

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 1:19-23
Sermon #14
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GOD'S POWER DISPLAYED L. Dwight Custis

Alright. Turn to Ephesians chapter 1. I could probably say to just let your Bible fall open where it will and it will be there in Ephesians chapter 1.

For those of you who are visiting with us this morning, we are considering Paul's prayer here at the end of Ephesians 1 with the three specific requests. We got down to the third request. The three requests are stated in verses 18 and 19. The first one is "that ye may know what is the hope of His calling; The second: "what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints;" third: "what is the exceeding greatness of his pwoer ot us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrough in Christ, when he raised him fro 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 (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 fulness of him that filleth all in all" (vv. 18-23).

Last week we looked at the description of God's power in verse 19, "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power." We learned, among other things, that God's power is possessed by God alone. Of course, when we speak about God in this sense we have reference not only to the Father, but to His Son and to the Holy Spirit. Each One, each member of the Godhead has divine power. Each one has the same power. But, as we examined those words, and I hope you concur with me this morning, we saw that the power of God is really indescribable. It is greater than any other single power in the universe. It is greater than all those powers combined. If it were possible for us to combine into one power all the power of angels and demons and men and nations, the power that is contained in nature itself, there would be no match for the power of God. In fact, we know, do we not, that there is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God, Paul teaches us in Romans 13:1. All creation derives its power from God. Paul reminded the men of Athens that one of their poets recognized this when he said, "We are God's offspring; "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). When God withdraws His power in any created being that being no longer exists. Therefore, any person who thinks that he can withstand God is certainly foolish. God has the greatest of all powers and God Himself is the source of all power.

How can Paul help us to know this power that is indescribable, "the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe?"

He could have chosen several different ways. For example, he might have chosen creation as the greatest example of God's great power. Surely that is an awe- inspiring manifestation of power. God brought this vast universe into being with no raw material to begin with, as the Scriptures say, "He spake and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast." The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that in creation we understand the eternal power and Godhead of God. As great as the work of God in creation, and we are still discovering, are we not, the marvels of this universe in which we live; as great as that work was, that was not His greatest work. We could look at another work. We could look at God's work in the incarnation of Christ, when Christ became a man. It seems that surely this has to be a candidate for one of the greatest works of God and that certainly is. Quoting from Psalm 40, our Lord said to the Father, "A body hast thou prepared me." But here Paul did not say anything about the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into the world as that which would help us to understand the greatness and the majesty and the power of God. Or, think what God has done in

your own life if you are a Christian, the power that God displays in the transformation of a sinner into a child of God. That is actually called in 2 Corinthians 5:17 a new creature, or a new creation, the creative work of God because when God saves us He gives us life that was not there before and lives are completely changed. It is beyond the realm of what we can do for ourselves. Perhaps you have tried various forms of reformation before you realized that your need was regeneration. It is beyond the realm of human science. Only God can do such a work. But that is not really mentioned here, except possibly by implication.

Perhaps we could mention the amazing work of Christ that is still ahead when He comes to reign. He will subdue all nations. He is going to put an end to all war. All men will bow the knee and recognize that He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. How many world rulers have there been who tried to conquer the world and subdue all men, but have utterly failed? This would surely rate as one of the greatest things that God will ever do when He subdues men and nations under His mighty power. Paul did not mention the coming of Christ here, and again, except by possibly implication.

I could mention the miracles, God's miracles in the Old Testament, the miracles of Christ in the Gospels, the miracles of the Holy Spirit working through the apostles in the Book of Acts. All of them beyond what man could ever do. Yet not one of them is specifically mentioned here. Instead, Paul mentioned three things that have to do with Christ. He mentioned the resurrection of Christ; he mentioned the ascension of Christ; and he mentioned the appointment of Christ to be head over all things to the church. Look at those in the text so that you can see them. After describing this mighty power in verse 19, he says, "this is the power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead (number 1), (number 2) and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, (then number 3--verse 22) 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."

Some of the things which I have mentioned this morning as manifestations of the power of God and of Christ are certainly involved in these, but these are the three things that Paul mentions specifically so that if we want to understand, if we want to know the extent and the character of the exceeding greatness of His power, look at His resurrection, look at His ascension, look at the place that the Lord Jesus holds at this very hour over His church which is in the world.

