

God's Supreme Purpose

God's Power in Christ

Ephesians 1:19-23

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Scripture

Today, we are concluding a series of sermons on Ephesians 1 that I am calling, "God's Supreme Purpose."

In Ephesians 1:3-14, which is one, long, complex, glorious sentence in the original Greek, the Apostle Paul praised God for salvation. Paul praised the Father for planning our salvation, the Son for purchasing our salvation, and the Holy Spirit for applying that salvation to us.

In Ephesians 1:15-23, which is also one, long, complex, glorious sentence in the original Greek, the Apostle Paul prayed for the saints to grow in their understanding of, and appreciation for, the blessings of salvation.

Last week we looked at verses 15-19a, and examined Paul's praise and petition to God for believers. In today's study in verses 19b-23, we shall examine God's power in Christ.

Let's read about God's power in Christ in Ephesians 1:19b-23:

¹⁹ ... according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:19b-23)

Introduction

Kent Hughes tells the story about a school fire in the town

of Itasca, Texas, just before World War II that took the lives of 263 children. There was scarcely a family in town which was not touched by this horrifying tragedy. During the war Itasca remained without school facilities. But when the war ended, the town, like many others, began to expand and in fact built a new school which featured what was called “the finest sprinkler system in the world.” Civic pride ran high. Honor students were selected to guide citizens and visitors on tours of the new facility to show them the finest, most advanced sprinkler system technology could supply and money could buy. Never again would Itasca be visited by such a tragedy. With the postwar boom the town continued to grow, and seven years later it was necessary to enlarge the school – and in adding the new wing it was discovered that the sprinkler system had never been connected.¹

Can you believe that? It is so incredible that it is hard to believe. Yet, it was true. The sprinkler system was never connected to the main water supply. Sadly, that is a parable of what happens in the lives of too many Christians. Far too many Christians don't know, understand, or appropriate the power of God that is available to them. So, Martyn Lloyd-Jones asks,

The most urgent practical question for every Christian is this: Are we aware of the fact that the almighty power of God is working in us? Do we realize that we are what we are solely and entirely by the grace and the power of God? Do we realize in our own personal lives and experiences that it is this exceeding great power of God that accounts for everything in the Christian life? I press these questions again because I am convinced that the main trouble with most of us is our failure to realize the greatness of the salvation into which we have been brought, and which we enjoy together.²

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 55–57.

² David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 412.

The Apostle Paul wanted Christians to understand the greatness of God's power that is at work in us. So, he prayed in verse 19a that believers would know "what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe." Then, he related God's power that is at work in us to God's power that is at work in Christ.

Lesson

Ephesians 1:19-23 shows us several ways in which God's power is seen in Christ.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Resurrection (1:19b-20a)
2. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Enthronement (1:20b)
3. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Supremacy (1:21-22a)
4. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Headship (1:22b-23)

I. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Resurrection (1:19b-20a)

First, God's power is seen in Christ's resurrection.

In verses 19b-20a Paul prayed that believers would know what is the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe, **"according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead."**

When Paul thought of the immeasurable greatness of God's power, he thought first of Christ's resurrection. For centuries people had lived and died, and that was the end. And yet, when Jesus came to earth he predicted that God would raise him back to life again after he died. In fact, he even predicted that God would bring him back to life after three days. He said to his disciples in Mark 10:33-34, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles.

And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.” And that is exactly what happened!

What kind of power could raise a dead person back to life again? No earthly power could do that. Only a heavenly power could – and did! Three days after Jesus had been crucified and buried, God raised him back to life again. Kent Hughes notes, “Just as the cross is the highest display of God’s love, so the Resurrection is the ultimate display of his power.”³

But Paul wanted believers to know that God’s immeasurably great power was not only able to raise Jesus back to life again, it is “toward *us* who believe.” That is, God’s immeasurably great power that is seen in Christ’s resurrection has practical benefits for us who are believers. So, how does the immeasurable greatness of God’s power benefit us?

First, God’s power benefits us as *saving* power. Paul said to the Roman Christians in Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” The immeasurable greatness of God’s power is able to save anyone everywhere. No one is beyond the grace of God because no one is beyond the power of God. You may say, “Oh, pastor! You have no idea what I have done in my life. You don’t know how great is my sin, my struggle, or my secret.” Ah! But I don’t need to know, because I do know that no sin, no struggle, no secret is beyond the immeasurable greatness of God’s power that is seen in Christ’s resurrection.

And second, God’s power benefits us as *sanctifying* power. God’s power enables us to live as becomes the followers of Christ. Later in his letter to the Ephesians Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:20 (NIV), “[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” Do you

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, 58.

see that? The immeasurable greatness of God's power that raised Christ from the dead is at work *within us*. God's power enables us to live godly lives.

The problem is that too many Christians don't hook up, as it were. The system is in place, but it does not work because of ignorance, unbelief, or sin. That is why Paul prayed that believers would have "the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe" (Ephesians 1:18–19).

II. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Enthronement (1:20b)

Second, God's power is seen in Christ's enthronement.

Paul said in verse 20b, "**... and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.**" God raised Jesus back to life again on the third day. Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, he ascended into heaven, where he is currently seated at the right hand of God the Father. To be at the "right hand" of a King was considered a position of privilege, honor, favor, victory, and power. And in heaven, this position belongs to Christ alone.

