

God's Power that Works in You

By Don Green

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Truth Community Fellowship

Creation Museum
2800 Bullittsburg Church Road
Petersburg, KY 41080

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

You know, the human race, men and women, are not nearly as strong as men like to think and it's not difficult at all to prove that point if you look at things over the course of time. Our advances in technology and medicine have done nothing to overcome the final opponent that the human race has never yet defeated and that is, of course, the power of death. The power of death. The certainty of death exposes the reality that we are all living on borrowed time. There is ultimately nothing that human wisdom can do about it. There is no escaping the reality that sooner or later our 70 years, give or take, will come to an end and we are defenseless against that. We are unable to overcome that power. There is a power greater than human ability that controls the direction of our lives on a human level. Martyn Lloyd Jones said, "The moment you come into this world, you are beginning to go out of it."

That sad reality prepares us by contrast for today's passage. It is only as we make an effort to somehow grasp the certainty of death and the inability that we have to overcome it in a final, ultimate, human, earthly sense that we can understand the greatness of what is laid out before us in Ephesians 1. I invite you to turn to Ephesians 1 for our text this morning, beginning in verse 20. The sad reality of death simply serves as the back-drop to help us see the supernatural power that God has displayed for Christians to live their godly lives. The reality of death is the contrast for what we need to see. Our inability on a human level to overcome death by contrast shows the greatness of the power of God.

Ephesians 1. We'll pick it up in the middle of verse 19 and then we'll go from there. Paul is praying here for his readers and he says in verse 19, I want you to understand

19 the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20 which He brought about 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 every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And He put all things in subjection 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.

That's our text for this morning and when you start to understand something about what it means, you realize that this is a text that doesn't need a lot of theatrics to buttress the greatness of what it is saying. This is a magnificent text and it is designed to help you as a Christian go through life with strength and courage and understanding and confidence. Here in this passage, you see that which gives you power to live a godly life and we're going to see three aspects of God's power in exalting Christ so that we would appropriate it to live a godly life.

Now, there are two things going on here in this passage that I want you to be aware of, that is going to help you understand and assimilate it and receive it well. This passage in one dimension, at one level of understanding, is greatly exalting our Lord Jesus Christ. It is explaining how highly exalted Jesus Christ is. He is exalted over all the universe. He is exalted over the church. He is exalted over death itself. As you read this passage, you are seeing Christ supremely exalted in a beautiful, magnificent expression of the truth of Scripture. You cannot read this passage without shrinking back almost and falling down at the feet of Christ in seeing how greatly exalted he is. We're going to see that as we go along.

So this passage preeminently focuses our attention on the Lord Jesus Christ in a way that is unmistakable and helps us see his surpassing greatness, his surpassing value, in a way that just makes us fall and worship as we hear and understand. There is that reality to this passage. But here's what you've got to understand: the point that Paul is making in exalting Christ here is to help you understand the resources that are available for you to live the Christian life. So he exalts Christ as a means to a greater end, to a broader end, in the context to show how it is that we are able to live the Christian life. That's the point. He exalts Christ to help us see what you have in order to honor God in your life.

Now, just by a little bit of understanding here as we kind of remember the big picture of the book of Ephesians, in the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul is blessing God and he is praising God and he is praying for believers and as you go through, you're seeing this great doxology of praise given to God in the first three chapters of Ephesians. As you go into the final three chapters, Paul turns toward exhortation and commands and says, "This is how you need to be living the Christian life." He talks about the preeminent priority of unity in the church. He talks about truthful living and knowing the will of God and living righteously in family and workplace relationships. He goes on even in chapter 6 and talks about the fact – look at chapter 6:12 with me for example. We're just doing a sweeping overview in just a few seconds here, really. But in chapter 6, verse 12, he says, "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." So as you get into the final three chapters, what you see are ethical demands that flow out of the Christian life. You are exposed to spiritual realities that there are dark, demonic forces that are engaged against the church and would seek to undermine the work of Christ and to frustrate believers and to hinder them in their obedience and their pursuit of truth.

