

Sermon – 23/03/2008 pm

The Power of His Resurrection

Study Text: Ephesians 1:19–21

In praying for the believers at Ephesus, Paul asked the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ to open the eyes of their hearts to three great spiritual truths. He prayed that they might know the hope of God's calling, and the riches of God's inheritance in them. These two we have looked at. We come now to the third and final truth, the greatness of God's power in us who believe (1:19). The apostle goes on to tell us what he means by 'exceedingly great power'. He digresses momentarily into another amazing doxology.

His Power

Power is greatly sought after in this world. We like to think that people enter politics to serve the country, but for many it is for the power. People want to get ahead in a business or profession so they will get more money and power. The people in Ephesus were no different.

Demetrius saw his business flagging because of the gospel so he tried to get rid of Paul and his colleagues. He started a riot with the aim of showing them who was boss, and where the power base in their city lay. The Ephesians, including some Jews, exercised power through magic. But when the gospel was preached with power in this city many believed. They brought their books on magic together and burned them in the sight of all – books worth some five million dollars in today's values. So much money went up in smoke.

But whatever these believers lost in worldly possessions and worldly power they gained much more in Christ. Like Moses they turned their backs upon the money and power of this world. Like Paul the power they wanted to know was the power of God in their lives, the power to stand against the schemes of the devil – or that was Paul's prayer for them anyway.

Martin Lloyd-Jones writes 'I sometimes think that our failure to realise the exceeding greatness of God's power in us is due to the fact that we have never realised the power of the devil'. Paul begins this letter with this prayer that we may know the power of God in us. Notice how he ends his letter. He writes *finally my brethren be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might* (6:10). He reminds us that our fight is spiritual; we fight an unseen enemy as we live in this world.

God is a Spirit and his power spiritual. We must have the power of God if we are to defend ourselves against the devil, *against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* (6:12). The power of God is exceedingly great – it is vastly superior to that of the devil or any other power in the universe.

Paul laboured night and day in bringing the gospel to all the world. In doing so he was beaten and stoned, he was shipwrecked and almost drowned; he was abandoned by brothers, left hungry and thirsty, cold and naked. In all this human weakness he knew the power of God. 'My power is made perfect in weakness' the Lord told him (II Corinthians 12:9).

To this end I also labour, said Paul, *striving according to his working which works in me mightily* (Colossians 1:29). *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me* said (Philippians 4:13). Yet towards the ends of his life he still prayed that he might know Christ and the power of his resurrection.

Power of the Resurrection

Paul appears to be struggling to find words to describe this power that is in us who believe. He says it is great – it is exceedingly or surpassingly great. He uses four different Greek words for power in verse 19. The first word is *dunamis* from which we get ‘dynamite’; next is *energeia* from which we get ‘energy’; then *kratos* and *ischus*. These are variously translated as power, might, work, strength.

But it is not just words that are a problem, it is our comprehension. Paul does not stop at just using different words and superlatives in order to explain the power of God, *His power in us who believe*. He goes on to give an example of God’s power at work, the supreme example of his power. It is not the power of God displayed in creating this world and universe, making everything out of nothing. It is not the power of God seen in Noah’s flood or in dividing the Red sea for Moses. He does not say ‘look at the crashing waves, at the violent storm or the volcano’ to see God’s power at work. All these are true but not the greatest display of his power.

The supreme display of God’s power in this world is seen in his raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus himself had raised Lazarus from the dead, calling him out of the grave after four days. But Lazarus was not finally freed from death. He went on to die again. When God raised Jesus from the dead he seated him at his right hand in heaven. He did not and will not see death again. Jesus lives and he lives forever and ever. Jesus conquered death forever.

From the time of Adam’s sin, death has cast its long shadow over this world. Death reigned and it still is the ultimate power of Satan. Death is the ultimate weapon wielded by evil men. Look at king Nebuchadnezzar for example. He ruled with the threat of death. Daniel’s friends dared to disobey his command to worship an idol, and they were cast into the blazing furnace. But the power of God was greater than that of this man. God saved them through the fire. In his death and resurrection Jesus destroyed the power of death that is the devil (Hebrews 2:14).

Man continues to conquer and subdue this earth – and destroy it. In his power man is conquering outer space and inner space. He is conquering the cell and its DNA and splitting the atom. He has bombs that can destroy continents and kill millions in a moment. But still death reigns in this world – well it did until Jesus came. Death entered this world because of sin, so when Jesus dealt with sin on the cross, death was also defeated. This is what the resurrection is all about. Because Jesus lives we who believe in him also live.

Paul does not stop at the resurrection. As he contemplates the power of God exercised in raising Jesus from the dead he goes on to the ascension. God seated Christ at his own *right hand in the heavenly places* (1:20). Christ is alive, as Paul found out on the road to Damascus. Jesus no longer walks on this earth because he is seated on the throne with his Father in heaven.

He came from there in the first place of course. He left the glory of heaven to be born in a stable. In this world he had no place to lay his head. He was rejected by men who tried to

stone him more than once. Eventually they hung him on the cross to die. But from the depths of humiliation and death God raised him and exalted him to the highest place in the universe (Philippians 2).

There is still more that Paul wants us to know about the power of God. God exalted him far above all every principality and power, every rule and authority in the universe. The authority of Jesus is absolute. His authority is universal; universal in time and space (1:21). Time marches on. The world is constantly changing. Rulers come and they go. But let the whole earth know that the King of kings remains the same. His kingdom will never end.

In the church at Colossae some were inclined to worship angels (Colossians 2:18). It may have been the same in the church at Ephesus. Churches today are full of people worshipping not only angels but so-called saints. Many also worship celebrities and sports stars – what else does it mean when worship services are moved to allow people to watch some ‘big game’.

Great singers have claimed that they were more popular than Jesus. How utterly foolish and indeed blasphemous such claims are. Jesus is on the throne in heaven. It was not man who put him there but God. Moreover, no man, no angel, no power or authority, seen or unseen in the entire universe will ever remove him from the throne.

Are you, like the apostle Paul, moved in your heart as you contemplate the power of God displayed in raising Jesus from the dead and exalting him to his throne in heaven? We must not become immune to the wonder of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must not become sentimental as we hear yet again the Easter story. God is all powerful. God is omnipotent and we must worship him and him alone.

This is the exceedingly great power that is at work in us. Paul wants us to know this power of God in our lives. How often do you feel powerless? It is easy to get downcast and feel defeated, especially when we see so few joining us in worship. Remember, however that God has given us his Spirit, the Holy Spirit of power. Paul knew that power in his life and ministry.

May we know the same power, the power of God, more and more in our lives! Can you say with the apostle Paul, *I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection?* Remember, *greater is he that is within you than he that is in the world* (I John 4:4). Amen.

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