So, Christ is not only *alive* forevermore, but he is also *reigning* forevermore. In the early preaching in the book of Acts, the preachers emphasized not only Christ's resurrection but also his enthronement. They saw this as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. For example, King David said in Psalm 110:1, "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" When Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin, just before his crucifixion, he said that this prophecy pointed to him. The high priest said to Jesus, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:63–64). Preaching

on the Day of Pentecost, just 10 days after Jesus' ascension into heaven, the Apostle Peter concluded his sermon with these words in Acts 2:32–36,

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

So, what does God's power in Christ's enthronement mean for us? It means everything. Christ, as the writer to the Hebrews says, "upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). If Christ upholds the entire universe "by the word of his power," then we can take our every problem to him, no matter how great or how small. No matter how great our problem, our trial, our difficulty, or even our sin, take it to Christ. He can take care of it.

Why don't we take our problems to Christ? Perhaps we don't take it to Christ because of ignorance, unbelief, or sin. That is a huge mistake because God's power is seen in Christ's enthronement.

III. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Supremacy (1:21-22a)

Third, God's power is seen in Christ's supremacy.

God's power is seen in Christ's resurrection. God's power is seen in Christ's enthronement. And God's power is seen in Christ's supremacy, for God put Christ **"... far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name**

that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet” (1:21-22a).

Scholars debate whether Paul meant spirit or human beings. However, it seems Paul was trying to assert in the strongest possible manner that Christ is **far above all**. Christ is greater than any human power, he is greater than any angelic being, and he is greater than any demonic being. He is above Satan and his demonic legions. There is nothing or no-one superior to Christ.

And Christ's supremacy will last for eternity. We need not fear that a hundred million years into eternity some rebellion will take place and Christ's supremacy will be overthrown, for Paul asserted that Christ's supremacy is **not only in this age but also in the one to come**.

Christ's supremacy **above all rule and authority and power and dominion** involves, as I said, both spirit and human powers. But, in the context of our struggle to live godly lives, the emphasis is upon hostile spirit powers. Later in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” However, even the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places are subject to the supremacy of Christ.

Practically, that means that we need not fear any demonic victory over us. But how are we to be victorious over Satan and his demonic host? James, the brother of Christ, gives us very practical advice in James 4:7, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” It is vital that Christians get the order right in this verse. There really are two instructions, and we cannot reverse the order. First, we must submit ourselves to God. That is, we must turn from our sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We surrender completely to God. Like a young man who gives up his civilian life to join the military, we give up our

sinful lives and join God's family. That must happen first. If that does not happen, one will always struggle with Satan.

However, once we have submitted to God, we are then to put the second part of the verse into practice: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." How do we resist the devil? By keeping in step with the Holy Spirit, who indwells all believers and enables us to turn away from sin and do that which becomes a follower of Christ.

So, God's power is seen in Christ's supremacy.

IV. God's Power Is Seen in Christ's Headship (1:22b-23)

And finally, God's power is seen in Christ's headship.

Paul said in verses 22b-23 that God **"... gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."** Here we see the amazing connection between Christ and his church. You see, it is the church, and not all creation, that is said to be his body. God gave Christ to be the head of the church, and just as there is a vital connection between our heads and our bodies, so there is a vital connection between Christ and his church.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "A head alone is not complete. A head needs a body, and you cannot think of a head without a body. So, the body and the head are one in this mystical sense."⁴ This truth is so amazing that it caused John Calvin to say, "This is the highest honor of the Church, that, until he is united to us, the Son of God reckons himself in some measure imperfect. What consolation is it for us to learn, that, not until we are as one with him, does he possess all his parts, or wish to be regarded as complete!"⁵

Many Christians don't understand the importance of this vital connection. They treat church like a country club. They join a

⁴ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 431.

⁵ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 218.

local church, attend when it is convenient for them, serve only if they feel like it, and when they get hurt or disappointed, they just go somewhere else. However, being united to Christ and being a member of his body, the church, means that we take seriously our privileges and responsibilities in the church.

The Apostle Paul also says that as his body we are **“the fullness of him who fills all in all.”** This is one of the most difficult statements to interpret in the letter to the Ephesians. What does it mean? I believe it is best to understand this phrase in a passive sense rather than an active sense. The church does not fill Christ. Christ fills the church. Paul is saying that Christ, as head of the church “fills it in a special way with his Spirit, grace, and gifts: it is his fullness.”⁶

Practically, that means that Christ has given the church everything necessary to function in a way that glorifies him. We sometimes may get discouraged about the church, but we must remember that he is the head, that he has given us his Spirit, his grace, and every spiritual gift we need to worship and serve him.

Conclusion

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that believers need to understand what the Apostle Paul is praying for. He says,

It is not that they may realize their need of power and then ask God for it; he prays that they may realize that this power is in them. The view of the Christian which depicts him as a man who may have lived for years without this power of God, and who suddenly comes to a realization of his need and asks for it, and obtains it, is unscriptural. You cannot be a Christian even for a moment if the power of God does not sustain you.⁷

⁶ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 152.

⁷ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 420–421.

God demonstrated his immeasurably great power in Christ's resurrection, enthronement, supremacy, and headship. But how does he demonstrate his power in us? He does so through his written Word and through his Holy Spirit. As Lloyd-Jones says, "He works in my personality, affects my will, and creates desires and longings within me. Suddenly I am aware of a desire to read the Word, or a desire to pray to God. It is the result of the working of God the Holy Spirit generating a prayer, or stimulating me to some other activity. He is constantly stimulating my will and giving me power to act."⁸

God's power is always at work in believers. He is at work, even if we are not aware of it. However, if we ignore his prompting and urging, we may find ourselves disciplined by God. Then we wake up to the fact that we have forgotten him, and so we turn to him and ask his forgiveness. Even that is another aspect of God's power at work in us.

So, let us thank and praise God for his power in Christ. And let us thank him for his power that is at work in us as well. Amen.

⁸ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1*, 421.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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