

*For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his 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 and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 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 and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.* Ephesians 1:15-23

A crowded United Airlines flight was canceled. A single agent began rebooking a long line of angry inconvenienced travelers. Suddenly an angry passenger pushed his way to the desk. He slapped his ticket down on the counter and said: "I have to be on this flight and it has to be first class." The agent replied, "I'm sorry sir. I'll be happy to try to help you, but I've got to help these folks first, and I'm sure we'll be able to work something out." The impatient passenger was unimpressed. He shouted, so that the passengers behind him could hear, "Do you have any idea who I am?" Without hesitating, the gate agent smiled and grabbed her public address microphone. "May I have your attention please?" she began, her voice bellowing throughout the terminal. "We have a passenger here at the gate who does not know who he is. If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to the gate."

It is important to know who we are – and that is most especially true for those of us who claim Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, both as individuals and as the corporate body of Christ, the church. In our text from last week, in the first fourteen verses of his letter to the church in Ephesus, the apostle Paul told us *in Christ* we are chosen by God by the will of God to share in all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places – and we are adopted by God; redeemed and forgiven; and given access to revealed will of God and the inheritance of God; with the assurance of our salvation, sealed and guaranteed by the power of the Holy Spirit in Christ; so that we will one day be united together with all things in heaven and things on earth; “*to the praise of his (God’s) glory*” (Ephesians 1:14).

We read these things which, for the most part, are more than we can wrap our minds around - and we humbly ask the question: “Why would God do this for us?” Paul gave us the answer to that question in Ephesians 1:6: “*To the praise of his glorious grace*” – which is much more than any of us can wrap our minds around. This answer should also make us then ask the question: “What does God want us to do with this?” Paul answers that question in our text for today. We see that in he begins with: “*For this reason.*” When Paul says “*for this reason*” he is referring back to everything he has said up to this point - that we have been blessed and chosen and predestined and adopted and redeemed and forgiven and given an inheritance and sealed as a special possession of God. Because of those things and because of God’s grace for us - Paul then prays: “*I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*” He has heard good news about those in the church. Clearly God is at work in the hearts of God’s people – and so he falls to his knees and praises God in prayer for them.

What is Paul praying for in our text today? In a general sense he is praying for four things; 1) that God would give them a “*spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him*” by having the “*eyes*” of their “*hearts enlightened*”; 2) that they would come to know “*the hope*” to which God had chosen and called them; 3) that they would “*know what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints*”; and 4) that they would “*know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.*” But, in a specific sense, Paul prays that those *in Christ* may come to know and live out all the spiritual blessings he has given us - by the immeasurable greatness of his power of the risen Christ.

William Randolph Hearst, the famous newspaper publisher in the United States, who became one of the wealthiest men of his time, was known to spend large amounts of his fortune on collecting art treasures from around the world. One day, while reading through some books on famous paintings, Hearst found a description of some incredibly beautiful and valuable paintings that he decided he really would like to own. So, he sent his art agent to Europe, to find them and try to purchase them. After months of searching, the art agent reported that the treasured paintings had been found - they were behind some old locked doors in one of William Randolph Hearst's vast warehouses, where they had been stored for years. It turned out that the only key to the lock on the old doors had been lost many years before, so no one had been in the room for all those years. The treasured paintings that William Randolph Hearst had so desperately wanted, had been his all the time.

Paul wrote this letter to those in the church at Ephesus because he wanted them to know about the treasure that was already theirs because they were followers of Jesus Christ. In essence his purpose was to tell them – and to tell us – that there is nothing they or we could ever desire as born-again Christians that wasn't already ours by virtue of the fact that we are people who are *"in Christ."* And because we are *"in Christ"* the greatest treasure God has given us *"in Christ"* is the power of God Himself – power over sin, power over evil, power over life, power over death – *"the immeasurable greatness of his 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 and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places."*

Paul wrote this to those of us in the church because the power of the resurrection is not a power we normally feel. To say we presently have the power of the resurrection sounds absurd. We love the idea but the reality of that kind of power is not part of our experience. Sermons on the power of the resurrection inspire us but they don't have much real effect on our everyday lives. That's why Paul is writing this; he knows why we don't live out that power. This is why he prays God would give us *"a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of our hearts enlightened."* The reason we don't feel Jesus' resurrection power is because we are spiritually blind to that power.

