

Series on the Book of Ephesians  
Ephesians 1:19-23  
Sermon #13  
August 28, 1988

## THE SOVEREIGN POWER OF GOD L. Dwight Custis

Alright. Take your Bibles and turn to the Book of Ephesians.

I do not know if we are ever going to get out of chapter 1, but we are gradually working our way through this important epistle.

We are considering together the prayer of the Apostle Paul at the end of this chapter, for those of you are new with us this morning. I want to read that prayer, beginning with verse 15. But, before I do let me call your attention to the three specific requests that the Apostle Paul was praying. You have those in verses 18 and 19. Each one is introduced with the word "what:" "That ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what ("are" understood) the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ."

The prayer begins in verse 15; in fact, why don't we read this this morning in unison. Verse 15 down to the end of the chapter (verse 23):

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God 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 being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward 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, 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 fulness of him that filleth all in all."

I do not know that I have mentioned this before, but there is a certain progression that is important for us to notice in these three requests. Request number one leads to request number two and request numbers one and two lead to request number three. I say that because when you look at the nature of the first two requests, any thoughtful person is going to say, How can such goals be reached? How can I ever reach that which is the divinely appointed hope of His calling? How can I ever consider myself to be one of those who is actually God's inheritance? The hope of God's calling, the purpose of God's calling is that we might be made like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week as we considered "what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in us" we saw that God is our inheritance, but we are His inheritance; therefore, this puts a tremendous burden upon us when we think about that. These are good questions, if you are asking How can I ever be like Jesus Christ? or How can I ever be brought to the place where God would find the same kind of delight in me that He finds in His Son? because that is what it means that we would know what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

The answer to that is in this third request: "That we might know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward (or we would simply say toward us) who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." He does discuss the power of God right on to the end of this particular chapter,

but I am going to confine myself, actually, this morning to verse 19 and then we will look at the others.

Here in verse 19 we have a description of His power. Look at those words: "The exceeding greatness of his power . . . according to the working of His mighty power." Then, in the verses that follow he gives us three occasions in which the power of God has been manifested. One is in the resurrection of Christ, "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." The second is in the exaltation of Christ, "And set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places." The third is the appointment of "Christ to be the head over all things to the church" as you read in verse 22, "which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." So we have the illustrations, we have the manifestations of what God by His power is capable of doing, and actually has done: raising His son, the exaltation of His Son in His ascension back to the Father's right hand, and then giving Him this place of absolute sovereign authority over the church in every age, over every one in the church. Of course, that would include those who are to experience the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.

This morning we want to look at this description of God's power. Paul used an amazing combination of Greek words in this part of his request. I think it is important for us to understand these words in order to understand in a better way just what we are dealing with when we are talking about the power of God.

In our Sunday School lesson this morning we were talking about the power of God and tonight we are going to be talking about the power of God. We all know, I am sure, something about the various attributes of God: God's love and God's grace and God's longsuffering, His mercy, all these attributes that we like to hear about; but it is interesting, is it not, that when Paul mentions his first prayer and the way that he is praying about them, he puts the power of God above everything else. You see, one reason that we have difficulty with the Christian life, one reason that so many people have difficulty with the resurrection of Christ--because I am sure that if we were to take a poll among the people of the world we would find that the mass majority of people do not believe in the resurrection or the ascension of Christ--the reason they do not is because they do not understand the power of God which is the power of Christ which is the power of the Holy Spirit. The members of the Godhead are absolutely equal in their attributes and their characteristics. There is no difference between God's power and Jesus Christ's power and the Holy Spirit's power. It is all one in the same. As Paul prayed about the power of God, and as I pointed out before we read this together, his burden is "that they would know what are the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." Remember that when you talk about knowing spiritual truth, we are not talking just simply about a knowledge of the doctrine of these truths, though we are certainly talking about that. It is a shame that more Christians do not pay attention to true Biblical doctrine. When Paul was praying that the Ephesians would know this, and, of course, it is important for you to know it and it is important for me to know it, it means that we not only understand the doctrine; but it means that knowing the doctrine, having been taught by the Holy Spirit what the doctrine is, we are going to see the practical effect of that truth in our lives. If we claim to know the truth of the Word of God, but it has not changed our lives, then our claim is an empty claim. Whenever a person is brought to an understanding of the truth of God it has a practical bearing influence upon his or her life, and if that practical influence is not there, if the change is not there, then, of course, we have no right to say that we understand it. That is the reason that we not only teach the Word of God, but we need to pray for each other as we hear the Word of God, and that God will give us, expose us, to the spirit of wisdom and knowledge (verse 17) that through the Holy Spirit we would come to know the doctrine to see the practical implications of this. If I know, if I really know in my heart, what is the hope of His calling, that is that when the Lord called me to salvation, He called us for the one specific purpose of changing us and making us like the Lord Jesus Christ. If I really understand that truth, then it is going to have a tremendous bearing upon the way I live from day to day. It is going to have a tremendous bearing upon the way I handle my problems and I deal with my difficulties, because my whole life is going to be pointed in that direction. The same way, if I know that someday, as a part of the inheritance of God God is going to delight in me

