture, one answer is that this was God's majestic demonstration of His power and He wants us to see that the greatest tragedy that ever took place from a human point of view, the death of Jesus Christ. It was of such great dismay to His own disciples was changed so that in a matter of just a few days the work of the enemy was completely undone and Jesus Christ was alive never to die again. Think also of what this meant as far as the promises were concerned. When Peter stood before that great company of people in Jerusalem he said it was impossible that Jesus Christ could be held by death because the Lord of God said that He would be raised from the death. Thou wilt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. And if you want the greatest proof that the Bible is the Word of God you have it in the mighty display of God's power when He raised His Son from the dead. We see in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and when we realize what God was accomplishing through that work we see that God never for one moment lost control of the situation. He was in charge all along. And we see that God Himself was so completely satisfied with the outcome that He is the One Who has set His Son at His own right hand far above all principalities and powers and the writer of the book of Hebrews goes out of his way to explain to us that that honor was never given to any angel in heaven. The raising of Lazarus from the dead gives us many lessons that tie in with the passage of Scripture like this. They sent for the Lord Jesus Christ and He didn't come so prayer wasn't answered. The Lord tarried, He was absent. When He did come

they felt that it was too late. Already his body had started to decay. The whole picture in John 11 seemed to be a contradiction of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for Lazarus and for Mary and Martha. And yet with just a word the Lord Jesus changed the whole picture when He said, "Lazarus, come forth." And I trust this morning as we have seen this marvelous passage of Scripture and we see that through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ we not only have a witness to the fact that our sins were put away but the sacrifice was accepted by God. And the work of the Lord Jesus Christ was finished. But this is a word for us in our trials and our testings. And let's pray for one another diligently and faithfully that the eyes of our hearts may be opened that we may know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of the power of his might which he wrought in Christ when he raised from the dead," because as the prayer indicates all that God did in raising His Son from the dead He stands ready to do for you and for me in order that our needs might be met. In order that His purposes might be accomplished and in order that one day we might stand in His presence dressed in the likeness of our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Take that truth with you will you and pray that it may become increasingly clear to your own heart.