

Series on the Book of Ephesians  
Ephesians 1:19-23  
Sermon #15  
September 11, 1988

## GOD'S POWER IN CHRIST'S EXALTATION L. Dwight Custis

Alright. Take your Bibles, please, and turn to the Book of Ephesians chapter 1.

The first chapter of Ephesians is really a chapter of prayer. Verse 2 is a prayer. It stands by itself. Verses three through fourteen is a doxology which can be considered by itself where Paul is praising the Lord for the blessings of salvation. Then, beginning with verse fifteen and going down to the end of the chapter we have his intercession for the believers at Ephesus. If we are right in saying that this may have been a circular letter that was expected to go to a number of churches, then this was his prayer for each one of them. It is a prayer that we can pray for each other. It is a prayer that I hope you will pray for me. There is nothing better for us to do than to pray the prayers that we find in the Word of God. I am sure that is one reason that they are there.

Now, we have been spending a good amount of time on this seeking to look at the various aspects of truth that Paul is dealing with in his prayer. Just for the benefit of those of you who have not been with us, let me mention that his burden was that God would give them "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him." That is, I believe the Word "Spirit" there should be capitalized. He is speaking about the Spirit of God Who teaches us the truth, Who enables us to see the truth, and Who reveals to us God in all of His wonder and in all of His glory. In order to do that, in order to see that, in order to understand these truths, the eyes of our hearts really need to be opened. So, according to this prayer we may know three things. They are easy to see because they are prefaced with the word "what" in each instance. First, "what is the hope of His calling": that is, what God's purpose was when He called us to Himself. Secondly, "what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." Not, for the moment, our inheritance in Him, but His inheritance in us. We have discussed the meaning of that important statement. Then, thirdly, and this is the one that he enlarges upon the most because it is involved in the realization of those first two requests, he is praying that they might know "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power," when he did three things: first, "Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead", and second, "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 third, "hath put all things under his feet (that is, under the feet of Christ), and gave him (Christ) to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

We have been discussing in a very limited way, the power that God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead. This morning we are thinking about that latter part of verse 20 and then all of verse 21, "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." So, this morning, we are concerned with the ascension of Christ and what has been referred to many, many times by theologians and Bible teachers as our Lord's present session in heaven.

I was very interested when I was attending seminary many years ago to find that of all of the various aspects of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ less is said about His present ministry in heaven in the various theologies than is said about any other aspect of His work. In fact, some theologians do not say anything about our Lord's present ministry in heaven: where He is now, what He is doing, and why He is doing it. Therefore, this is the truth that the Apostle Paul is setting before us in these words. We are talking about that which combined with the resurrection of Christ constitutes His

exaltation, His glorification, where He is now at the right hand of the Father. Isaiah, that great Old Testament prophet predicted this of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he wrote, "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." You find those words at the beginning of that great Messianic passage in Isaiah 52:13. Our Lord Jesus prayed about His exaltation in His prayer recorded for us in John 17. These were His words found in verses 1 and 5 of that chapter: "Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."

In writing his gospel, John Mark gave this account of the ascension of our Lord. He said, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19) Luke stated it this way in his gospel, "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51). And Luke wrote in the Book of Acts that when the Lord Jesus had finished speaking the things that he was saying to His disciples, "While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

After Paul had spoken to the Philippians about the death of Christ in his epistle to them, you remember that he said, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). Even in this epistle to the Ephesians in the fourth chapter and the eighth verse you read, "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men." So the ascension, the glorification, the exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly taught and well-supported in the Word of God.

Now think for just a moment of the miracle of it all. We live in what has been called the Space Age, but no man can do even today what our Lord did almost two thousand years ago. He ascended into heaven through the farthest reaches of the universe without a space suit, without a space capsule, without a ground crew to monitor his flight, dressed in clothes like He wore while He was living in this world He ascended back into heaven. It is really a miraculous thing, isn't it? You and I have never seen anything like this and nothing like this is going to take place again until, as the Scriptures say, the Lord "will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). We are going to antique all of those space vehicles very quickly when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

Paul, writing to Timothy, said in his first epistle, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). So the ascension is Christ is an essential part of the Christian faith.

