

He's Got The Power!

Ephesians 1:19-23

People are fascinated by power. Ever since Eve was seduced by the serpent in the Garden to reach for God's power, mankind has been obsessed with the pursuit of power. Whether it is the power a man seeks behind the wheel of a sports car or the squeeze of a trigger in a power tool—or whether it is the power a woman looking for in an outfit or bathing suit that attracts the admiring glances of men—we live in a culture that idolizes power. We love slam dunks. We especially get *geeked* over combinations of power like that of a Honda-powered race car coupled with a beautiful yet petite driver like Danica Patrick. Scenarios like that are great for audience ratings which power more advertising dollars for network TV. Speaking of the media, you can hardly view commercials or listen to ads without hearing the echo of Snap's Power song made famous a few years ago in the movie, "Coyote Ugly." *I've Got The Power* is more than a refrain in a now familiar song—it has become our unofficial national anthem.

But as obsessed as we are with power, we are beginning to learn its limits. We used to measure our security by our military power. We have tried to guarantee our economic way of life by harnessing everything from fossil fuels to wind power. We built our monuments to the power of free enterprise—only to have those very symbols of our power destroyed by the supposed means of our power—a lethal mix of fuel and free enterprise technology. In the past, Marx and Lenin proved to be no match for our power. But lately Bin Laden and Zarqawi are making us feel a bit vulnerable. So how have we come to this?

Traditionally, we looked to God—at least for the source of our power. But lately a whole generation has grown up with a new understanding of power. Not a power from above, but a power from within. The Almighty Creator God has been replaced by impersonal energy. The Force is, in fact, a metaphor for trying to achieve godhood apart from the revealed God of Scripture.

As I mentioned before, man's love affair with power is not new. It is as old as Eden. And so we really ought not be surprised by all the hype and hoopla that surrounds man's interest in power. We were created to be amazed by power. God's power. Just read Genesis and see the God who merely had to speak Creation into existence and order. Furthermore, man's persistence in seeking power apart from knowing the All-powerful God of heaven is as old as Babel. But what ought to concern us is when God's people get caught up in the world's lust for power—when we settle for pagan hopes and dreams for power. The OT prophet warned about this when he wrote:

23 "This is what the LORD says:
"Let not the wise man boast of his **wisdom**
or the strong man boast of his **strength**
or the rich man boast of his **riches**,
24 but let him who boasts boast about this:
that he **understands and knows me...**"

We need a fresh understanding of the Power of God and the God of Power. To that end, let us consider a prayer that Paul prayed some 2500 hundred years after Jeremiah. It is remarkable in its similarity to Jeremiah's warning. Look with me at Ephesians 1: 17-23:

17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. [PRAY]

It has been nearly three months since we last looked at this passage—so a brief review is in order. After spending over half of the first chapter in a prayer of praise that also serves as a reminder of who we are in Christ and all that God the Father, Son and Spirit have done for us—Paul begins to pray that his readers then and for all ages will comprehend what he has been saying.

You might be wondering—why would he feel it necessary to do that? Because sin has so messed up our thinking (to use Bob's description in Romans—it has caused so much brain damage) that we can't even comprehend His power until we get rid of our own mistaken notions of what it is. And so Paul prays that God will open the eyes of our hearts so that we can know three things: the hope of his calling; the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints; and finally his incomparably great power to those of us who are believers.

I know it has been three months—but can you recall the meaning of the phrase: **“hope of his calling?”** **Hope** means the “confidently expected outcome” of something. It refers to something we firmly expect to happen. **Calling** refers to God's saving work in the lives of his people. It is His *effectual* calling. It is what God does to initiate His salvation in us but it also points to the ultimate completion of our salvation when He finishes His work in us and Christ presents us to himself as His bride at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb. So the **hope of his calling** is the steadfast expectation that the God who *chose* us and *adopted* us and *redeemed* us and *sealed* us will one day finish His work by bringing His Church into complete conformity to Christ and restoring all that was lost after Creation due to sin. Paul is praying: “God don't let your people get so caught up in the day to day stuff of life that they fail to comprehend your unswerving, unfailing purpose to bring your people and all of history to its final completion in Jesus Christ.”