and I understand that that is coming and that is according to God's purpose then I am going to do everything that I possibly can by His grace to make sure that even now, even now, God, in a more limited way, is going to be pleased and satisfied with the way I live.

In Paul's writing to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 remember that he says, "We make it our ambition (and I am freely translating what he wrote) that whether present or absent (whether living or dead), whether we are here absent from the Lord or in His presence with the Lord, we might be well-pleasing to Him" (v. 8-9). When the Apostle Paul said that, he was indicating that he really knew what was the hope of God's calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. If you know, then you can look back upon this past week and you, as well as I, can see times when we failed the Lord; but I trust that there has been throughout that week a real desire in your heart to live in such a way that pleases the Lord. You see, if the Lord is pleased with what we are and the Lord is pleased with what we do, then we really do not have to worry about anything else. That is the thing that ought to have the greatest priority with us.

As we learned this morning in our Sunday School lesson, and I want to emphasize this again, that would be a hopeless goal if it were not for the exceeding greatness of God's power, this power which is being manifested toward us who believe. Then, as though that were not enough, Paul says, "according to the working of His mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ," when he exalted Him, set Him at His own right hand, appointed Him to be head over the church. As Dr. John brought out this morning in our Sunday school lesson, it takes the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, the very same power, to make you and to make me what God wants us to be. If you are trying to do that in your own strength, you have tackled a hopeless job. You have to know the power of God.

Now. Let us look at these words. Let me take those words "His power" before we come to the greatness of it. Let us simply talk about "His power."

Paul uses a word here which means the power is uniquely God's power. That means that nobody else has power like that. It is His and it is His alone. Remember, when I say it is His I mean to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is a word which means that the Lord is not dependent upon anyone else or anything else outside of Himself for the exercise of this power. If I had power or if you had power, we know that we are dependent every moment upon God for the exercise of this power. That is not true of God. This power that Paul was talking about is power that is inherent in God Himself and God alone. We are talking about a special kind of power. We are not talking about human power. We are talking about the power which exists in only God. When the Word was given to Zerubbabel, you remember, about the rebuilding of the Temple and all that was to take place when the people went back to captivity, he was told, "Now this task is not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. 4:6). The two words that he used there are words which mean not by might which means personal strength, nor by power, the combined power of all the people of Israel--if you put them all together, you still do not have what is sufficient for the job; but it is by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts. When we talk about power, this morning, we are talking about God's power, that which is uniquely His.

That would be enough. In fact, Paul could have said, as he mentioned this prayer, that ye may know what is His power to us who believe and the go on without adding all these other words to it; but he wanted the Ephesians, and he wants us, to get a glimpse of the actual greatness of this power. When he said "the exceeding greatness of His power," he means that it is absolutely impossible to measure the power of God.

