

POWER WORDS

Eph. 1:15-23

May 24, 2009 – Ascension Sunday

Eph. 1:15-23 (NASB)

¹⁵For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers ; ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

INTRODUCTION: “I’ve Got The Power”

What do you think of when you hear the word “power?”

When I was in high school power ties were popular. I think most of them were yellow with some sort of blue pattern in them. In the scarlet and gray Buckeye State, you can imagine how a combination of maize and blue went over... the color of pansies. But everywhere else in the country, power ties were all the rage. Soon you wore your power ties to power lunches, and then a couple hours after you ate your power lunch, you took a 20-minute power nap. Then we had power walks.

People do all kinds of things to increase their power.

We are drawn to people who have great influence, to people who are strong, intelligent, or famous, because they have power. I am especially drawn to people who can articulate a dream, who have a vision, and who have the ability to figure out how to get things done. The 18th century German scholar Goethe said, “Dream no small dreams for they have no power to move the hearts of men.” That’s one of the good things about First Church... there is a master-plan and vision in place. It’s not so comprehensive that it can’t be built on in the future, but there is a direction here and a mission – Bringing people to the transforming power of Jesus Christ by membership in His family and to equip the members for ministry in the church and in the world.

All over the world, people respect power – or they fear it.

In Chicago, I met a great man who was president of the famed Moody Bible Institute at the time. When he preaches, Dr. Easley often refers to a *tri-fecta* of sin that people – especially men – are drawn to: money, sex, and power.

We of course are familiar with the famous quote of Lord Acton, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

We have many demonstrations of power in our world today. From Iran’s recent demonstration of missile power, to the remaking of the American auto industry, from credit card companies, to microscopic virus-carrying bacteria – we see power. In the art of modern medicine, in the influence of our media, and in the words of ordinary people – we see power.

Perhaps you are *enjoying* some positive power in your life. Maybe you have had the will power to change a habit in your life. That’s wonderful! Maybe because of your brain power or the power of your parents’ persuasion you have made it or are making it through school. Congratulations! Maybe you have exercised power of discipline over your finances and you are heading out of negative cash flow and into a plan that includes increased savings and giving to God’s work. Kudos to you! Maybe you are seeing the power of answered prayer in your life or in the life of a friend or a loved one.

THE POWER OF GOD

Today we’re going to look at positive power – but not just positive power, but *perfect* power, *infinite* power – the power of God. We see the power of God in the Ascension of our Lord.

Earlier in this morning’s service, we read about the Ascension from the book of Acts. Jesus gives His disciples their final mission, He lifts His hands to bless them, and then, He is taken up into heaven. Can you imagine this? They saw Jesus lift off the ground and they watched His body go up in the sky until the clouds hid Him. And the clouds over Bethany in Judea probably hung a little higher than the cloud over Bakersfield! ☺ Up, up, and away! Except it was clear to the disciples that it was not Jesus who was flying; no, He was being taken from them.

Ephesians 1:19 identifies this as the power of God, the glorious Father. Notice how many times power or a word for power is mentioned in this verse:

the surpassing greatness of His **power** toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the **working** of the **strength** of His **might**

As you know, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. In the Greek language, power is expressed in four different words, and all four words are used here in one way or another.

There's a *working* power, from which we get our word energy – God was *working*. There's the power of *strength* – an *ultimate* power, as in God working the *strength*. There's the power of *might* – a power of *capability*, implying personal *potential*, as in God working the strength of His might. And finally... this is actually the first word for power in this verse, there is the Greek word dynamis. It's dynamic! It's dynamite! It's the surpassing greatness of His power to us who believe.

All power is God's power. And God's power is greater than all other power!!! God's power is demonstrated in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

²⁰which He brought about in Christ, **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand** in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And He put all things in subjection under His feet...