And then he prays: “Father, help them to see *who* they are in your Son. Help them not to seek their identity and purpose in what they can make out of themselves, help them not to spend their lives trying to manipulate the Creation around them so that they can define their worth in secular terms—how much money or intellect or physical beauty or power they can try to muster or maintain—but help them to see that because of your grace and mercy invested in them and paid for by the blood of your Son—they have a preciousness that makes them *your own treasured possession!*”

Imagine that—the treasure that we have consists in the fact that God *treasures us* and is counting the days when He will finally redeem us completely from our sin to live with Him and worship and serve Him forever?! That is powerful stuff! That puts your life and longings in a whole new perspective! It puts that recent stain on your carpet or the scratch on your new truck in a little different perspective—doesn’t it!!

But then he adds: God help them know your incomparably great power to believers like us! This part of the prayer is where the rubber meets the road. It’s one thing to have pie in the sky—it’s quite another to actually start slicing it. It’s one thing to have hope on Sundays—it’s another thing to see yourself actually moving toward the fulfillment of that hope on Mondays.

Sometimes I struggle to see much evidence of the hope. I can see plenty of evidence of the curse of sin. And some days I feel as though my **Hope-mobile** has broken down in the middle of Death Valley.

There are too many days I don’t feel like I am a treasure to God. In fact, I feel more like I am a liability when I get snappy with my wife or impatient with my kids. I often feel like I am overdrawn on my Heavenly ATM machine. That is why I need to understand this part of Paul’s prayer. Not only is there hope and treasure. God has the power necessary to throttle us to the final destination! And so Paul spends more time on this part of the prayer than anything else. Why? Because he wants us to know that *God’s* got the power! There are four things you need to know about God’s power that are revealed to us in this text. The first one is....

I. God’s power is **adequate** for all He intends to do (v.19).

Why do you suppose Paul is spending so much time talking about God’s power in this passage? While we cannot read Paul’s mind, knowing a little about the circumstances that were going on in first century Ephesus can be helpful. Ephesus, like most large cities in its day was loaded with pagan worship. It is probably safe to say that the majority of the converts in Ephesus and the rest of Asia Minor for that matter were converts from the pagan religions and practices of occult magic. Ephesus was renown for the worship of Diana or Artemis. Consequently, most of the believers from Ephesus had been involved in demon-related activity and while they were glad to be out of such bondage—they were afraid of reprisals and retaliations from the spirit-world. So they needed encouragement that the power of God was more than up to the task of spiritual warfare.

In light of that, it should come as no surprise that Ephesians, more than any other book in the Bible prepares us and equips us for spiritual warfare (We will see that in chapter 6). We will also see and some might be surprised that the armor given for spiritual warfare has nothing to do with binding demons or praying for authority over a particular home. It rather shows us how to take the greatest power of all—the power of the Gospel and use it to deal with our sin and sinfulness on a daily basis.

The point is that while God’s power is not always dramatic—it is adequate for *any* and *every* situation we face. This is underscored in at least a couple of ways:

A. “That power is *like*....” (19b)

This translation misses the point in the original text. It is not merely comparing God’s power at work today with the power that He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead. The word in verse 19 translated “like” is literally “according to” or “in accordance with” “the working of his mighty strength.” The point is that the supply of power is always commensurate with power of the supplier *and* the *particular need*. God who is infinitely powerful always provides the amount of power needed at the moment it is needed. Whether parting the Red Sea or raising His Son or enabling you to say “no” to temptation—He has all the power you need. But there is another expression I want you to notice....

B. “...working of His *mighty* strength...” (19b)

The word translated “mighty” in verse 19b means “abundantly effective in relation to” a specific objective (See LEKGNT, p. 436). God provides all that you need and specifically what you need to do His will in any situation you face.