Let's pull all of this together now. Those of us who do not have the power to overcome death, to triumph over physical death in our lives, we're faced with a question, with a reality: how am I, one who still has sin dwelling within me, how am I where the principle of death is operating in me and is certainly going to triumph over my physical life in the end, how am I a person with merely human strength, supposed to resist and overcome supernatural demonic dark forces that operate against me in the spiritual heavenly realm? How am I supposed to do that? If you started in chapter 4 and went through chapter 6, you'd say, "This is utterly impossible. Are you kidding me? It's hard enough for me to live righteously in the midst of my family day-by-day and I'm supposed to overcome and attain to this level of godliness and to resist spiritual forces that are greater than I am? How am I supposed to do that? Where am I supposed to find the resources by which that will be successfully accomplished?" You see, when you start to understand something of the glory and the nobility and the high calling of the Christian life, if we're honest with ourselves and we look within ourselves, we say, "It's not within my power to do that. It's not within me to live that kind of righteous way. It's not within me to triumph over dark forces that I cannot even see."

Well, here in this passage is displayed as the foundation for what is to come in those later chapters, here in this chapter is what is laid out for you to understand how it is that God cannot only tell you to do this but he has given you the power that you need to do it. What we're seeing here in this passage, verses 20-23, is the power of God that works in you so that you can live the high calling of the Christian life. This is what every one of us who are born again need to see displayed to us. How do we know what that power is? How can we appreciate the significance of it? Well, we're going to see it in relationship to the way that God has exalted Christ and we're going to see that in three aspects here this morning. First of all, as you contemplate the question: what is the power that works in me? How can I understand. How can I evaluate? How can I get some manner of sense of appreciation and understanding for the greatness of the power of God that's at work in my life? Well, first of all, you measure that by the fact that God exalted Christ to heaven. That's our first point for this morning. God exalted Christ to heaven and that's what we're going to see in the first couple of verses of the passage here.

Let me just remind you. I want you to see this context, to see that this isn't about Christ in isolation from us as the church. This isn't exalting Christ in isolation from the impact that it has upon his people. Paul here in verses 15-23 is praying and he is praying for his readers who are Christians and he is laying forth truths that apply to every Christian including you and me here today. Look at verse 15. He says, "For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers." That's really key for you to understand. Paul is praying here in verses 15-23. He is not giving a theological lecture although he's teaching the highest and most exalted forms of theology. He is an apostle praying for the people who are under his apostolic care. He is a spiritual leader directly appointed by Christ and saying, "Here is what I am praying for you so that your spiritual life would go well; so that you would overcome all of the difficulties; so that you would be energized for the opportunities and the challenges

and the responsibilities that are yours as a Christian." He says, "I'm making mention of you in my prayers."

In verse 18, he says, "I pray." Here's the substance of my prayers for you. "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." He's praying that their understanding would be expanded and deepened so that they would understand aspects of what it means to be a Christian that otherwise would go over the top of their heads and not impact them as it should. Paul says, "There are truths about the Christian life that are real, that are true, that are powerful. We're so earthbound that you'll miss it if it's simply left up to you." And so Paul says, "I am calling God to bear. I am calling the Holy Spirit to bear and asking him to do a work inside you to help you understand why it is that you can live the Christian life that I'm going to call you to later in this book." He is, as it were, think about it as a great treasure chest of wealth. He's coming to this great treasure chest and unlocking it and opening it up so we can all participate in the wealth that is ours in Christ. Otherwise, if he didn't do that, we would try to open it and we would miss it. We wouldn't be able to access it. So he's praying to God in verse 18, "God, open their eyes. Help them to see so that they would know, so that you would know, what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints and what is the surpassing greatness of his power toward us who believe."

Now, it's really important for you to understand that. Paul is praying for Christians here, not writing an abstract discourse on Christ. He is praying for us. He is praying for those who know Christ in order to understand the greatness of the power that is operative in our lives as Christians. Look, aren't you just like me? Don't you need to know that? Don't you have a sense as you go through day-by-day if you're honest, if you have any sense of self-reflection, aren't you mindful of your own weakness? You're mindful of how easily discouraged you get. You're mindful of the fact that you fall easily before the throne of temptation. You're mindful of the fact that you are a worry-wart and you are filled with anxiety as you look to the future. Where is the strength in that kind of Christian life? Why is it that we feel this kind of weakness. Well, we recognize the fact that in our own ability, in our own strength, in our own weak and faltering commitments, we fall short, you and I do.