Did you notice that in verse 20 Paul describes Christ's resurrection and ascension as if it were one single event? During my study this week, I stumbled across a pastor who asserted that the resurrection and the Ascension can't be separated. They form two parts of one continuous movement resulting in the glorification of Jesus. The resurrection and the Ascension are milestones in the process whereby Jesus - crucified, risen and ascended – was brought into the glory of God in heaven. ²

Last week when we received (Sharon/ Blake and Anne/ Kim) into membership, we said the Apostle's Creed together. In it, we celebrate the resurrection and ascension almost in the same breath:

“I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty!”

When was the last time you saw someone raised from the dead after three days? When was the last time you saw gravity defied with no visible assistance whatsoever? That, my friends, is power! And that kind of power rests supremely and gloriously in God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. English translations describe God's power as surpassingly great, infinite, boundless, extravagant, and incomparable.

THE POWER OF GOD IN ME

“That’s great,” you’re thinking, “But so what? What does that mean for me? My life is a mess. The economy is in a free-fall. My kids are out of control. I just lost a loved one. I went to see the doctor this week, and I got bad news.”

This declaration of power is put in a prayer that Paul writes not just for one group of Christians, but for all Christians... if you’ve trusted in Christ as your Savior, if you’re living your life for Him, then Paul prayed for you, too. He prayed that

...the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.

The power is directed *toward* us. Other translations say it is *for* us – either way, *we become recipients of God’s power*. And the thoughts in Paul’s prayer continue into Ephesians 2 to say that all Christians are now in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (2:6) Now, you’ll hear lots of health and wealth people say, “See? Right now you have all the riches of heaven, so, claim them in Jesus’ Name.” Or, “God just wants you to be happy. Just think in positive ways, make your own karma, and God will bless you.” I think that we need a reality check. This world is a harsh place. If you don’t believe me, look around. It may get harsher still as history gets closer to the return of Christ. Jesus knew His disciples would have a hard time in the world – that is much of what He prayed for for them and for us in John 17. But Jesus also came that we might have life and have it abundantly. A life filled with joy in the midst of trial, a life filled with hope in the midst of despair. This power of God – power to raise us from the grave and from the ground – is ours because the Holy Spirit is within us, and because Christ is seated at the right hand of God. It doesn’t mean we’ll get around whatever our problems are, it means that He will lead us *through* them. And it means that, just as *in* Christ we are now in heavenly places, at God’s appointed time, those of us who believe will be raised to heavenly places *with* Christ Jesus.

Some day that same power will cause our resurrection and exaltation to the right hand of the throne of God. The chains of death will be shattered. The bonds of Satan will be dissolved. The shackles of sin will be broken. We will be freed from every foe that would hold us – free at last, free at last! Thank God Almighty! We will be free at last!

There's nothing in this world that can waylay the plan of God, nothing can halt it, nothing can thwart it. That same power operates on our behalf. And not just at the point of our death and resurrection or our ascension to the glory of the Father, not just at the point of Christ's coming or our being caught up with Him, but now, even now. We have that power, the surpassingly great power toward us who believe. It works operatively in our lives even now.

But do we use God's power? Do we tap into it? Do we get to the depths of knowing God or do we live in the shallows, chasing around for all of the easy formulas and never pursuing the deep knowledge of Jesus Christ that comes through time spent with Him and through the Word³ and strengthened by serving in His mission for His glory?

Jesus says in Acts 1

"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

He has given us power and a purpose – to be His witnesses – in my family, in my school, in my city, in my region, in my state, in my nation... anywhere and everywhere God calls me to be. The world is our parish – and we must be His witnesses all over our world.

Go with the power of God. Go with the purpose of God. Go in the place of, and surrendered to the person of Christ.

When the Father brought His Son out of the grave and then up from the earth, He placed His Son at His right hand and put all things under His feet, then He gave Him to the Church to be her head. Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. The Church is built on the cornerstone credo that Peter cried, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" He is the Lord!