ILLUSTRATION: Sometimes I talk to people who will say something like this: “*Jerry, why isn’t God doing anything in my life?*” Perhaps it’s a wife struggling with a husband’s failure in the marriage. She has tried to improve in her role and it appears to be having little or no effect on her husband. He still comes home and watches TV for hours on end every night. He never leads the family in devotions. He persists in being selfish and self-centered—his wife’s efforts and good intentions notwithstanding. Now, according to this text—is *that* a good question? **No!** It starts with a faulty assumption. Instead of asking: “Why isn’t God doing anything in my life”—we need to ask: Why am I not *seeing God at work in my life!* Now we are getting somewhere. You see—God has given that wife all the power she needs to grow in that difficult situation. She has His Word, the Spirit of God resident in her life—she has the hope that God wants to use such a situation to drive her to a deeper knowledge of Christ and His

ways. She has adequate power to cooperate with God's purpose to make her like Christ. If they are members of a local church, she also has the resources of the local church to appeal to the church for help when her husband persists in unrepentant, sinful living. God is a good general. He does not leave his troops ill-equipped or unarmed in spiritual warfare!

That is why Paul prays this prayer and at this point includes himself in that prayer. God open please open our eyes to your resources. Don't let my personal expectations blind me to your agenda.

Transition: But that is not all this prayer has to say about God's power. God's power is not only adequate for all he intends to do...

II. God's power has been **actualized** through Christ (v. 20).

This verse says our hopes and treasures are bound up with Jesus. Chapter 2 will go on and make the point that where he goes we go—where He is, we are. The power that raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to a position of honor at the Father's right hand is guaranteed to raise us and cause us to sit with Him in the heavenlies. Again we see this idea of the **already—not yet**. What God did in Christ—in one sense He has done for us and will one day accomplish in us. We no longer have to be captives to death and sin. And one day *our* victory will be actualized in every way. But it is easy to forget that.

Just as in Paul's day, a lot of people are looking for power in all the wrong places. Just as Paul lived in increasingly dark times, so today it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see the alarming spiritual decay going on in our society. The times are a changin'—and not for the better! I don't need to rattle off all the issues that reflect a culture's growing rejection of truth and righteousness. You know the issues all too well. Abortion, same sex marriage, fetal stem cell research are just a few. So what is the Church of Jesus Christ to do? How do we respond to this gargantuan culture war over the soul of our country? Do we turn to power of hardball politics. Do we spend the majority of our time promoting petition drives and calling politicians to keep them in line with our potential vote? I am all for being a good citizen. And in a country that at least in name professes to be a representative democracy—I believe we must exercise our influence when it comes to voting. However, if we as believers put all of our eggs in the basket of politics, it is possible to win a given battle and lose the overall war! Especially if we try to define God's power in primarily human terms. The same thing can happen in churches that get caught up in marketing the church rather than cooperating with God in growing His Church!

Brothers and sisters. Do we know really God? Are we really buying into the hope of His calling? Do we really think that God will protect His own treasure the Church, so we can pour ourselves into doing what He has called us to do and be! Why is it that so many churches are spending time rescuing the suburbs from liberal politics or trying to overcome excuses from carnal, un-churched people so they will come back to church and feel more comfortable while letting the cities slip into hell—barely even slowed down by the call of the Gospel?

God's power cannot be reduced to a formula or a sure-fire, field-tested marketing scheme. God's power is actualized through what God has done and is doing in the Person and Work of Christ. God's power is displayed and unleashed when the Church lives, breathes, and bleeds Gospel. As Paul says in Romans 1:16: It is the power of God unto salvation! We need to believe it ourselves. We need to follow Paul's example and put its truth to test in our lives! Does this stuff *really* work?! Ask Paul. **Look at II Cor. 1: 3-4; 8-9.** Gun to the head? I know the God who raises dead people! Pray—"God open my eyes so I know you like Paul did when he faced ultimate challenges!"

Transition: God's power is not only adequate. It not only is actualized in and through Christ, it is...