Keep in mind that those important words which we considered last week in verse 19 were all directed toward us. Paul wants us to know the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward, or toward us who believe. When we talk about the resurrection of Christ in this context, we are talking about the resurrection of Christ with respect to us--what it means to us. When we talk about the ascension of Christ, we are thinking about what the ascension of Christ means to us. When we talk about the headship of Christ over the church we are talking about what this means to us, and thinking of this in connection with those two previous requests. I am trying to package this altogether for you this morning. You remember, that his first request was that you might know what is the hope of His calling which is that we would someday be like the Lord Jesus; secondly, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints--that is, God would work in us in such a way that He would delight in us the same way that He delights in His Son: God is our inheritance, but we are His inheritance. When you think of that you realize that that is far beyond what we can do. So the Apostle Paul mentions that we also need to know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, which he wrought in Christ, doing something for us when He raised Christ from the dead, when Christ ascended back to the Father and now that He holds that place of headship over His entire church. Paul was speaking, not about the power of God displayed in a general way, but what God has done in Christ to carry forth His work in the lives of His people to ultimate perfection.

This morning we are going to spend the time talking about the resurrection--the resurrection of Christ, "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." This marvelous power of God is illustrated and displayed in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, displayed in our behalf. Here we see a supreme evidence of His power when He raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. It is

no wonder, it should not surprise us that so many people that we talk to, deny the resurrection of Christ and try to spiritualize that resurrection. There is nothing like the resurrection of Christ in all of human history. It is a work which no one could have done but God. Here Paul definitely says that it was God who raised Christ from the dead. You have him saying the same thing in Romans 6:4. He says it again in Romans 8:11. Let us not be bothered by verses which say that the Lord Jesus Christ raised Himself from the dead. Remember that He said in John 10:18, "I have power to lay down my life; I have power to take it again. This authority have I received from my Father." The Scriptures also teach that the Lord Jesus was quickened by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18). All three members of the Godhead were involved in the resurrection of Christ. He was raised by the Father, raised by the Holy Spirit, He raised Himself from the dead. It was an act of each member of the Godhead and was accomplished by that power which the Apostle Paul fittingly describes as "exceedingly great."

In speaking of the resurrection of Christ, I want to do it under three headings this morning. First of all, What are we talking about? What do we have in mind when we talk about the resurrection of Christ? Secondly, What did the resurrection of Christ require? Then, the third thing I want us to look at just briefly is, What was accomplished through the resurrection of Christ? Remember that we are thinking now of how we have been benefitted by the resurrection of Christ and how our hope that someday we will be like Christ and someday we can be the delight of God the Father--all of this can be fully realized only because God has seen fit to manifest His divine power in raising Jesus Christ from the dead. We are going to add to that His ascension. We will talk about that, the Lord willing, next Sunday morning, and the following week I will take up the subject of His headship over the church.

The resurrection of Christ: What it means.

I would like to invite all of you to come to the Tuesday Bible Class which we will be starting in a couple of weeks. There we are going to learn more about the resurrection of Christ as we consider the last chapters of Luke's Gospel. For this morning, I want to be clear, just in case there might be even one person here who does not understand what we are talking about when we speak of the resurrection of Christ.

We are talking about the fact that Jesus Christ was really, actually, in a physical sense, raised from the dead. It was a physical, bodily resurrection. There were spiritual matters involved, to be sure, but Jesus Christ came back to life from the dead. He had the body in which nails had placed scars in His hands and feet, and where the mark of the sword could be seen in his side. Jesus Christ died a real death. Jesus Christ was raised back to life from that death. This is what the Bible teaches. The idea that the resurrection of Christ was nothing more than a reference to the way the Lord lived on in the memory of His followers is a blatant denial of the teaching of the Word of God. Jesus Christ really died and Jesus Christ was really raised from the dead.

There was one unique thing about the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in contrast with other resurrections because, if you have read your Bible, and most of you have, you know that Jesus Christ was not the first one to be raised from the dead. Others had been raised from the dead previous to this; but He was the first one to be raised from the dead never to die again. Romans 6:9-10 has this to tell us, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once (the word means "once for all"--once never to be repeated): but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." I hope that we all understand this. Even if you do not believe it, at this point at least, I want you to know that this is what the Bible teaches--a real, physical resurrection. Nothing else could possibly have satisfied God.