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He fills all in all and He wants us to be His body and do the same. We can't do that if we are not yielded to His power in our lives.

As I close, I want to quote from a great preacher of a great sermon – SM Lockridge of San Diego, preached this sermon in Detroit in 1976: (At 11:00, call for Praise Team.)

He's the King of righteousness. He's the King of the ages. He's the King of Heaven. He's the King of glory. He's the King of kings and He is the Lord of lords. Now that's my King. ...

Well, I wonder if you know Him. Do you know Him? Don't try to mislead me. Do you know my King?

He's enduringly strong. He's entirely sincere. He's eternally steadfast. He's immortally graceful. He's imperially powerful. He's impartially merciful. That's my King. He's God's Son. He's the sinner's saviour. He's the centerpiece of civilization. He stands alone in Himself.

He's the grandest idea in literature. He's the highest personality in philosophy. He's the supreme problem in higher criticism. He's the fundamental doctrine of historic theology. He's the carnal necessity of spiritual religion. That's my King.

... He's the only one able to supply all our needs simultaneously. He supplies strength for the weak. He's available for the tempted and the tried. He sympathizes and He saves. He's the Almighty God who guides and keeps all his people. He heals the sick. He cleanses the lepers. He forgives sinners. He discharged debtors. He delivers the captives. He defends the feeble. He blesses the young. He serves the unfortunate. He regards the aged. He rewards the diligent and He beautifies the meek. That's my King.

Do you know Him?

His office is manifold. His promise is sure. His light is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His Word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteous. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. I wish I could describe Him to you . . . but He's indescribable. That's my King. He's incomprehensible, He's invincible, and He is irresistible.

...the heavens of heavens can't contain Him, let alone some man explain Him. You can't get Him out of your mind. You can't get Him off of your hands. You can't outlive Him and you can't live without Him. ...Death couldn't handle Him and the grave couldn't hold Him. That's my King.

He always has been and He always will be. I'm talking about the fact that He had no predecessor and He'll have no successor. There's nobody before Him and there'll be nobody after Him. You can't impeach Him and He's not going to resign. That's my King! That's my King!

Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory. Well, all the power belongs to my King. We're around here talking about black power and white power and green power, but in the end all that matters is God's power. Thine is the power. Yeah. And the glory. We try to get prestige and honor and glory for ourselves, but the glory is all His. Yes. Thine is the Kingdom and the power and glory, forever and ever and ever and ever. How long is that? Forever and ever and ever and ever. . . And when you get through with all of the ever's, then . . . Amen!

END NOTES

¹ **The Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ** by Owen Bourgaize

² **Christ Is Everything** by John MacArthur

PASTORAL PRAYER

May 24, 2009

Glorious God of majesty and power, we open our hearts to You today. What is inside is no surprise to You, for You have made us – we are Your people. Help us to be the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Today we lift up to You the prayer needs of our congregation.

Healing:

- € Hilda (prayer quilt recipient)
- € Pat Brady
- € Others

Comfort for those who have lost loved ones:

- € The family of Phil Gratke
- € Pastor Richard's family in the loss of his mother Elizabeth

On this Memorial Day weekend, we give thanks for those who have given their last full measure of devotion in defense of freedom, and for all those of who more than self their country loved and mercy more than life. We know that in many nations throughout our world, Your people suffer at the hands of brutal mobs and stubborn dictators, while we worship in freedom and live in peace and relative comfort. We don't know why we should receive these blessings, but we are grateful, O Lord.

And so we pray for our nation and her leaders. May they truly look to You, commit their way to You, acknowledge You, and lean not on their own understanding, so that You may make their paths straight. O Lord, have mercy.

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Let our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee,
Shadowed beneath Thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.

We worship You, God! You have put all things, including all native lands, under the feet of Your Son Jesus Christ. He is head of the Church. May He be the head of *our* church, and the center of our lives. We pray in His Name, using the prayer that He taught His disciples to pray, Our Father...