III. God's power is **absolute** over all others (vs. 21-22a).

Just look at these next two verses. What is our Lord doing here? What is His posture? He is sitting. He is relaxed. Heaven is His throne. Earth is his footstool. Everything under His feet is a picture of His dominion over all things. What a powerful picture! What exactly does it communicate? That God is absolutely *sovereign*. That while the first Adam lost control of His God-given dominion over the world, the second-Adam, Jesus Christ, regained it when He his heel crushed the head of the serpent through His mighty work on the cross. He has everything under His complete control. That will be even more evident in the age to come than it is now. Then the lion and lamb shall lie down together and justice will be meted out fairly and consistently. But in the meantime, this present age is under His control as well. So how can we get our mental arms around this?

Illustration: Imagine that instead of the hundreds of channels now available on cable or satellite TV—imagine just two. And these two networks are as different as can be. One is called **Earth TV**. It broadcasts pretty much what you see on regular TV. Disasters, wars, political corruption, accidents, tragedies—the usual stuff you see on the nightly news. But there is *another* station. It is harder to get because it is *only* available through the Gospel. And the only way you can tune into it is by through a relationship with the owner and tuning in via God's Word and the Holy Spirit's illumination. It's called **Heaven TV**. It has a completely different take on world events. Bad news is still recognized as bad news—but it is seen in the larger context of the Good News.

And so when you tune into Heaven TV, you get a completely different take on the news. The sort of difference you get when you compare Fox to CBS! One story—can be told in quite different ways!

What Paul is praying for is that his readers—then and now—will start tuning in to **Heaven TV**. That news about the economy will be seen for what it is—but that it will also be seen in light of God's Sovereign agenda. That a decaying society like ancient Ephesus or modern America will be viewed through God's unswerving, unalterable purposes. That evil times are to be redeemed for God's glory—not

fled *from* as Paul says in Ephesians 5:16. That man's failure due to sin does not thwart God's saving purposes but sets the stage for them. That a gun to the head is not merely a threat but an opportunity!

Illustration: Some of the best disciple-making moments in this church have come in the middle of some of the biggest struggles with sin. But when people decide to tune in to Heaven TV—they see God do the most unexpected things! You see, He put all things under His feet so you can more and more put your sinful habits under yours! We will see how that works in the last three chapters of this book.

Transition: Finally, God's power is not only adequate, is not only actualized in Jesus Christ, is not only absolute in its scope, but it is...

IV. God's power is **available** to/for the Church (vs. 22b-23).

There are some difficulties of interpretation connected with these verses that I will not spend time discussing. Suffice it to say there is not any uniform agreement as to what the text is saying. I will leave that to your further investigation with a good study Bible or Commentary. So here is my take on it:

Jesus is sovereign over all. He is the head of everything. But not just everything. But head over the most precious entity that He ever inaugurated: The Church!! And so His power not only controls everything and harnesses it for His glorious redemptive purposes—but He does so with His eye on the Church! What exactly does that mean? It means that everything He does—He does it for the *advantage* of His Church.

Jesus is not some Cosmic Vendor dispensing goodies for customers to consume for their own purposes. He is the Head of the Church and everything He does is for the health of His body. Notice verse 23. Just like He filled the Temple in the OT—He fills His Temple of the Church in the NT. The God who in every way fills the Universe with his presence and power—in a special way fills and superintends the life of His Church. Why? Because He said He would build His Church!

Application: But you have to be tuned into heaven TV to comprehend it all. Otherwise bad news is only bad news.

Examples:

- 1) I said goodbye today to a couple that I have poured some of my life into. How does that look on Earth TV—not good. But on Heaven TV—I am already watching the impact they are having on people I will never meet this side of heaven!
- 2) I also talked to someone else who might have to move because of their job! A loss or a gain? Depends on which channel you are tuned in to.
- 3) I grieve over churches with nice structures and declining congregations because they are in neighborhoods that no longer resemble their past constituency.

I grieve because *they* are grieving over a dying memory while they could be celebrating a new opportunity to reach a whole new group of people! I wonder if the problem is that they are simply tuned in to the wrong channel!

Brothers and sisters—let this passage grip your heart. And cry out to God to renew your subscription to Heaven TV. And let's encourage each other as Hebrews tells us to that we might be continually reminding ourselves that while we live in a world that has a love affair with power—it is blind to the one and only true God of power. May you know His power and demonstrate His power this week!