*We are spiritually blind to the power of the risen Christ* because often we are not fully aware of the blinding, deadening power of sin in our lives. Sin is the enemy of our souls and it is also a natural part of our fallen DNA as human beings – and so our sin within us fights against God in every fibre of our being every moment of every day. Many of us are even spiritually blind to the battle. Sin has either defeated our unction to persevere or convinced us that we have the power to control it on our own. *We are also often spiritually blind to the power of the risen Christ* because we are not fully aware of the magnitude of demonic power and evil that continuously and constantly come against us. The devil is the enemy of our souls and he *"prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). Satan knows he has lost the war but he will continue to battle us and poison our hearts and minds and lives with anger, pride and bitterness until our last breathe here on earth. *And we are also spiritually blind to the power of the risen Christ* because we have never fully embraced the work of Christ for our own lives. We've never fully considered that at this very moment that Jesus Christ is reigning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords over the entire universe - and that he should *also* be reigning supreme in our hearts, our lives, our family, our church, our community, and in our world.

This is what the apostle Paul was praying for, for the church in Ephesus. Paul was praying for those in the church because they were not living their lives with the power of God that was available to them. Paul prays this even as he says: *"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints."* Paul prays this prayer *because* he had heard of their faith and of their love for one another in the church – and he was hopefully encouraging them to not just be satisfied with their faith in Christ and their love for one another - without moving one millimetre beyond that point.

Paul prays *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”* The *“spirit”* spoken of here is the spirit of God – the Holy Spirit. *“Wisdom”* is gained through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. What Paul is getting at here is that the magnificent, deeply mysterious, glorious truths of God’s Words are more than just mere sentences on a page of paper – they are truths that should grip our hearts and lives! The Bible isn’t just a book that gives us good morals and ethical guidelines on what to do and how to behave. First and foremost, the Bible was written and designed to lead us into the presence of the living God - to know him, to receive His love, His wisdom, His strength, His sovereign will, His reign and control over our lives and every situation we will ever find ourselves in – as we stand and live and breathe in His majestic, holy, glorious presence.

And Paul doesn’t take it for granted that’s going to happen. This is not automatic. The Word of God tells us to read and study the Scriptures – and if you want it to come alive for you, you must pray that the Holy Spirit would enlighten the eyes of your heart. The word *“give”* here in the original language in the *aorist* tense which includes past, present and future all in one – and so Paul was praying the God would continually give us a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of God, so that our eyes of our hearts would be constantly enlightened.

Paul is praying that God would enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we may *“know”* something. Now we tend to think of the word *“know”* as meaning to know about or to perceive or understand. But quite often in the Bible the word *“know”* doesn’t mean just to *know about* or perceive or understand - but rather to know someone or something in a much deeper, more intimate way. It would be like the difference between knowing what an apple is. You can know about what an apple is when you see it because of what it looks like – but it’s a different kind of *“knowing”* an apple when you smell the apple, taste the apple, chew on the apple, eat the apple, and swallow the apple.

This is the kind of *“know”* Paul is speaks of here. He wants us to *“know”* three things: 1) *“what is the hope to which he has called you,”* 2) *“what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints”* and 3) *“what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”* Paul is not praying we discern the hope of God’s call or that God is our inheritance. He is telling us we have God’s calling and we are God’s inheritance. Paul is praying that God would enlighten the eyes of our hearts so that we would not just *know about* God’s calling and God’s inheritance - but that we would intimately *“know”* – fully experience – the hope of our call and the riches of being God’s glorious inheritance. When we truly *“know”* – not just *know about*, but fully, deeply and intimately experience *“what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe”* – we will then *know* (fully, deeply and intimately) *“what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints”* and all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places that we have been given *“in Christ”* Paul wrote about in verses 3-14. The power of the risen Christ toward us is immeasurably great! In the last four verses of our text for today the apostle Paul writes of the five ways God demonstrates those of us in Christ can know *“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”*