Now, that we might know how glorious His ascension was, Paul said here in our text that it was "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world... [age: that is the Greek word "ion" that contemplates the world from a standpoint of time. Actually, "world" is a good translation, but he is thinking about the ages of time; and when he speaks of this age he probably has in mind this period that we call time. The day in which Paul lived, the day in which we live are all a part of that age in this sense--but the age which is to come would speak of eternity.] So he is "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."

We have five words here, all of which are expressive of the power and authority as we are familiar with and lots of power and authority that we are not familiar with. You remember that at least two

of these words are used in chapter 6 of Ephesians. Perhaps you want to look over there for just a moment. The first two words, principality and power, in chapter 6 verse 12 of Ephesians, Paul is talking about our conflict with unseen demonic powers. He said, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers..." These are the first two words that we have in our text for this morning. Then he goes on to say, "...against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Quite obviously, when he uses these words "principalities and powers", in verse 12 he is talking about evil principalities and powers. He is talking about demonic principalities and powers. He is talking about the forces of Satan himself. So the context here shows that what he is speaking of has to do with evil principalities, evil powers, the rulers of the darkness of this evil world, spiritual wickedness in high places. But, when we look at it in chapter one in the prayer, while these words include those evil principalities and powers, I think we are limiting what the Apostle Paul was actually saying if we say that here also it only speaks of evil principality, evil power, evil might, evil dominion, and evil names. Paul here is not limiting himself to the domain of Satan and all of the fallen angels and demons, but he is saying here in the realm of men and the realm of nations and in the realm of good angels, the elect angels who have not fallen. So we actually have three categories. We have that of human beings. We have that of the elect angels. We have that of the fallen angels. Among all of these where principality and power and might and dominion and every name is named, our Lord Jesus Christ was not only exalted to the position above them, but far above them, far above all principality, all power, all might, all dominion, and then, of course it is there, every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.

Now let me just take a minute or two on each one of these so that we will understand, or come as close to understanding these as we can. Before I do, remember that when we looked at verse 19 and the beginning of verse 20 I said that we have one of the greatest combinations of different words that have to do with power in that verse and a half. He is talking about the mighty power of God. "What is the exceeding greatness of His power...according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ..." There he is speaking of the mighty power of God. It took His power to raise Jesus Christ from the dead. It took His power to take the Lord Jesus back into heaven itself. It is through that power of God that the Lord Jesus Christ has been made the head of the church. When we come to our text this morning, while we are not trying to distinguish between the power which God has and the power which the Lord Jesus Christ has, yet these expressions have to do with Christ. Again you have a marvelous combination of words of authority, words of power, and they are all related to the Lord Jesus Christ so that if He is above all of these, if He is above all demons, if He is above all men, if He is above all nations and every name that is named, not only now but forever, then Jesus Christ stands as supreme over all. He is greater than all. I do not know of any passage that more clearly teaches the absolute sovereignty of our Lord Jesus Christ than this passage does. You see, this is part of the conquest, a part of the victory that our Lord Jesus Christ obtained and gained when He died on the Cross. His enemies thought that they were through with Him, especially when they put Him in the tomb and sealed the tomb. They felt that that would surely be the end, but God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, and there He exercises greater authority than He has delegated to men or angels.