When you buy a car you want to know what kind of power that car has. When our astronauts go into space why they are well-acquainted with the power of that mechanism that is sending them into

space. If you take a trip on an airplane, you want to be sure that there is plenty of power in that plane to get you up and get you back down again safely. We are always measuring power, are we not? When you buy even a little electric motor, someplace it is going to tell you just how much horsepower it has. So we are familiar with measuring power. The tendency is for us to try to calculate how mighty God's power is. When Paul uses those words "exceeding greatness of His power" he means that there is no way that the power of God can be computed in any terms. It is exceeding in its greatness because when you compare it with any other power, or with all other powers combined, the power of God is greater than any of them and greater than all of them put together.

This means that there is no power, then, that can possibly stand in the way of God to keep Him from accomplishing what He intends to do. Some Christians, and I guess all of us at times, behave as though it were possible for us just to do what we want and go in any direction that we want; but remember that God has called you to Himself, you are His child, He is going to have His way in your life. He is going to have His way in my life. All the resistance that I might try to build up to resist, to hold back, what He is seeking to accomplish in my life is destined to failure before it even starts. You see, we are talking about this amazing power of God. We cannot stand in the way. Even by our sins we cannot defeat God. The world cannot defeat Him. The devil and all the forces of hell cannot defeat God. He is invincible. He is unconquerable. He is absolute in His mighty power. What Paul is saying here is just another way of saying that God is omnipotent. He is sovereign. He is the Almighty God. I just run out of words when I try to portray what Paul was saying here; but I hope that I have said enough to give you some idea of what is involved in these words "that ye might know the exceeding greatness of his power."

I encourage you in your reading of Scripture--you just find it everywhere--to meditate on the power of God, learn about the power, pray that you would know the exceeding greatness of His power. When you do, the more you come to understand the power of God, the more that you see that it is within the realm of divine possibility that sometime you are going to be like Jesus Christ, just as someday I am going to be like Jesus Christ.

Now let us look into this a little bit more. Notice that Paul said, "it is to us-ward who believe." Like I mentioned, we could just simply re-arrange the words and say the same thing. It is toward us who believe. He is not talking about the power of God in conquering Satan. He is not talking about the power of God in overcoming the world and overcoming the enemies of His people. He is talking about the exercise of God's power to us who believe, toward us who believe, toward the saints, toward the people of God, toward these people who have been called to the Lord with the one specific hope that they would be like the Lord Jesus. These people who with all their weakness and defilement and infirmity are still destined to become that group of people in whom the Lord finds His delight. It is toward them that His amazing, omnipotent, sovereign, unconquerable power of God is being demonstrated.

What does he mean by this? It is to us, it is toward us, it is in our direction. Literally, using the word he used, it is "unto us." This means that this little preposition "to" that he used is a word that means "it is for us, it is for our benefit, it is to our advantage. Here Paul is talking about what he wants God to do in the exercise of His power to make us what He wants us to be and to make us what we, really, in our hearts want to be as well. Paul was saying that he was praying, not only that they would understand this might, glorious power of God which is greater than any other power, greater than all other powers combined; but he wants us to know that this power is being exercised to our advantage. It is on our side.

This is the reason Paul could say, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Some versions, as I have mentioned in teaching that passage that, "And we know thta God worketh all things together for good," because He is the One; that is, He takes all the circumstances of our lives: our sorrows,