1) The power of the risen Christ is immeasurably great toward us because God raised Jesus from the dead and broke the power of death: *“according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.”* Jesus rose the dead; he will never die again. Because it is so, those who surrender their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ will also one day die – but *“in Christ”* they will rise from the dead and will never die again. Jesus’ death on the cross paid the price for our sin and his resurrection defeated death’s power over us. 1 Corinthians 15:54–57 says: *“Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is our power too! He raised us from spiritual death and gave us new life. This is the *“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”*

2) The power of the risen Christ is immeasurably great toward us because God seated the risen Jesus at his right hand: *“He raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”* After Jesus rose the dead God sovereignly seated Jesus at his right hand of power in heaven. That is our power too! Ephesians 2:6 tells us that God *“raised us up with him (Jesus) and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”* The day we go to glory we will have a place to sit right next to Jesus. There is a place in heaven waiting for us right next to the One who was mocked, beaten, crucified, buried, and raised up by the power of God. The power that took Jesus from death to life and put him eternally in the presence of God - is the same power that will put you there and keep you there *“in Christ.”* This is the *“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”*

3) The power of the risen Christ is immeasurably great toward us because God gave Jesus power over all the powers of the universe: *“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.”* God is sovereign and providential over all things. He gave the risen Christ that same power. Now we all know that Jesus Christ himself was and is and always will be God; but it is significant that God gave Jesus this kind of power after the resurrection. Ephesians 6:12 tells us *“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.”* The *“rulers and authorities”* Paul speaks of here include the devil and the demons. When Jesus rose from the dead, he was given the power over the devil and his demons. They are defeated foes. But they are still in the world we live in, and they will still battle against us. But *“in Christ”* we possess the power to defeat them! This is the *“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”*

4) The power of the risen Christ is immeasurably great toward us because God gave Jesus as head over all things to the church: *“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”* We read of two authorities here. First God has put *“all things under”* Jesus. Jesus has authority over *“all things”* - over history, human beings, demonic powers, disease, coronavirus, disabilities, hurricanes, tsunamis, lightning, tornadoes, volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, global warming, sports, salmon runs, the economy, inventions, media, price of gas, Internet, Ipods, iPhones, iPads, wars, governments, presidents, kings, chiefs, tribes, city councils, mayors, religions, colleges, universities, solar systems, stars, galaxies, molecules, atoms, protons, neutrons, and thousands upon thousands of things, people and places that I do not have time to mention. Jesus is head over them all.

The second authority we read of is that God has given Jesus’ *“head”* over all things *“to the church.”* That doesn’t mean that we as the church have authority over all things. What it means is that God has appointed Jesus Christ, the chief authority over all things, to be over the church. Ephesians 5:23 tells us that *“Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”* This is always a good reminder for those of us who attend church in a culture and world saturated with entitlement. The One who has authority over *“all things”* has authority over us too. This should deeply humble us in whatever we choose to do together. Jesus reigns over all things. By His grace He chose us to be instruments of His grace. This is the *“the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”*

5) The power of the risen Christ is immeasurably great toward us because ultimately when the power of Christ is revealed, we will be his greatest glory: *“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”* God’s power toward us is ultimately intended to fill the universe with the authority of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. In the beginning, God created human beings to populate His created world - to subdue it and enjoy it so much that we would reflect his glory in all that we think, say and do. But sin entered the world and our lives – and thus began our downward slide into depravity, evil and death.

