

# God's Power Exerted for You

Ephesians 1:20-23

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## **Introduction**

God's saving work in Jesus Christ is such an encouraging thing, isn't it?

- It is such a great work, such a wonderful work, such a monumental absolute transforming work—a work that completely reverses our eternal destiny.

As a preacher, I can identify with Paul as he writes this first chapter of Ephesians.

- You realise that God has done something so marvellous for His people and that they don't even realise the half of it!
  - You see them struggling along and you think, ah, if only they could see the riches of their salvation!
    - If only they could see what great things God has done for them!
    - God has sent me to declare it to them, and I myself do not even know the half of it...
- Brothers and sisters, you know how you feel about those outside of Christ...
  - "If only they could see! If only they knew!"
  - But you see, Paul felt that way about the Ephesians who believed...
    - about all the people He ministered the gospel too...
      - He wanted to make them see the riches of the glory of their inheritance in Christ.
      - He burned to make Christ known to His people...
        - He is constantly saying to them,
          - "Just look at what the LORD has done for you! Just look! Can you see it? Isn't it wonderful?"
          - Oh, wake up and understand!
- That's what he has been doing in Ephesians 1.
  - In the first 14 verses, he laid it all out before them!
    - He keeps showing them that God has made it His purpose to display His glory by being gracious to them—by taking them from their ruined estate and bringing them into His glorious kingdom of righteousness and peace.
  - And then in verse 15, He tells them that he is praying without ceasing that their eyes will be opened to see what they have...

- They see it now—but they need to see it so much more...
  - there is so much more for them to understand! to grasp! to lay hold of!
  - Paul is very earnest about this!
    - The gospel is burning within him and he wants it to burn in the Ephesians too!
    - Oh my brothers and sisters—just think what you have!
      - The God who would have been honoured only to condemn you and to cast you into the Lake of Fire (if you were left as you were) has chosen to be honoured by redeeming you and bringing you to live in His house as His sons and daughters forever!
      - Paul is saying, “I pray without ceasing that you will see what has been done!”

And today as we come to the end of Paul’s prayer,

- I want you notice where he goes...
- We saw last week that he prayed that their eyes would be opened to see three things:
  - First, the hope of their calling—that it is something certain because God has called...
  - Second, the riches of the glory of their inheritance in the saints—that they would see just how precious their salvation is...
  - and third, the exceeding greatness of God’s power toward us who believe...
    - He wants them to see the mountain moving power that was expended for them.
    - To realise the immensity of the power that was required to move us from eternal condemnation to eternal glory in His house...
      - the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of His mighty power...
- It is on this third point that he dwells...
  - And you will notice that He shows us how this monumental power, this exceeding great power for us, was exercised...
    - or more particularly, in whom it was exercised!
    - He focuses on Jesus Christ and the power exerted for us in His ministry as our redeemer.
      - This is the power-exercised-toward-us that Paul wants us to understand better.

- He wants God to open our eyes to see the power exercised for us through Jesus Christ.
- It is no surprise that Paul speaks of Christ here...
  - He has been talking about Him through the whole chapter—constantly...
    - In almost every verse he says, “In Christ,” “through Christ,” “by Christ,” or “in Him” with the pronoun “Him” referring to Christ.
    - So it is no surprise that when the Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul, wants us to understand the power of God wrought for us in salvation,
      - It is the power that was exercised with reference to our redeemer.
  - Let’s be realistic—
    - When we look at the church and at ourselves, we can see something of God’s power in our conversion and preservation,
      - and if we really understand what we are up against in the world, and the depravity of our nature, it is a very wonderful power—a very great power.
      - But the truth is, there is still a lot of weakness...
        - In Romans 8, Paul talks about this present time as a time of groaning as we eagerly wait for our adoption and for the redemption of our bodies.
        - In Romans 7, he spoke about the need we have to be delivered from the body of death that we yet carry around with us.
        - In 2 Cor 4:17-18 he says there is no comparison between what we have now and what we will have when God brings us to glory...
          - “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” (2Co 4:17-18 NKJV)
        - In other words, God’s power has nearly done all that it is going to do in us...
          - In 1 Cor 15, Paul even goes so far as to say that if there is no future resurrection for us, it’s all a complete waste of time!
          - All this talk about salvation is a lie and we should abandon the whole thing—if there is no future hope.
- Now do you see what this has to do with understanding God’s power toward us?
  - We can’t understand it only by looking at ourselves and where we are at this point in our lives...