So, the purpose of this is to help us look not at our own resources but to understand that God has made it possible, God has enabled us, God has energized us so that we can live above where our natural human ability would take us. You are meant to live a godly, courageous, noble Christian life, every one of you. You are not meant to dwell and to live in the midst of anxiety and vacillation and going back and forth this way and that; being tossed about by different waves of doctrine; being tossed about by the anxieties and the cares of your own heart; being tossed about by what's happening in the world around you whether it's wars or rumors of war or politics or any of that junk that so often preoccupies us in which many Christian voices would call us to live our lives in the realm of that kind of thinking and thought. You see, what Paul is saying here is very crucial for every one of us: he is saying that the power that God has placed in you – watch this – what God has given you in Christ is utterly sufficient for you to live the life that God has called you to. You don't need additional human strength or wisdom. What God has given us in Christ is

sufficient and you need to understand that so that you would stand firm and live a strong and fruitful Christian life. We're not meant to be blubbing idiots going through and embarrassing Christ with weak churches and anxiety-filled lives. We're meant to appropriate this power that God has placed in us.

What does this power look like? What is Paul praying that we would understand? Well, first of all, I want you to understand that the power that is at work in you is the exact same power without diminishment, without qualification, with nothing held back in reserve, the power that is at work in you as a Christian here today is the exact same power that God used to raise Christ from a grave and then exalt him to heaven. It is the exact same power. God doesn't have one power to raise Christ that he uses and then he uses some kind of lower octane on us. No, no, the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that is at work in us.

What is this power? Paul goes on to explain. Verse 19, he says, "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe is in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which," notice how this sentence runs together. "I'm praying that you would understand the power." What is that power? "It's in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead." The power that delivered you from sin, the power that caused you to be born again, the power that is resident in your life in the person of the indwelling Holy Spirit, is the exact same power that so mightily worked and raised Christ from the dead. Now listen: there was a reason why I introduced the message the way that I did. You need to see it by contrast. We as human beings, have no power over death. You know, there's a reason why we don't know our ancestors from more than three generations up the chain. There's a reason why they're not walking about on earth. It's because men have no power over death. There is a reason why cemeteries are sedate. There's a reason why grass grows over them and the graves settle and become permanent, as it were. It's because no one is stirring up to get out of them.

We do not have power over death and those of you who have recently felt the sting of death in your personal lives, understand that death is an enemy of the human race and that we can't stop it when it comes to our doorstep. For all of our seeming appearance of strength as we live in the flower of youth, later comes the weakness of nursing homes followed by the grave. We don't have this kind of power. The point that Paul is making here in verse 20 is that God has power that goes beyond the human race. God has power that goes beyond men. When God raised Christ from the grave, he did something supernatural that was beyond the ability of man to accomplish and the phrase here, look at verse 20 with me, this power which in the text that we're using here, the New American Standard, says "which He brought about in Christ," that phrase "He brought about," it's from the same word that was used just a few words earlier. "The working of the strength of his might," it's the same Greek root that's translated "He brought about." it's kind of a flimsy translation there. What it's saying is that these are in accordance with the working of the strength of his might which God worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead. We get our English word "energy" from this word group. The working of the strength of his might which he worked in Christ, this energy, this power.

Let's put it another way: God displayed his energy, his power, his strength, after Jesus had been crucified and placed in the grave. He did it in two ways: 1. He raised Christ from the dead. Jesus was certified as dead by trained Roman soldiers and they thrust a spear in his side and blood and water flowed out. That was a death certificate. He was certified as dead, placed in a tomb, a stone rolled over and the stone was sealed and Roman soldiers were guarding it. How on earth was he supposed to come out of that grave? But he did. God displayed incomparable power in the resurrection of Christ. You and I can't avoid death. We can perhaps postpone it humanly speaking by medical means but in the end, death wins every time. In Christ, in God's power over the resurrection, God displays that he has power even over that realm where we have no power. We can't avoid death. We can't overcome it. We can't reverse it. If we could, we would when we think of the loved ones that we are missing here today. But we can't do that. We don't have that power. God does. That's the point and he displayed it when he raised Christ from the dead.