Now, just a word about these. The word "principality" is a word which speaks of anyone who holds the first place in power. It means a mighty ruler. As I have been saying to you this morning, it can mean a mighty earthly ruler or it can mean a mighty heavenly ruler. When I speak of heavenly rulers I am speaking of angels, whether good or bad. Satan certainly falls into this category. He exercises, doesn't he, at this very moment a great deal of power. Paul says more about that in chapter 6, as we have seen. The word "power", the second word, is the Greek word for authority. God has delegated authority to different men, to different nations, angels, we read in Romans, don't we, the powers that be are ordained of God. God has delegated these. There are many of them in our world and in our universe. Those who have authority have the freedom to exercise the power that has been delegated to them. We sometimes wonder about the power of men, sometimes the power of the authority that is exercised by men is a very wicked power and people suffer under it, but nevertheless we are talking about this generally. Might is power which one holds because of who he is. Consequently,

we are talking about kings; we are talking about rulers of the nations; we are talking about the nations themselves that may exercise a great deal of power in connection with others.

Dominion is lordship. It seems that Paul may have been thinking here about the extent of a person's power. There have been men who have sought to conquer the whole world and men who have been successful to a great degree. That would fall into this category. You can see that there is some overlapping of these terms. It is just like Paul did not want to exclude anything. Wherever you see authority, wherever you see power, wherever you see sovereignty, wherever you see that which causes men to be fearful because of the power that others exercise over them why never think of those except you think of them as themselves being under the sovereign authority and power of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then, of course, every name that is named. You know, sometimes individual people have power that goes beyond their position, one nation will conquer other nations. Hitler had this. The Russians have this to some extent over the Iron Curtain nations. The Caesars had this. The great world conquerors had this. There are just many illustrations, aren't there, of those great names. Every name that is named. We mention these names and it immediately speaks to us of authority, power, dominion, principality, often suffering, often great wickedness, because it seems like the more power a man gets why the more corrupt he becomes. So we have a situation here, as I have said that is similar to verse 19; but whereas verse 19 had to do with the power of God, the mighty power of God, here we are talking about the sovereign power of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we consider what Paul was saying here God has raised him to a place where he has authority over men and angels regardless of how great they might be, not only for time, but for all eternity. He is saying that none is greater than our Lord is now and none will ever be greater than He is. So no nation, no group of nations, no individual human beings, great world leaders, or group of world leaders, because sometimes they have gotten together and gone against other nations, no angel or group of angels, not even the devil himself and all of the forces of hell can begin to compare in their power with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me say what I said about verse 19 and the beginning of verse 20. If you could harness all of the authority of men and nations and the good angels and demons and somehow combine all of those powers and direct it against the Lord Jesus Christ, He still would be greater than all. Far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named, not only for time, but also for all eternity.

This is what the Lord Jesus had in mind when He spoke those words concerning the evangelization of the world. He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, go ye therefore..." You know, the nations have stood against the ministry of the Gospel. There are places in our world today where people are not free to witness for Christ. There are nations that will not accept missionaries to come in and proclaim the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, if we are looking at missions, if we are looking at our mission in the world, even the obstacles that many of you face when you would like to witness to your family members and your loved ones and barriers are set up that you cannot knock down. It seems at times that men are being successful in resisting the plan and purpose of God in standing against the proclamation of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. When we are faced with circumstances like that and overwhelmed with the obstacles that stand in the way, remember this great statement of our Lord Jesus Christ, "all authority in heaven and in earth is given unto me." As Isaiah said so long ago, "nations are a drop in the bucket to Him." God's purposes are going to be accomplished. If all the forces, if all the principalities, if all of the power, if all of the dominions, if all of the great names of the earth took their stand against the Lord and His anointed, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 2, what is the Lord's reaction? "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh." "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh." You see, if you are on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are on the winning side. You are on the victory side. He is going forth conquering and to conquer. The Apostle Paul, as he speaks of our understanding this and seeing that God exercised His mighty power in raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and giving Him that exalted position above all of the authorities and powers over the earth, then remember in the light of those first two requests: "that we might know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance"

in the saints." This mighty God and this mighty Lord Jesus Christ are perfectly sufficient to overcome every obstacle that stands in the way of your becoming like Christ and my becoming like Christ. They are able to overcome every obstacle that stands in the way, making us a people in whom God can find all of His joy. God's purposes are going to be accomplished to His own glory.