- Yes, we have been turned around—and this is a marvellous and great work!
  - This is something to glory in!
- But if we really want to see the power of God, exercised for us, the place to see it is in Jesus Christ!
  - It is the power that God “worked in Christ” as Paul puts it in verse 20.
    - We see the power of God for our salvation by fixing our eyes on the power wrought through our Saviour.
  - By looking at what God did for us in Christ we will see clearly the exceeding greatness of His power—
    - we will see it in such a way that we will be filled with praise to God—we will stand in awe before such power...
      - It will enhance our worship of God and our admiration for God.
    - we will see it in a way that will inspire hope in us for what God will yet do in us by such power...
      - If He has done so much in Christ for us, He will do all that He has promised in us.
    - and we will see it in such a way that we will be filled with gratitude that such power should be expended for us.
      - How great is His love who put into effect His omnipotent power to redeem us, even when we did not deserve it!

So brothers and sisters, give attention now as we explore what the Holy Spirit says to us in Ephesians 1:20-23 about God’s power in Christ—

- May you be enlightened to see it better than ever before, and to keep on seeing it over the years as you go in Christ.

## **I. First, see the power that raised Christ from the dead**

A. It is a marvellous thing to consider that here was a man...

- a man who had been severely beaten,
- a man who had been crucified,
- a man who had had a spear thrust into His side and up into His heart so that blood and water had gushed out...
  - raised from the dead!

1. Resurrection is a marvellous thing because it can take a body that has been torn apart and that has ceased to function and put it back together again.
  - When Jesus and the apostles raised others from the dead, it caused the multitudes to marvel.
    - It caused them to see the mighty power of God.
    - So in Christ's resurrection.
  
2. You only need to think about what it must have been like for those who mourned at the funeral of Lazarus and then saw him come out of the grave at the mere command of Jesus to "come forth!"
  - To have actually been there and seen it—you would have marvelled...
  
3. And with Jesus, there is something even greater.
  - a. When Lazarus was raised, it was only to live a few more years and then to die like all the rest of us.
    - He was still subject to sickness and pain and would at last die...
      - His body was still under the curse of God and was not fundamentally different than the body he had before he became sick.
  
  - b. But when Jesus was raised, His body was changed.
    - He was no longer subject to death, or to having His body rebel against Him—
      - You know, to give up in tiredness when it was asked to do something... or to cease to function as it ought as in times of sickness.
    - His body was made immortal.
      - This is what God has promised to do for every believer...
      - This corruptible must put on in corruption.
      - Christ is the first fruits, and we will all be raised as He was raised.
        - This is a glorious thing!
        - See in the power of God!

TRANS> But my brothers and sisters, I have hardly yet begun to speak of the mighty power that was exercised when Christ was raised from the dead!

- Yes, resurrection from the dead—especially resurrection to immortality—is a marvellous thing!
  - but there is a power in the resurrection of Christ that goes way beyond this!

- B. You do not grasp the power of Jesus' resurrection until you understand something of the power of the death that held Him!
1. You must understand that when Jesus was raised, it was not just that a man was raised from the dead and made immortal...
    - Jesus was raised up as the Christ! the Redeemer! The Messiah!
    - He was raised up as the Christ who had died for the entire church of God from the beginning of time until the end of the world!
  2. Remember that when He died, He died as the representative of the whole church.
    - a. Isaiah tells us that *all* our iniquities were laid on Him...
      - They were charged to Him.
      - He took on the sin of the entire church in all its ages...
        - He represented you for all your irreverence and ingratitude toward God in our worship this morning...
          - for every adulterous glance...
          - for the bitterness and the selfishness and the deception...
          - for the idolatry and the Sabbath breaking...
          - for all those sins in all His people in every age.
    - b. Just try to imagine the weight of all that sin!
      - 1) Out of all of it, the very least sin in the whole big pile is enough to drive us down to Hell forever.
        - All the riches in the world were not sufficient to pay the penalty of even that one sin!
        - And that least sin as well as the very greatest, and all the others in between were all loaded onto Christ when He went to the cross...
        - All that sin brought Him down to the grave.
      - 2) And brothers and sisters, it was from *that* grave that Jesus arose!
        - a) What came out of that grave was not just a man,
          - but the Christ man...
          - the man who represented the whole church...
          - the man who made Himself an offering for the whole church to fully bear the penalty of sin for the whole church.
        - b) Do you see what happened—in a representative way when that man rose from the dead?
          - The whole church came out of the grave on that day!