Now, watch this: Paul's point here, what he's really saying here is as he's praying, he's saying, "I want you to understand that the same power that raised Christ is the power that is at work in your Christian life." Resurrection power is at work in every true Christian. Paul is praying that we would understand that. All of a sudden, the challenges, the difficulties, the internal and external weaknesses that we feel, all of a sudden, here's the point: we view them from a completely different perspective. It's not that those things are going to crush us. That can't be the case because there is a greater power at work in us so that we would triumph through them and display the power of God through the very weaknesses that otherwise would crush us. That's what you're supposed to understand. You are not meant to, you are not destined to, God did not save you to tremble at life in fear and anxiety and uncertainty. You are supposed to understand, "No, there is a greater power at work in me and therefore whatever God has presented in my life circumstantially, whatever temptations I might face, whenever death comes knocking on my door, I answer the door with strength and confidence, not with fear and weakness and further sin." That's the point and you can do that because there is a greater power at work than just your mere human ability. That's the point. There should be dawning on your heart, there should be dawning in your mind, "This is really, really great." Not just that this is wonderful to know and to be a part of but this is something greater than human minds could express.

Now, this whole passage just goes on. It's just like one wave comes on shore and then a bigger wave comes on and then a bigger one after that. There are just bigger and bigger waves of the truth of God and the power that is at work in Christ that is designed for us to understand the power that is at work in us. God didn't just raise Christ from the dead. This isn't just resurrection power, although that would be great enough. Paul quickly goes by the resurrection to another truth, another aspect of the way that God exalted Christ after the crucifixion. Look at verse 20 with me again. He didn't just raise Christ from the dead, "He brought about in Christ," in other words, he worked it in Christ, "when He raised Him from the dead," and watch the conjunction here, "and." There is a resurrection which that alone could occupy our thoughts for the next ten years of preaching to talk

about the resurrection and the implications of that but as great as that is, Paul practically passes over it and says, "and there's something more I want you to see here. There is something more that I'm praying that you would appropriate." He says, "God's power raised Christ from the dead, yes, and further, in addition, He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

You remember what happened in the ascension. Turn back to Acts 1:9 just in case you don't. There are a couple of things maybe that we want to see here. God didn't merely, here's the point, God's power didn't merely resurrect Christ from the dead and then leave him to wander about on the earth, as it were. God's power did something even further. In verse 9 of Acts 1, it raised him into heaven. Look at Acts 1:9, "And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." God supernaturally lifted Christ from earth, through the gravity and the atmosphere all the way up into the geographic region of heaven where Christ currently dwells in bodily form. We have no access to heaven geographically speaking. We can't book a flight that will take us there later today is what I mean by that. We have access to heaven spiritually through Christ but we can't get there in a spatial sense. We wouldn't have the first idea where to go. God, by his power, not only raised Christ from the dead to walk on earth again, he raised him from earth all the way into heaven. That, beloved, is great, great power. That's the point.

What kind of miraculous power intervenes in time and nature and lifts Christ into the sky away from human sight? Where do you go to find that kind of power? Do you get an extension cord and plug into the wall? Does our electrical grid generate that kind of power? No. There is no human comparison to this. There is nothing like this. That's what you need to see. This is what you are supposed to understand. This is a power that is supernatural, that is beyond the human realm, that raises Christ from the dead, that lifts him into heaven.

Even that's not all. Look on in verse 21. When Christ was received into heaven, he seated him, verse 20, he "seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." When Christ returned to heaven, God seated him at the place of preeminent authority, honor and favor. What kind of power puts someone at the right hand of God? At that place of preeminent honor, power and authority? No one goes there. No human power gets there. We don't have access. We don't know how to get there. We don't have any prerogative to be at the right hand of God in that singular position of greatness. And yet, God took Christ without exhausting his power, he took Christ from the grave to the earth to heaven to his right hand. That is astonishing power. That is a holy power. In the language of verse 19, look at verse 19 of Ephesians 1, that is surpassingly great power that human language cannot exhaust in its description.