our trials, yes even our sins and our failures and our shortcomings, and in His mighty power He works them together so that the result is good. You know what the good is? It does not mean that He is always going to give me what I want. The good that God is after is conforming us to the Lord Jesus Christ. Under the mighty hand of God, through many different circumstances hit us in the course of our lives, God is so great and overruling in exercising His power in all of those things that there is not a one that proves to be ultimately a hindrance, but under His mighty power they all become a help, the all become that which God is going to use to make us more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yesterday, as I stood by the graveside of Dean Brooten, I was reading from 1 Corinthians 15, there with the family. In that wonderful passage where Paul is dealing with the subject of resurrection, he says this at the end of the chapter, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). You see, you can stand by the graveside of those who are so dear to us that we just feel that we cannot go on in life without them and sing a song of victory and praise and thanksgiving to God because even in a trial like that which is really the greatest trial that we ever go through, we can give God thanks because even there, in the very presence of death, He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. It takes divine power to be assured of a truth like that. This was why the Apostle Paul could write to the Philippian church as he thinks of the exceeding greatness of God's power exercised to our advantage. He says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Have you ever felt like giving up on people? or Have you ever felt like giving up on yourself? God never says, "I give up." God never says, "This is a case I cannot handle; this is a job that is too great for me." God does not know that kind of language. He does not speak in those terms. When He calls sinners to Himself and places within them the Spirit of God that believer with all of His weaknesses and trials and difficulties can be guaranteed that what God has started He is going to finish to perfection. It is because it is dependent upon Him, not dependent upon us.

So we know that we are going to be like the Lord Jesus, do we not? The road may be rough and there may be many a time that we fail the Lord; but, you know, He is going to be bringing us back into line. He is going to be working in our hearts. We cannot possibly get away from Him. The greatest power that has ever existed, or ever will exist--the power of God--is being exercised toward you and toward me. As fantastic as those first two requests are, you and I can humbly say to the glory of God that they are not at all out of the question. Do you see why I say that there is a progression in those? He lets us see the goal first and how marvelous is His purpose in salvation; then, as we begin to contemplate that and say, "You know, it might be for others, but it can never be for me." Paul says, I am also praying that you might know what is the exceeding greatness of His power which is being manifested to your advantage, on your behalf, to see that these purposes are fully accomplished.

But now, we are not through. Let us look at the word "according to the working of his mighty power." I think you would agree with me if Paul had just moved on to verse 20 after he wrote the word "believe" why that would have been sufficient; but he adds these other words. As I said, there is an amazing combination of Greek words for "power" that are clearly evident in our English text as well.

The word that is translated "the working" that he mentions here is the word that has the same root as the word "wrought" here in verse 20: "According to the working of his mighty power, Which he worked," we could translate it, "which he worked in Christ." This is a Greek word from which we get the word "energy". "Energo" is the word. It think you can hear the word "energy" in that.

Why does Paul add this? Let me explain it in this way. It is possible that God could possess all of this marvelous power and yet not be exercising it. Perhaps you have felt sometimes, "you know, the Lord is not really doing anything in my life. I am praying for help and nothing really comes." The

Psalms frequently dealt with this. He just felt that God was away, God was delaying things unnecessarily, and perhaps He was too busy doing something else. We just get kind of irritated with the Lord sometimes. We feel that God could help us, but we cannot see that He is doing anything.

Do you know what is wrong when I do that and when you do that? We are usually looking in the wrong place. This word "according to the mighty working" tells us that this mighty power of God, not to be compared with any other power and more than a match for all of the combined powers of heaven and hell, this divine power, is continually being exercised in my behalf. Remember in John 5:17 that we have the record of those words that the Lord Jesus spoke on one occasion when he said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." If we would give the force of the word there, He is saying, "My Father is continually working and has been working up to this point, and I am continually working." The assurance that we have is not that God just spasmodically at different periods in our lives, at times of crisis and special need, goes to work and says, "Well, Pastor Custis needs my help in a special way at this time so I will give him my help." That is not the way it is. Paul was saying, "I want you to know the mighty power of God and to understand that there is not a moment of any day at any point in your life but what God is at work in your behalf. You may not see what He is doing because you may be looking in the wrong place. It may not be immediately apparent, but here is the truth. He is working. The energy, the force, the power of God is being exercised on behalf of His people continually. He may not be doing what I want Him to do; but He is doing what He wants to do. That means that He is using our circumstances, my circumstances and yours to make us more conscious, perhaps, of our need of Him, and using our circumstances to conform us more and more to what we will eventually be when we are like the Lord Jesus Christ. So God's power is mighty, greater than all other powers, He is able to do what He has purposed to do, and it is being exercised continually.