- God's infinite, mighty power that had sentenced us to death broke the power of death and raised Him up.
    - Death was vanquished for the entire church of God!
    - The steel bars that held us in bondage were broken away and out He came with immortality for us all!
      - The very curse of God was turned to a blessing!
- c. Hallelujah!
- With what units can we measure this great power?
    - It is off the scale of human understanding!
    - It stretches us beyond our limits!
      - But let us stretch our minds to understand...
      - Let us stand back and marvel with awe and wonder!
  - This power has been exercised for you Christian!
    - Let hope permeate you to the very marrow of your being!
    - Let praise and thanksgiving well up in greater and greater measure from your heart forever!
      - What a mighty Saviour—our Christ—risen from the dead for us!
        - That is the first thing the Holy Spirit reveals to us in this passage.

## **II. Second, see the power that exalted Christ to the highest place in the universe.**

### **A. See how Paul speaks of this in verse 20-21...**

1. He speaks of the power that God worked in Christ when he not only raised Him from the dead, but when He:
  - Eph 1:20-21: "seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."
2. To be at the right hand of God is to be at the place of highest power under God.
  - a. It is like the position that Joseph was given in the Old Testament—
    - You will remember—after he interpreted Pharaoh's dream about the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine...
    - Pharaoh put Joseph at his own right hand and said:
      - Gen 41:39-44: Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

- Pharaoh had authority over all of Egypt, so it was within his power to grant this authority to Joseph...
  - Joseph's authority was backed up by Pharaoh and was unlimited except for the throne...
  - He fully trusted Joseph with all authority in all of Egypt.
  
- b. In the same way, Christ was given authority over everything in heaven and earth.
  - 1) God alone is the LORD of heaven and earth so that no angel or man can lift his hand or foot in all the universe without his consent.
    - And now, after He raised Christ from the dead,
      - He gave Him authority over all things in heaven and earth!
      - Christ Jesus is seated at His right hand so that only in the throne is God greater than He!
  - 2) Paul lays up words to show us how universal and complete this authority is!
    - a) first, he says that Jesus has been put *far* above (not just above, but *far* above) all principality and power and might and dominion...
      - A lot of commentators have tried to figure out what all these words are referring to—
        - are they ranks of angels—or is the first pair of terms about earthly rulers and the second about angelic rulers?
        - They cannot tell—there is no consensus...
          - but that is not Paul's point!
          - His point is that Christ has been given authority over the whole universe!
    - b) He goes on to say that He is far above every name that is named...
      - By name, Paul is talking about titles...
        - You know how men are given titles—they are called lords or masters or kings or dukes or prime ministers or elders or deacons or officers...

- There are millions of names that are named...
- But Jesus has been given the name above every name so that every last one must answer to Him!
  - He has the last word—from His judgement there is no appeal!
  - He alone decides who will live and who will die, who will be blessed and who will be cursed, what is to be done and what is not to be done.
  - He showed Himself to act in perfect synchronisation with the Father, so now He has been given all authority all authority in heaven and earth.
- c) And Paul makes it clear that this is a permanent conference of this authority...
  - It is not until another comes to take His place—it is forever—
    - He is over all, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come.
    - There will be no successor!
    - He has the final word forever and ever and no one can remove Him from this position!
- 3) I might add that it is on the basis of this authority that Jesus commanded His church to go out into all the world and preach the gospel, commanding all men everywhere to repent and believe...
  - When He gave them this great commission, He began by saying, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me...”
  - That is exactly what Paul is talking about here in Ephesians 1:21-22!

B. Now you may look at this and you may say,

- but I don't understand—did the Son of God not always have this authority?
  - Why does Paul speak as if this is something that was **given** to Christ as if he didn't have it before—
    - indeed, why does Jesus Himself speak of it that way in Matthew 28?
- 1. Paul speaks this way because He is speaking of Christ who did not have this authority until God gave it to Him...
  - Paul is speaking about the same Christ we talked about earlier who rose from the dead...
    - Not the Son of God from eternity, but the Son of God in human flesh!