Notice as you continue on in verse 21, it's not just what we've already said. Remember the demonic realm we talked about, alluded to, from Ephesians 6, that supernatural, dark realm. Paul says, "I want you to understand that the way that God has exalted Christ and he has seated him in the heavenly places," verse 21, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named." He said, "Whatever supernatural

realm there may be, unseen demons, angels, all of that. Whatever the angelic and demonic realm is, Christ is way above that." That's how great the power of God is, that even demons couldn't restrain it from coming to pass. Paul multiplies references to angelic beings with these words "rule" and "authority" and "power" and "dominion." Then he expands it in verse 21, "and every name that is named." You name anyone, anything at any place in the course of time: Alexander the Great, Nebuchadnezzar, Sennacherib, US Presidents, world leaders. You name it. Take the greatest of those who have had the greatest fame and the greatest honor on earth. Multiply it by the strength of supernatural angelic and demonic beings. Let your mind run wild to think of the greatest men you've ever heard of or ever have known and the name of Christ and the person of Christ is far above them. Here's his point: for Christ to be exalted to that great place at the right hand of God means that the power that put him there is greater than any other power in the universe, visible or invisible. There is no greater power than the power that exalted Christ to such a place of honor and preeminence. He's far above every name that is named.

Now watch this, he's still not done. He's still not done talking about the greatness of this power. Resurrection would have been enough to say, "Whoa, I bow before that power. The power of the ascension, from the grave to earth, to the skies. That's something I can't do. That's something you can't do. That's something no one can do in their own power." But then to set him at the right hand of God where all of his greatness surpasses the greatest names that we could possibly name, spiritual or human, throughout the whole course of time, greater than all of that and you're just left in a wondrous, trembling, fearful awe of how great Christ is and how great the power is that was at work in his career, if I can use that inadequate term.

Then you look at verse 21 and you realize that the greatness is still not exhausted. Look at the end of verse 21, "not only in this age but also in the one to come." God has exalted Christ greatly this way in this present age and in the age to come. In eternity, nothing's going to change. Christ will still be in that exalted place. The power of God, in other words, is so great that he could do this in time and it's so great that he can guarantee it for all of eternity. It's true for this age about the greatness of Christ; it's true for the age that is to come. How great is the power of God? It exalted Christ to heaven. It raised him from the dead. It exalted him to heaven to reign over men and hostile spiritual beings now and forevermore. That's great power. That is mighty strength. That is an energy that is beyond, not only human ability, it's beyond human comprehension. That's great, great power and Paul's point is, "I want you to understand that the power that did that in Christ is the power that is at work in you as a believer in Christ."

That's what he's praying for so when we come to the instructions about godly living in Ephesians 4-6, watch this: we remember that Christ has equipped us to obey. When devastating things come into your life as a Christian, things that would otherwise be devastating, you remember, "Ah, no, I will not cave under this because Christ has equipped me for such a time as this." When opportunities come that seem beyond your ability but yet the door is open for you to do it, you don't shrink back in fear and say, "I can't do that." No, no, you rise up and say, "If the opportunity is here, the power of God is

at work in me. I'm going to go for it." When men begin to oppose you and resist you for your testimony in Christ, you don't flinch. You stand all the more strong. No, the power of God that raised Christ and exalted him to heaven is at work with me here. You see, this whole thing designs us to be strong, obedient, courageous, noble Christians and that's what we're supposed to be. Not goofballs running around up and down aisles and speaking in tongues and all of that stuff that is a false, cheap substitute for the reality. Here is the power of God. Not in stage-managed healings that couldn't possibly be real. If they really had that power, they'd go in and empty children's hospitals around the world. They don't have that power. It's all a charade. It's all an act designed to fleece desperate people out of their money and they do it in the name of displaying the power of God. That's my point. That is a fraud. What we see here revealed in the trustworthy, sure, inerrant word of God, here is where we find the definition of the power of God, not in stage-managed theatrics. In Christ, resurrected, exalted and reigning over all in this age and in the age to come. That's where the power of God is and Paul says that's the power that's at work in your Christian life. God has made you sufficient – listen to me – God has made you sufficient as a Christian for the life that he has orchestrated for you to live. Your circumstances are not too difficult for you if you're a Christian. You may feel your weakness, 2 Corinthians 12 says his power is perfected in your weakness. That's where he displays strength, in your weakness.