Having said that, let me just say in the concluding moments that we have this morning, let me ask and answer two questions.

One is, What is Jesus Christ doing in heaven? and second, What should this great truth mean to you and to me as His people? because this is a marvelous truth, isn't it. So many of the Lord's people are missing great blessings because they feel that the Lord may be sovereign in this thing or that thing or the other, but they have not seen that the Lord is sovereign in everything. The Lord is sovereign in the work of salvation. The Lord is sovereign in our sanctification. The Lord is sovereign in the affairs of the nations of the earth. God has everything under control. You and I do not need to worry about that. But, what is He doing at the Father's right hand, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named?

Well, you could answer that question I am sure in many respects, and I am not going to try to give it a full answer. In fact, one answer, at least, that I am going to suggest I am going to delay until we deal with that passage in the fourth chapter. But the Word teaches, doesn't it, that the Lord Jesus Christ is there as our intercessor. "Wherefore he is able also to save to the uttermost (which means completely) all them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25). You see, the person who is worried about his salvation does not understand the complete sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ and somehow has never been able to enter in to the joy of knowing that Jesus Christ is at the right hand of the Father praying for you and for me. That is a wonderful truth, isn't it? If any man sin, is God going to cast him out of his presence? No. He is speaking of believers. If any man sin, we have an advocate. That word "advocate" is identically the same word that is translated "comforter" in John 14, 15 and 16. We have a paraclete. We have One Who defends our case, Who moves in our behalf at the Father's right hand. Jesus Christ is interceding for us at the Father's right hand. Though you may not be conscious of any person on earth who is praying for you, Jesus Christ never forgets you and He continues to plead your cause and intercede in your behalf before the Father.

The passage in Ephesians chapter four verse 8 says that "He ascended up on high...and gave gifts unto men." He is dispensing gifts. I am going to hold off on that because we are going to get into the church next week, or the subject of the church, and we will eventually get to that fourth chapter, if the Lord does not come too soon. So I am going to reserve it until that time. But, He is there dispensing gifts. He is there dispensing gifts. Something that is very important for us.

Another thing the Lord is doing He talked about when He was here on earth. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many dwelling places: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). So that at the Father's right hand, and do not think of God and the Lord Jesus Christ as sitting in a couple of chairs in heaven, remember there is just such a vastness about the deity, but He is there at the Father's right hand preparing a place for you and for me. When that work is finished, don't ask me to explain that because that is beyond me, He is going to come and take us to be with Him where He is. That is what we are looking forward to, isn't it?

Let me mention just one more. In Hebrews chapter 10, and you remember that there are four passages in the Book of Hebrews (there are more than that that speak of His ascension), basically that speak of His ascension. One is in chapter one where He is seated at the Father's right hand. The second one is in chapter eight verse one. The third is in chapter ten verses twelve and thirteen. And finally, in Hebrews chapter twelve and verses one and two: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of

our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The one in Hebrews chapter ten says, "But this man (speaking of Christ), after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool" (vv. 12-13). You see, some day, though men have refused to believe this, some men are going to see when the Lord talks about every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, remember that in Philippians chapter two which was written about the same time that Ephesians was written, Paul gave us that wonderful statement, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is (after all) Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11). As Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father this morning, He is anticipating that day when His enemies will become the footstool for His feet. Thank God that day is coming. Jesus Christ is going to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, as we read in the Book of The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

