7-1-18

Ephesians 1:18-23

In Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians, we have considered the hope of God’s calling. While this hope and calling remain with us throughout our Christians lives, these are what brought us to Christ. He called to us and so, we hoped in Him. Next, we considered the riches of the glory of His inheritance. Certainly, we receive some of that inheritance during this life, but it is primarily what we look forward to when we enter eternity with Jesus. Paul covers the intervening time of our lives with the last part of the prayer: power.

We must be very careful here because the idea of power goes straight to our heads. In our fallen human condition, we can’t handle power unless we are restrained by God’s Holy Spirit. It is important to notice here in Paul’s prayer that it is God’s power. “And what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.” This idea of power was of great concern to the people of Asia minor during this time. It is also of concern to us today.

Remember that at the time of Paul’s writing, Christianity was breaking into an entirely pagan culture. They believed in powerful deities who had control over their lives. They worshiped these gods out of fear and hoped they could entice them to look favorably on them, their families, and their crops. Magic abounded; there were large numbers of scrolls and parchments devoted to casting spells. Those who were magicians were feared because it was believed that if you crossed them, they may cast an evil spell on you. Evil spirits were thought to be everywhere, just waiting to cause trouble. Magic was thought to be the way to ward off these demons.

It was necessary for the Asian Christians to know that the power of God far exceeded any evil powers, real or imagined. They didn’t have to fear ignoring the goddess Artemis, whose temple prevailed over Ephesus. They didn’t need to be concerned about others threatening to cast some evil spell on them. They could throw away the little figurines that guarded their houses from demons. They no longer needed to bow to or make offerings to all the idols that were prevalent throughout their towns.

For us today, it is somewhat different. I say “somewhat” because more people, in developed countries, are turning to witchcraft and satanism. There is a huge market for crystals and little figures that people use to align their powers and pray to. A couple weeks ago, during the summer solstice, crowds of people gathered around Stonehenge to worship nature; people who consider themselves druids and pagans. Every year, at each solstice and at each equinox, people gather to dance around and practice the idolatry of the created.

Perhaps more important to us is the powers we face in daily trying to live Christian lives. Laws are being passed that make it more difficult to maintain a Christian culture, in fact, impossible. The god of diversity has taken over the world of business and industry. The god of diversity says that all things are okay except Christianity. The fact that this is hypocritical makes no difference. In the words of the old song, “The devil wears the hypocrite’s shoes”. And certainly, demonic forces do exist which ceaselessly hurl fiery darts at us.

So, we face powers of law, of commerce, of agendas that are entirely self-serving and opposed to God, and the forces of satan himself. We need to be assured that the power of God is greater than these powers and Paul is assuring us of that here. God’s power is of “surpassing greatness”. There is no other power that can touch it.

Later on, in Ephesians 6:12, Paul makes a very important statement about who our enemy is:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

We will study this verse in detail when we get to it, but it’s important to keep in mind now. Our real fight is not against people, it is not against institutions; it is a spiritual battle against evil forces. This brings it home to us that our own strength is useless; it all depends on the power of God. Our weapons become prayer, because God has ordained that as a way of getting things done; and the Gospel, because it is by the Gospel that the Kingdom of God increases. We must also know God’s word; by it we know His will and thus we know what to pray; by it we know the Gospel so we can spread it; and by it we can discern evil so as not to be fooled by it.

And see where this mighty power of God is directed. It is directed “toward us who believe” or “for us who believe”. This unmatched power of God, is in our favor; it is in the favor and for the good of Christians. Ultimately, it is so that we can live a Christian life of giving glory to God. It allows us to have faith in Jesus Christ and love our fellow Christians.

It is so important to understand that this is not power that God gives to you. It is the power of God working through us for our good and for His glory. This is the power that gets us through this life; it carries us from that time we receive hope and accept His calling until the time comes for us to receive that wonderful inheritance He has for us. Once again, we are reminded that our salvation is all from God. Even when we accept Christ, our sin nature is still too strong and we are too weak. If it wasn’t for the sustaining power of God, we would turn right back to our old ways of life. We have no room to boast.

Paul goes on to speak of the unsurpassed power of God. In the second half of verse 19, He tells us that our calling, inheritance, and His power are according to “the working of the strength of His might”. This is why we can rest easy in the knowledge that we belong to God and that He holds us in His hand. There is no one powerful enough to snatch us from Him; we are safe. Come what may, no matter how the powers that be rage and carry on, no matter what we may suffer, God has us. It isn’t up to us or according to our own strength; it is all God.