So what we're talking about right here, right now, is designed to revolutionize the way that you view all of life. It takes away the excuses for giving into temptation. It takes away the source and the cause of anxiety. We receive this. We rest in this. We stand in this. We go forward in this. And we say in the deep recesses of our hearts, "I am not going to be a cowardly, sinning, weak Christian because God has put power in my life that enables me not to live that way. So as we read in the Gospels and in the epistles about the great exaltation of Christ in his resurrection, we realize, "Wow, that's the power that's at work in me too and as long as God gives me breath, I'm going to trust in that power, I'm going to rely on that power, I'm going to act in accordance with the fact that that is a spiritual reality and I'm not basing my life on my feelings, on my circumstances or on old wives' tales. I'm not going to base it on religious rituals that have no power to change my heart." We start at the word of God. We start at the reality of the Christian life and God says, "This is what I've done for you. Now rise and go forth. Be strong. Be courageous. Be a man for Christ."

Now, all of that simply to say that God has exalted Christ to heaven and that is the power that is at work in us. But he goes on. Verse 21 isn't the end of the chapter. God has done more in Christ. It kind of just flows out of what we just saw in verse 21 but point 2 here is that: God subjected all things to Christ. He subjected all things to Christ. Everything in the universe is inferior to Jesus Christ. There is nothing greater than him. There is no person, there is no power that exceeds Christ. There is no being that can successfully oppose him. Christ will never be overthrown. Heaven will never be overthrown by a coming rebellion.

Look at verse 22. There is that blessed conjunction again, "And," so watch the flow of thought here. Verse 20, God worked this "in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead

and seated Him at His right hand in the heaven." Now verse 22, and he did something else and there's another way that Paul can illustrate the greatness of the power of God that is at work in the lives of believers. And. You see, he's multiplying aspects of the way God has worked in Christ showing us that from various angles so that we would grasp something of the majesty of what has happened to us spiritually in conversion. Verse 22, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet." All things are inferior to Christ. They are subject to him. Christ rules over all of it and here in this verse we see allusions to two different passages from the Psalms. I want to take you there just to help you see that Paul here is referring to the fulfillment of things that the Old Testament pointed to. Go back to Psalm 8, if you would. Psalm 8:6, remembering that the passage has just said that he put all things in subjection under his feet. Now in Psalm 8, which at one level is a reflection on the dignity of man that God has assigned to the human race, well Christ, as the preeminent head of the human race fulfills in the ultimate sense what this Psalm speaks about. Verse 6 here in Psalm 8 is praising God and he says, "You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet." Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of that statement from David in Psalm 8. "All things," heaven and earth. "All things," visible and invisible. "All things," past, present and future. Whatever dimension at which you want to evaluate this, Christ is over it all. It's all subjected to him. He rules over it all. The power of God, remember, keep in mind, here's the point: the power of God did that. Look at Psalm 110:1, a passage quoted numerous times in the New Testament. "The LORD says to my Lord," Yahweh says to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand." This is what God the Father in essence says to Christ the Son, "Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet."

Go back to Ephesians 1:22 and see the ultimate fulfillment of this in the ascension and the exaltation of Christ. God, verse 22, by his power has put all things in subjection under the feet of Christ. This phrase "under his feet" was used of the winner of a duel who put his feet on the neck of an enemy that was on the ground. Total, absolute conquest. Total, absolute victory. Total subjugation. That's a picture of Christ over his enemies. It's a picture of Christ over all. The friends of Christ are under his control. The enemies of Christ are under his control. Men are under his control. Demons are under his control. Angels are under his control. Everything is under his feet. Christ's victory and exaltation to heaven has made him a supreme victor over all and if God allows here in time for people to walk around in rebellion for a season, it's temporary. It's not because Christ is somehow not the conqueror. This victory is not always or necessarily even often obvious in an outward sense but God makes it plain in Scripture.

Beloved, here's the thing: you and I should trust not what we see in the temporary world around us to evaluate whether this is true or not, we should go to the Scriptures that describes the exaltation of Christ, his sitting down by the power of God at the right hand of God where he reigns over all and we say, "Here is the defining reality." This is that by which we determine what is real and what is real is that Christ is at the right hand of God reigning over all things, having subjected all things to himself and then you extend it as Paul tells us to do and to realize that the power that put him there is the power that works in your soul in the Christian life.