Psalm 121:4, "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved . . ." (Ps. 121:1-2). You see, even when you are asleep, even when I am asleep, God is not asleep. God is working in your behalf. He is working in my behalf. He never loses sight of the goal. He is going to see that job through to completion.

I have two more words, don't I? "According to the working of His mighty power."

The word "power" here is a word that is different from the word that we had earlier in this same verse (verse 19). This is a word which means "if you still need to be convinced that this power is abundantly affective in relation to an end that is to be gained, or some dominion that is to be exercised."

When I think about becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ, you know, there are many things that the Lord has taught me about Himself. There are many things that the Lord has taught you about Himself. All of us have a certain understanding of what Jesus Christ is like, who He is. That would differ according to our spiritual growth; but, you know, there is not a one of us here today who really knows all that can be known about Jesus Christ. He is far better than I have ever been able to understand, far better than you have ever been able to understand. If we could combine our knowledge, Jesus Christ is far more wonderful than any one of us know. So if my idea of being conformed to Christ is just measuring up to my understanding of what Christ is at my present spiritual level, I am going to fall short of really being what He is like because He is better than I think He is. He is great than I think He is. He is more holy than I think He is. There are things about Jesus Christ that I need to learn. So, by the working of His mighty power, Paul is lifting us above what we understand Jesus Christ to be to that level of what He really is and saying that God is working all the time, not to make us just like we think Jesus Christ is, but to make us just like He actually is and like we are going to see Him in glory. When you and I see Him, the effect upon us is going to be so amazing that at this work of transformation that has been going on since you and

I came to know Jesus Christ is going to be completed in an instant of time. "We shall like Him," (what does John say?) "for we shall see Him as He is." We have never seen Him that way and we will not see Him that way until we get to heaven; but we can still know Him and understand Him better than we do. So here is this word, "God's mighty power" is being manifested so that God by Himself is going to accomplish this work; and you and I are going in His hand to be brought to that wonderful level of what our Lord Jesus Christ is.

As we think about these words, I am going to have to stop here because my time is gone. Next week, the Lord willing, we are going to think of these words in connection with the resurrection of Christ. I am not going to promise that I am going to get to the exaltation next week; but we have these coming: To see this amazing power of God that Paul has been speaking of here in this prayer request and to understand that the Lord is the One Who is going to accomplish these wonderful, wonderful purposes.

Remember that when the children of Israel went across the Red Sea, Moses led them in a great hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God. You find that in Exodus chapter 15. That is really the first psalm in the Bible. If people ask you what the first psalm is why you tell them that it is in Exodus 15. Psalm 1 may be the second of his songs; but remember that the thing that they were singing was this: "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he is become my salvation." Moses wrote that under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. I think what the Spirit of God was showing Moses and what Moses was trying to get across to the people was this: If God is not your strength, He is not going to be your song; and if He is not your strength and your song, He is not going to be your salvation. We sing the mighty power of God, do we not? It is the power of God that has been exercised to transform us from hell-deserving sinners into saints, into the people of God. This is where we need to start. When we are talking about knowing and understanding the power of God, you see, your life is going to be directed and my life is going to be directed by what I understand and what you understand of God's sovereign, almighty power.

One of our hymns says this:

[Pastor, I am sorry I could not find this hymn to get the punctuation correct.]

He by Himself hath sworn  
I on His oath depend  
I shall on eagle's wings  
Upborn to heaven ascend  
I shall behold His face  
I shall His power adore  
And sing the wonders  
Of His grace for ever more.

I trust this morning that you are a child of God rejoicing in the wonderful power of God. If you are not a Christian this morning, let me assure you from what I have said that God has all the power to make you what He wants you to be. I trust that you will find your faith and your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). Only God the Creator could bring the heavens and the earth into existence. Only God the Creator can make a saint out of a sinner. He has done that millions upon millions of times.