Paul then tells about three ways in which God has demonstrated His power. And notice that according to verse 20, God brought all these things about in Christ. He raised Jesus from the dead; He made Jesus sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, putting all things under His feet; and God has made Jesus the head over all things for the church, which is His body. Man cannot defeat death. It is coming for all of us. But God defeated death through Jesus Christ. Man cannot defeat sin. Because of our fallen nature, we fight a constant battle against sin and sometimes we lose. But on the cross, God defeated sin through Jesus, and now Jesus is enthroned above all evil forces. This demonstrates that God is able to rescue us; His power is sufficient.

What incredible power God displayed when He raised Jesus from the dead. Death is so very final to us; when someone dies, we can’t back things up and have them again; they won’t come back in a few days or weeks. They are gone. But God can change this. He did this with Jesus. First, God stopped the natural process of decay according to the prophecy in Psalm 16:10.

For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol;  
Nor will You allow Your Holy One toundergo decay.

Of course, neither did God abandon Jesus’ soul to Sheol because it was brought back and reunited with His body. God brought Jesus back to life. He did what no human-being can do. Further, the life God gave back to Jesus is everlasting. He will never die again; death no longer has any power over Him. God’s power is greater and God offers to work that power in us. Believe in Jesus Christ in accordance with God’s word and not only will our souls be saved from eternal destruction, but our bodies will be restored, forever beyond the reach of death.

This is of great comfort to us; although we have no power over death, God has complete control and is stronger, so He can give us life, even after death has struck. We need not fear the power of death because God has shown that He will work His power of life in His children.

The next demonstration of God’s mighty power is taking His Son, Jesus, and seating Him in heaven at His right hand. When Jesus became a man, He was subject to everything that any ordinary human-being is subject to. He had to eat, he had to sleep. He became physically tired. In His body He dealt with pain, with aging, and eventually, with death. He was subject to temptation, although He never gave in to it. But by God’s power, Jesus was raised above all that. His new physical body is no longer subject to the things of the earthly body. By the power of God, He was brought up from the earth and into heaven where He has been given complete authority.

All the forces that tempted Him are now completely subject to Him personally. God continues His plan of summing up all things in Christ. He has been lifted above all powers; not only the demonic forces of satan, but even all the angels, and certainly over all mankind. All those who turn to Jesus as Saviour and those in heaven who never turned against Him will be ruled by Him for eternity in love. All those who remain rebellious against the lamb will be in His presence forever, suffering the torment of the lake of fire. That’s in Revelation 14:9-11.

Again, this is great comfort to us as Christians. We can’t avoid death and evil, but God has overcome both through Jesus Christ. So, we will overcome death and evil also; but strictly by the power of God and through Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that in some way, we will also rule with Him, but it gives us no details. That means that we’re not to spend much time thinking about that. It is enough to know that we will be saved by Christ and ruled by Him.

Thirdly, because of these things, God has given Jesus as head over all His church on earth. Jesus doesn’t simply sit on His throne and observe; He is actively involved in leading the church. This is one of the reasons it is so important to attend church services. Jesus is here by His Holy Spirit and we get to be in contact with Him; have communion with Him. The church is considered to be Christ’s body here on earth, and so, we are a part of Him. If we are not branches connected to the vine, then we cannot be nourished nor produce fruit. Being connected to the church is being connected to Christ’s body, which is being connected to the vine.

The last statement, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all”, refers to Christ filling the church. If we think back to the Old Testament accounts of Moses completing the tabernacle and Solomon dedicating the temple, we recall that God showed His acceptance of these places by filling them with His glory. Jesus is certainly the glory of God and we the church are shown acceptance by God when the church is filled by Christ. How important for us to follow Christ by the Holy Spirit so we are acceptable to God.

Paul prays that we may have some understanding of this infinite power of God. It is a good prayer to pray for ourselves and for the church. People who depend on God can be used by Him for the advancement of Jesus’ Kingdom. Part of the way to advance the Kingdom is to pray for it to come; as our Saviour taught us.

Prayer

Thank You Lord for the guide lines for prayer given to us in Your word. So, we do pray for this church, each other, and ourselves. Give us Lord, a greater hope in that wonderful calling to salvation. Give us some better understanding of the wonderful inheritance that is coming. Give us revelation concerning Your great power.

You have demonstrated by Your mighty works that You are stronger than death, and that evil will not prevail against You or Your people. Your church is secure in the headship of Your Son, Jesus. In spite of all the works of satan against Your church for almost 2000 years, Christianity has remained and grown.

We are Yours; we are safe in Your arms. Death will not conquer us, evil will not defeat us; but only because of all that You have accomplished through Jesus Christ. May Your Kingdom come, bring it here to earth that Your will can be accomplished. We await the coming of our Saviour and King.

Come Lord Jesus, it is in Your name we pray

Amen