There's a final display of God's power in Christ that he goes into as we conclude this passage. He worked it in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at the right hand of God and he put all things in subjection under his feet. Look at the middle of verse 22, another conjunction. Another blessed conjunction, "and." And. And. And. And. You wonder if Paul is ever going to stop speaking about the ways that we would see and understand and appropriate the power of God in our lives. "And gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Look, it's not just that Christ is over all of the universe and that he's the authoritative head of the universe in that sense. He is that but there's another dimension to his authority. There is another realm in which he exercises authority and that is the realm in which Christ rules over the universal body of those who believe in him. Christ is the head of the church. Those who believe in Christ have him as their head. How is it that Christ came to that position? How is it that spiritually redeemed men and women through the ages would be under Christ as their head? How is it that we today know Christ as Lord? How is it that this church which didn't exist three years ago came into being? Now we're talking about our local body which is a manifestation of the universal body of believers. How did this happen? It's because Christ is head over all things even in the church. How did he get there? The power of God was at work.

Christ has authority over the church as well as over the universe. He rules over God's redeemed people. We are identified with him like a body is identified with its head. That group of people that Christ died for on the cross he now reigns over as Lord and head. Christ directs the church with his authority. Think about it this way: Christ is head, authority over the created realm of the universe, the physical universe. He created it and he's head over it. He is also head over the spiritual realm of the redeemed. You start to run out of words to describe the greatness of Christ, don't you? You look at what you see around you and you see the realm of which Christ reigns. As a Christian, you consider your life, he's Lord over your life. You look at the church, the realm of the church from Pentecost into the eternal age, he's head over that. He's Lord over death. He's Lord in heaven. Everywhere we go, any realm of which we could think finds Christ at the pinnacle. He must be really, really great. Watch this: the power that enabled him to subdue, as it were, the rebellion of the human race starting in Genesis 3 to fulfill and satisfy the curse that God placed on the race because of Adam's sin and which you and I all have participated and furthered, for Christ to fulfill the curse of that in his body on the cross, for him to rise from the dead over that realm, I use this phrase a lot: you get lost in wonder, awe and praise.

Everywhere we go if we properly think: in nature, in the church, in the future, in the past. Everywhere. We see Christ evermore preeminent. Evermore glorious. Evermore ruling by the power of God and Paul's point is...you can see why he prays for it, right? "God, enlighten their eyes so that they would see how great this power is and then understand that it's connected to their lives today. God, help them to see that so that they would live differently and that they would see they have the ability to live what I'm going to call them to later in this letter."

Now, there's an aspect here in this verse that we need to talk about to complete our exposition of it in verse 23. God "gave Him as head over all things to the church," and then there is an explanation, there is an appositional statement that is made about the church, the church "which is His body." The church is the body of Christ. Paul will return to that metaphor in Ephesians 5. We're connected to Christ like a body is connected to its head. Then there is this difficult statement, "which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." I remember the first time I preached this passage many years ago. I made sure that my sermon ended before I had the responsibility to try to explain what that meant. I can't do that here. Whenever I try to cut a sermon short here at Truth Community, I get chastised. Good commentators disagree over what this means. Better men than I see this differently than what I've going to explain it to you as and the question is: what does it mean "the fullness of Him who fills all in all"? What does that mean and how does it relate to the fact that the church is the body of Christ? I'm going to oversimplify it here. You could read this verse in the sense that the church is the fullness of Christ in the sense that the church completes who Christ is. Christ is incomplete without his body. Christ is incomplete without his people. He came to save the church and until the church is all gathered in, he is in a sense incomplete without it. The church is the fullness of Christ in the sense that it completes what Christ came to do; it represents the fullness of his eternal mission. You could read it that way. Good men have read it that way. That view is possible grammatically but I don't think that's what it's saying. I think it's better to see this verse as saying that the church is on the receiving end of the fullness that Christ gives to it.