Secondly, what did it require? We can obviously see that it required the sovereign power of God to raise the Lord Jesus from the dead. The power of Rome was against it. The power of the Jews was against it. You remember how they sealed the tomb so that, though they did not believe that Jesus was going to be raised from the dead, they did not want the disciples to get in, steal away His body,

and then say that He had been raised from the dead. But all the forces of hell were arrayed in one mighty show to keep Jesus Christ in the grave. What a pathetic spectacle they give us, do they not, as though mere man could prevent the resurrection of Christ by sealing the tomb. We sang, this morning, did we not, "Vainly they seal His tomb." They set a guard to make sure that not one could steal away His body. However, while they were guarding the tomb, while the stone was still closing the entrance to the tomb, the Lord Jesus came out. Remember that the stone was not rolled away from the tomb to let the Lord Jesus Christ out; the stone was rolled away from the tomb so that the disciples could get it. The death of Christ was not an ordinary death. It was necessary that Jesus Christ be raised from the dead. His death was an atoning death. His death was a substitutionary death. Jesus Christ came to the earth to die for sinners, and His primary object in dying for them was to offer a sacrifice that would be acceptable to God. If this had not been accomplished, that is, if God had not been thoroughly pleased with the work of His Son, perhaps the Lord would never have been raised. I do not think that we can say for sure. It goes without saying that when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead it meant that God was pleased with His sacrifice. Therefore, He was the One Who had to raise Him from the dead. Whenever people were raised from the dead, either by the Lord, by prophets, or by apostles, it has always been by the power of God; but in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ He was raised from the dead never to die again, and He came forth, victorious over the grave and over death and over sin itself.

What did it accomplish?

Remember, and I want to say this until you really get this into your own thinking concerning this passage of Scripture. We are thinking of the exercise of God's power in the resurrection of Christ in the way in which it is going to benefit you and me, those of us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What did He accomplish for us when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead? What did He do for us that was a result of the resurrection of Christ?

I would be very foolish myself to think that in the course of just a few minutes I could adequately describe the resurrection of Christ with all of its benefits and with all of its blessings; but let me point out in the time that remains how the power of God was displayed in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and what that means.

First of all, and I think I will just mention three things, this morning; but there are so many things that could be said about Christ's resurrection. I think that most of you will understand that we are just simply tasting perhaps some of the choice parts of this great truth in the few minutes that we have this morning.

The resurrection of Christ means that Christ had made full provision for our justification. Justification, of course, includes the forgiveness of our sins, the removal of our sins. You see, the hope of our calling was that God could, on behalf of those for whom the Lord Jesus Christ died, bring them to a place in their own experience and existence, ultimately when we stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, when we are going to be exactly like He is. We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. The one thing that keeps me from being like the Lord Jesus, and the one thing that keeps you from being like the Lord Jesus, is sin. Sin has to be removed. Sin has to be atoned for. Paul, writing in Romans 4:25, says that our Lord "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."

How are we going to reconcile this when he also says, in that same Book of Romans, that we are justified by His blood? That is, pointing to His Cross, to His sacrifice? Paul says, "We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son." You know, we cannot really preach the resurrection of Christ without preaching the death of Christ; but we cannot adequately understand the full meaning of the resurrection of Christ until we understand what happened when He died on the Cross. So, as

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, the resurrection shows that that work was finished, that that work was pleasing to God, that nothing needed to be added to what Jesus Christ did in dying for sinners. God, by the resurrection of Christ, was bearing witness to the finished work of salvation. It is through the resurrection that we understand that we can become new creatures in Christ. Every believer who understands what God was doing when He raised Christ from the dead must have assurance in His heart when He sees what the death of Jesus Christ meant to the Father and the testimony that He has given for us by raising His Son from the dead, that that work was finished. "Tis done, the great transaction is done." There is nothing that needs to be added to what Christ has done. We put our trust in Him and in His work to find our perfect acceptance with God.

Secondly, the resurrection of Christ--by the resurrection of Christ--we have, and this perhaps is the most appropriate as far as the subject of this prayer is concerned, present deliverance from sin.