- The man Christ—the Son of man...
  - He is the one who was **given** this authority over the whole universe.
    - He was given it as the Christ who is our mediator and who represents the whole church!
2. Do you understand what this means?
- a. It means that a human being—Christ Jesus the man—has been given absolute authority over everything...
    - Christ as Messiah is in this place...
      - Christ as the redeemer of the whole church!
      - Christ representing the whole church!
  - b. Christians are glad when they get a man into high office who is a brother—a believer who will represent them in the high courts of the land...
    - Well brothers and sisters, our own flesh and blood has been exalted above the angels and is seated at the right hand of God!
      - And because He is there as Christ—as the representative of the whole church—
        - He is there for us.
        - We who belong to Him are in a sense in that position with Him!
  - c. Do you get it?
    - Our Saviour—not just in His divine form, but in His human form—is given the place of highest honour and privilege...
      - And because He is united to His church, we are brought into that same privilege with Him!
    - We are talking here about the power that moved the whole church—
      - not only from death to life...
      - but from death to the very right hand of God!
        - That is where the church is because that is where Christ is!
        - Everything in heaven and earth has been made subservient to us because Christ has made us God’s sons!
    - Think of what power this is manifest in the exaltation of our Saviour to God’s right hand!
      - By His merit, the whole church is brought from the place of condemnation right into the very house of God as sons!
        - How far our Jesus raised us!

- What a reversal of our destiny!
- What unspeakable power has been wrought for us!

**III. Third, see the outworking of His power... what all this power does—how it changes everything for us.**

- You need to see this because you may look at what has been said and you may say,
  - “Okay, I understand what is being taught here...
    - Christ was raised and given authority as Christ, for the sake of the Church, and by His power we were all raised from condemnation to the right hand of God.
    - He dragged all of us up from our misery to the highest place in heaven and earth, and now we reign with Him...”
      - But you would say, “I really don’t feel much like I’m reigning.
        - I mean, I still have trouble mastering myself—I find it hard to even pray as I ought—to be consistently kind to my own spouse—to be responsible...
        - and just look at the mess our world is in...
          - I could hardly say that we believers are reigning!”
          - “So tell me about the outworking of all this power... where is it?”
- Before I explain, let me remind you what I told you at the beginning...
  - Paul is saying all this to encourage you to see what God has done *in Christ*.
    - We have not yet experienced the resurrection for ourselves and we won’t until the end of the age...
    - But Christ has and what is done for Him as Christ is done for us all...
      - We **will** be brought to where He is...and because He is there already, we can see where that will be.
      - We can look the place Christ has been given in our flesh and we can see the place we will be given we go to be with Him and raised up to reign with Him in the heavenly places.

A. Paul shows first of all that everything has been put under His feet...

- In verse 22 He says:
  - Eph 1:22: And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church...

1. Paul speaks of this here as something that has already been done...

- a. And there is a sense in which it has been done.
  - When Christ was given His position of authority,
    - as is spoken about in verse 21,
      - it only follows that if He is over everything in heaven and earth, then everything in heaven and earth is under Him!
- b. Yet, at the same time the scripture frankly acknowledges that we do not see everything put under Him...
  - 1) There is still a voice of rebellion among the angels, among the men of the world, and even in our own hearts...
    - All this has not yet been subdued.
  - 2) In Hebrews, we read of the tension. The author says:
    - Hebrews 2:6-9: But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor.
      - He is given the position, but we do not see the actual results... not yet!
        - But we see Christ exalted to the position of glory and honour and we know that all things will be brought under His feet...
        - He will reign until all His enemies are brought under His feet.
          - It is the sure promise of scripture.
  - c. So it has already been done in that the authority has been given to Christ...
    - all things are put under Him...
    - and all things will be brought to their final place at the appointed time.
- 2. What this means that even now everything does what Christ wants it to do...
  - And as the head of the church who is over all things,
    - Christ uses all things for the sake of the church...
      - Just as the Father used Judas for the church and the Assyrian empire, and the flood for the church—
        - so Christ as head of the church uses everything for the good of the church.
  - a. It is not His will to bring everything to its final place just yet—