So look at verse 23 with me again. The church "is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." You've got to remember two things that when you come to a difficult verse, let context direct the way that you understand it. Here is verses 15-23, the whole point of the passage has been what God has done for the church in Christ. It makes sense then that in verse 23, it would be an extension of that theme of what God has done for the church in Christ rather than suddenly becoming about what the church does for Christ to make him complete and that's disregarding all of the theological issues to talk about Christ as someone being incomplete. But the passage here is talking about what God has done for the church and Paul praying, "God, help them to understand what you have done and the power so that they would get it." To suddenly pivot and make it about what the church does for Christ seems awfully contrary to the context. This is talking about how Christ fills the church.

There are a couple of other things here in Ephesians that will help you see this. This word "fullness" when it's used elsewhere in the book of Ephesians is talking about the church on the receiving end of this filling from Christ. Look at Ephesians 3:14, Paul is praying again. He says, "I bow my knees before the Father." Verse 16, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." You see, his prayer here is that the church would be on the receiving end of a work of God. Verse 17, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." Verse 18, that you "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth," verse 19, "and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." He's praying for the

church to receive and understand and embrace the fullness of all that God has done for them. Similarly in chapter 4, verse 13, he says again, God gave some as apostles, verse 12, "for the equipping of the saints." Verse 13, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." Again, the church on the receiving end of a work of God which fills it, which completes it, which equips it, to do what God has called it to do. So Paul is praying that we'd understand this.

Let me wrap all this up together. Stepping back. Thinking about the big picture of what we've seen in the fullness of Ephesians 1: God chose us, adopted us, redeemed us, included us in his will, sealed us in the Spirit. Paul says, "I pray that you'd understand the hope of your calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and what is the surpassing of His power toward us who believe." He says, "This is so magnificent. It's so great and I'm just praying that God would help you get your mind around it. Just as Christ rules over all things in the universe to achieve his will, Paul is praying that we would understand that he also rules over us. That he directs and provides and protects us according to that same unlimited power.

Look, this must be important because it's recorded in the word of God by an apostle writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it's so important that an apostle is praying that we would get it. That tells you something, Christian. That tells you that you're in danger of missing it. You're in danger of missing the whole point of getting so wrapped up in the world around you that you miss the bigger aspect of what is going on. God has truly given you the power to live the life that he has called you to and there are no exceptions to that. I realize that there are a lot of trials represented in this room. If you're a Christian, God has equipped you for precisely the life he has called you to live. You can do it because the power of God that worked in Christ is also at work in you. There is no reason for us to be afraid of death. We belong to the one who conquered death. There is no reason for us to fear the future, the future is glorious. All of that should have a sanctifying effect on your life. Those sins that you love and those ways that you waste time should become increasingly distasteful to your affections. "This has nothing to do with what God has called me to, what he has given me the power to live." This should shape your affections for heaven and give you a confidence about what God is doing in your life that allows you to rest and go forward with a song in your heart. That's how great the power of Christ is toward those of us who believe. Bless his holy name.

Bow with me in prayer.

I usually like to speak to unbelievers at this time and I'm going to do it again here today. Do you realize how foolish and useless your rebellion against Christ is? That you cannot possibly succeed in rebelling against one who is so highly exalted? That you are no match for the power of God? I ask you once more: won't you lay down the weapons of your heart rebellion? Won't you bend to Christ who lovingly calls you? "I will share these riches with you. Come to me and I will give you eternal life." Won't you put your faith in Christ right now? Abandon your love of sin. Abandon your love of self. Come out of all of that rejection of Christ so that the power of God would be arrayed in your favor rather

than against you. Your arms are not long enough to box with God. He will prevail in the end. Oh, let him prevail now over your heart as you give your life to Christ for eternal salvation rather than prevailing over you in judgment when you would be cast away forever. Don't leave this room, man, woman, boy, girl, don't leave this room without having handed your life over to Christ for him to save you to the uttermost.

Father, we praise you for your great power. We have seen omnipotence on display in the text before us. You energized all that toward the person of Christ and then incidentally, almost, as it were, exercised that same power to do good in our lives. Help us to respond now in this life with praise and obedience and confidence. Father, may that simply prepare us for an eternity of worshiping you for the greatness of your majesty, power and love. We pray in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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