Will you turn to the Book of Romans chapter 6. I want to read just a few verses from that wonderful chapter. I said a moment ago that that which keeps us from being like the Lord is our sin. Our sin had to be atoned for and had to be forgiven. Our sin had to be cleansed. We have that in the work of our Lord Jesus and the testimony of that in the resurrection of Christ. Notice this also, verse 4: Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if (since) we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man (our old nature) is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:1- 14).

Now. In the death of Christ the power of sin was broken in our lives. God does not take away from us the possibility of sinning, I am sure all of us understand this by our own experience--it is still possible for a child of God to sin; but there is no reason why a child of God should be kept in bondage to sin. There is no reason that he cannot experience deliverance from sin. The possibility is always there; but by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ-- and this is what the Apostle Paul was saying--we died with him, we were raised with Him, and "as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

If you were at camp this week, you know that both Tom and Terry in the excellent messages that they brought to us, emphasized the fact, and I concur heartily with them, that it is impossible--absolutely impossible--for a person to experience salvation from the penalty of his sin and yet go on living in exactly the same way. It is impossible, utterly impossible. If we have come to know Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we are new creatures. We owe this deliverance, not only to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we owe this deliverance to the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul, there in Ephesians chapter 1 is praying that we might know the power that was exercised in our behalf when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, because, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, He did that which was going to make it possible for us ultimately to realize the hope of His calling and for us to become the kind of inheritance in whom God could find all of His delight. I cannot do it for myself. You cannot do it for yourself. God has made provision for us in exercising the power that He did to raise Jesus Christ from the dead.

There is one other thing that I want you to see about the resurrection of Christ in our behalf. This

is related to the hope of our calling and this is related to the fact that God is going to find His inheritance in us and God, someday, is going to find all of His delight in us. The resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees the resurrection of every believer. The Lord Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19).

When Paul was writing to the church at Ephesus, you know, he was a prisoner in Rome. At the same time that he wrote to the Ephesian church, and maybe he intended for this to be a circular letter, he was writing to the Colossian letter, he was writing to the Philippian church, and he was writing to one of the members of the Colossian church, a man by the name of Philemon. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that in Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and Philemon we would find some continuity of thought. We could see that what was in his heart as he wrote to the Ephesian believers was in his heart when he wrote to the Philippian believers. Among the things that he wrote to the Philippian believers was something that fits right in with his prayer for the Ephesian believers. You find it at the end of Philippians chapter 3 where he says, "Our conversation (the King James says that the original word means 'citizenship') is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). We do not go visit His tomb with the realization that His body is in the tomb. We are not even sure where His tomb was. There are differences of opinion on that. But Jesus Christ is not in the grave. We are looking for Him from heaven. He is in heaven because He was raised from the dead and He was exalted to the Father's right hand, as we are going to learn next week. Here Paul says, "We are looking for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body (that means this body that is subject to death, this body that is still capable of sin, this body that is still unlike the Lord's body), that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, (How?) according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:20-21). You see, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ guarantees our resurrection and our resurrection is going to mean the fulfilment of the hope of His calling and is going to mean that then we are going to be, according to the riches of His grace, the inheritance in whom God can find all of His delight. Do you see a little more clearly this morning why it was so important for Jesus Christ to be raised from the dead?

I have only touched upon a few of the aspects of this wonderful truth. The hope that God had in calling us would have never been realized if Jesus Christ had not been raised from the dead. My hope that someday I am going to be like Him, your hope that someday you are going to be like Him, we will never be able to sin again, we will never be able to do anything that is displeasing to God, we will never even be tempted to do anything that is displeasing to God, all of that is directly traceable to the death of Jesus Christ and to the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul says, "I want you to know that His resurrection guarantees your perfection, and that the power that God displayed in raising His son from the dead, overcoming every obstacle that stood in the way, is the same power that is being exercised in your life and in my life as the children of God to make us like Jesus Christ. That is our hope. Thank God we can look forward to that with absolute certainty because we have a Saviour Who has been raised from the dead, Who sits at the right hand of the Father, and Who someday is coming and He is going to change us that we may be just like He is.

I trust as we come to the Lord's Table this morning that this hope may mean perhaps more than it has ever meant to us before when we realize that it is guaranteed to us, absolutely guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.