- He has told us plainly that He will not do that until the day and the hour appointed by the Father...
    - a day and an hour that He did not even know before His resurrection.
  - As the head of the church, it is His will, for the good of the church,
    - to leave us in a world of sickness and persecution and death where God is often opposed.
    - He could put a stop to it whenever He wants, but He wants to use these things to prepare us for a more blessed eternity.
- b. It is for us, therefore, to continue serving Him with patience and hope...
- We are not to suppose that He is unable to bring the things that are put under His feet to their final place...
    - He is able and He will do it...
  - But in the mean time we are to learn how to love our enemies in a fallen world...
    - we are to know what it is to struggle with sin and with sickness and with persecution...
      - and with brothers and sisters who sometimes disappoint us...
      - and with pastors and elders who disappoint us!
      - and with political decisions that go against our Lord and sometimes make it hard for us.
        - As Paul said in Philippians,
          - It is given to you not only to believe, but also to suffer for His sake.
          - That is what Christ has for you to do until He is ready to bring everything to its final place of submission under His feet.
3. He has told us what that place of final submission will be!
- a. For those who have never acknowledged Him, it will be to the Lake of Fire.
- 1) Christ had told us that many will not be saved...
- There are many that He will consign to the place outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth,
    - away from the celestial joys of His eternal kingdom,
    - cut off from Him to spend eternity in misery...
      - all to the glory of His justice.

- 2) Brothers and sisters, the enemies of Christ and of His church will be stopped...
  - All those who work against Him and against His church will be taken out of the way and they will no longer be able to entice us with their temptations or harass us with their persecutions.
  - Christ, who is over all, will deal with them in an absolute and decisive way.
    - His authority will be visibly exercised in all its glory and fullness.

TRANS> That is what will happen to His enemies when they are brought under His feet—to all who have not acknowledged Him as Lord and Saviour.

- b. But to those who are called and who are thus united to Him by faith...
  - For all of you who believe and so are organically connected to His body...
    - His power will raise you up from death and misery to life and joy in the kingdom of God!
    - Remember that what God did in raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand,
      - He did for Him as the Christ who represents the whole church.
      - The power that He raised to the highest place was a great power because it was the power that brought the whole church up from condemnation and ruin to eternal life as God's own sons.

B. In verse 23, Paul shows us what that glorious mighty power is doing for you who believe as the members of His body.

1. By calling Christ our head, he shows that He is intimately connected to us.
  - a. This is why I was able to say before that when Christ was raised, so was the whole church!
    - If the head is brought up to heaven to sit at God's right hand, so is the body that belongs to the head.
    - He was raised as Christ the head of the church, not just as a private individual, not connected to anyone.
  - b. It is really quite remarkable that Paul even refers to Christ's body—to all of us who believe brothers and sisters—as the fullness of Him!
    - 1) Christ would not be Christ without His body!
      - What glory would there be in a Saviour who had no people that were saved?
      - He would be an empty Saviour...

- I don't mean that the Son of God would not be all glorious without or without us...
- But as a Saviour, He would be empty without us...
  - as the One who came as Christ to redeem a great multitude of people that no one can number,
    - what would we think of Him if there were none that were saved?

2) And so you see that as the Christ who came to redeem,

- We, the elect church, are filling Him up...
  - We are His members who will bring glory to Him as His body—
  - We will be His booty, His prize, His inheritance, the fruits of His gracious work.
- Each person has a very important place as a member—
  - It cannot be that he should be without a joint or that any part of Him should be defective.
  - He will bring us all to perfection so that,
    - as I have spoken about before, we will love as He has loved...
    - each with our own unique personally and place in His body...
    - each serving the other forever and ever...
    - each with joyful delight in the worship of our Father and of His Son...
- All of us together and none of us excluded make up the fullness of Christ.
  - That is why He insists that not one of us can perish, but that all without exception will be saved...
    - all that is, who are His elect, chosen before the foundation of the world to be in Christ.

2. Paul goes on to show the effect of our organic connection to Christ as our head...

a. The reason we can be His fullness is because He fills all in all!

- As Head, He fills us with His glorious life!
  - The head directs the whole body—we will brought into perfect submission to Him so that we will do just what He wants...
  - Oh it will be beautiful!

b. And as head, He also fills us with grace so that we are empowered to do His will...perfectly!

- That is what He is doing in us!
  - He is filling us up with the all His fullness.
  - He is fitting us to be God's sons and to live in God's house forever and ever...
  - He is filling us up with all in order that we may be the fullness of Him!
    - in order that we may bring glory to Him forever and ever!

**Conclusion:**

Brothers and sisters, what power has been exerted for you in Jesus Christ!

- He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us!
  - He is actually filling you with all the fullness of God that you might be the fullness of Him as Christ!
    - He brings you from the lowest place of condemnation and filth to highest place of life in God's house as His fullness!
- What power divine love has unfurled!
  - What a mighty Saviour!
    - What praise should come from you!
    - What hope belongs to you!
    - What gratitude should be yours!