What should this great truth mean to us? Well, I am sure that you have sensed the blessing and the peace and the joy that comes from even knowing this. Let me ask you as I close this morning to turn with me to a passage of Scripture, again in the Book of Hebrews chapter four. I want you to see the encouragement that we can get from this. This is especially appropriate for us when we are thinking of our Day of Prayer on this coming Wednesday. The last three verses of Hebrews chapter four. This is what we read: "Seeing then that we have a great high priest (that is what the Lord Jesus Christ is at the Father's right hand as a great high priest), that is passed into the heavens (the Greek says: passed through the heavens)..." You know, the Bible talks about three heavens: the heaven that surrounds the earth. We look into the heavens and we see the sun and the moon and the stars. The third heaven is where God is. It would seem just by implication though this is never specifically taught that the second heaven must be the domain of Satan Himself, the angelic beings. That is where there has been rebellion as well as rebellion on the earth. So when the writer of Hebrews says that He has passed through the heavens, he meant that as He came forth from the grave conquering death, entering into life, in order to get to the third heaven He had to get through the second heaven. If men could not control Him and keep Him here on earth, then certainly the forces of hell, the demons and Satan himself would have done everything that they possibly could to keep the Lord Jesus from going to the third heaven. But here the Word is that He has passed through the heavens overcoming every obstacle. "...Jesus the Son of God... Since He has made that conquest, "...let us hold fast our profession (confession). For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we re, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16).

I am sure that most of you could quote that sixteenth verse if I would give you an opportunity. That is a verse we love, isn't it? It is a verse that keeps us praying. It is a verse that encourages us in our prayers. But, have you ever noticed before, that the promise of that verse, the assurance that we are granted in that verse is directly related to the ascension of Jesus Christ--because we have a high priest at the Father's right hand Who has passed through the heavens, Who has been given a name that is above every name, Who is sovereign over all principality and might and dominion, on earth and in the heavens itself, among all created beings. Therefore, let us come with confidence to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need; because if our Lord Jesus Christ could do all tht He had to do and did it by the enabling power of God Himself to get back to the right hand of the Father, then there is not any need that you and I have in our lives that is too great for Him. That is wonderful, isn't it? That is only one thing that this should mean to us. But this truth certainly ought to delight our hearts.

Let me close with the words of this hymn:  
Jesus, hail, enthroned in glory  
There forever to abide

All the heavenly hosts adore thee  
 Seated at thy Father's side  
 There for sinners thou art pleading  
 There thou dost our place prepare  
 Ever for us interceding  
 'Til in glory we appear  
 Worship, honor, power and blessing [Pastor, I am sorry that I  
 Thou art worthy to receive was unable to find this  
 Loudest praises without ceasing hymn in the books that  
 Meet it is for us to give I have--so I am sure that  
 Help ye bright angelic spirit it is not correct.]  
 Bring your sweetest, noblest lays  
 Help to sing our Saviour's merits  
 Help to chant Emanuel's praise

I trust that that is the reaction in your heart this morning as we have seen these wonderful truths concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, the mighty victor, seated at the Father's right hand waiting the day when men and nations, angelic beings, all will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

If He is not your Lord this morning, I trust that you will put your faith and your trust in Him. He is the only Saviour. If any of us can be of help to you in answering questions that you might have or giving direction to you, we would be delighted to have that privilege after the close of the service.

Shall we bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank you this morning for our Lord Jesus Christ, One Who has a name  
 greater than the name ever given to any man, any nation, any angelic being. Father, we marvel  
 that in your wonderful grace, you in your great majesty and power and perfection and glory  
 would ever condescend to send  
 your only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for us, to be raised again, to be  
 received back into heaven to be our Lord and our Saviour, the Sovereign in our lives, the One  
 Who will one day reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and all men will do obeisance  
 before Him. How we marvel at your grace. We are ashamed, dear Father, that we have ever  
 doubted your love or doubted your power or doubted your wisdom. Help us to trust you  
 more and to glorify you with the lives that we live. And Father, should there be any here  
 this morning who are without Christ, may the Holy Spirit who turned our hearts to yourself turn  
 their hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ. How wonderful it would be, Father, if, even during this  
 service, some have come to realize that you have been dealing with them and that they  
 have been drawn into a living relationship with your dear Son. We pray, Lord, that as we  
 are dismissed today following the singing of our hymn, we pray that we may go from this place  
 rejoicing in what Christ is, rejoicing in His exalted authority, rejoicing that He is our Saviour, our  
 Lord and our Friend. In His precious name we pray, Amen.