Ephesians 2:4-7 tells us: *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."* This is how the church is, *"the fullness of him who fills all in all."* One day God will fill the universe with the glory the crucified and risen Christ, by making the church the showcase of sovereign grace of God.. Jesus will fill the universe with his glory by showing the universe his body, the church - how he chose us, how he predestined us, how he came for us and taught us and suffered for us and died for us and rose for us and reigns with us, how he called us and justified us and cleansed us and keeps us and will raise us and glorify us and satisfy us forever with himself. This is the *"the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe."*

This the power of God that the church of today seems to lack. One of the uncommon responses we are hearing to the coronavirus is that some who are struggling with the illness are thriving by putting their faith in God. But much too often we don't hear that same about Christians who live in North America. One of the pervasive marks of our times is our spiritual weakness. It is in the air we breathe as a culture, and it has infected us all. We want everything in life to be quick, easy, and comfortable. We are easily hurt. We are quick to pout and mope. We whine and complain about our feelings. We become angry if we have to wait or if something costs too much or if someone doesn't treat us well.

Claiming to be a Christian doesn't seem to make a difference anymore. We are emotionally weak; it doesn't take much for us to break. We tend to bend God's Word to fit our personal preferences. We are easily disheartened when faced with problems, struggles and pain. Our sacrificial commitment to the church breaks easily; baptism and membership, tithing, giving and serving are now considered personal options rather than commitment to Jesus Christ. Years from now when historians list the outstanding character traits of church of our day - commitment, patience, perseverance and resolve will be replaced with an all-consuming interest in our comfort and happiness. What a contrast to those who have come before us. History and the Bible speak of men and women of faith in Christ who saw struggle in life as normal, necessary and healthy. They knew they could not escape pain or struggle or suffering, nor should they try. They saw the difficulty of life as something to embrace, as being a gift providentially and sovereignly sent by God to shape their souls. They knew life in Christ was not about prosperity, success and comfort but rather about intimacy with God, with a maturity of the character of God and God's influence in the world. This is something we all need help in.

While we do live a society that is emotionally weak, and we have been affected by that weakness - we still have been chosen and we are called by God to something much joyfully deeper in Christ. Jesus said his power is given *"toward us who believe."* We too often forget that Jesus said: *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:18-19). As we move ahead in our mission and vision and transition in the days ahead, we must know the reality of *"the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ."*

The power the apostle is speaking of is the *"power"* of our resurrected Lord from his death on the cross, the same *"power"* of God that raised Jesus into heaven. This is the same *"power"* that is available to us in Jesus Christ. The *"power"* of God that available to us is the same *"power"* that raised Jesus from the dead. I say that again because we most likely would respond by saying, "Well, of course. That's what the Bible says." Yet I'm not sure we really, fully know what the *"power"* of Christ's resurrection means. It is a *"power"* that is much greater than us. It is a *"power"* of the resurrection of Jesus Christ which goes far, far, far beyond us.

Consider the words Paul wrote in Romans 8:19-23: *"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."* About this, Pastor Randy Alcorn writes:

The power of Christ's resurrection is enough not only to remake us, but also to *remake every inch of the universe*—mountains, rivers, plants, animals, stars, nebulae, quasars, and galaxies. *Christ's redemptive work extends resurrection to the far reaches of the universe.* This is a stunning affirmation of God's greatness. It should move our hearts to wonder and praise. Do you ever sense creation's restlessness? Do you hear groaning in the cold night wind? Do you feel the forest's loneliness, the ocean's agitation? Do you hear longing in the cries of whales? Do you see blood and pain in the eyes of wild animals, or the mixture of pleasure and pain in the eyes of your pets? Despite vestiges of beauty and joy, something on this earth is terribly wrong. Not only God's creatures but even inanimate objects seem to feel it. But there's also hope, visible in springtime after a hard winter.

As Martin Luther put it, "Our Lord has written the promise of the resurrection not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime." The creation hopes for, even anticipates, resurrection. That's exactly what Scripture tells us: The *"redemption of our bodies"* refers to the resurrection of the dead. Paul says that not only we but *"the whole creation"* awaits the earth-wide deliverance that will come with our bodily resurrection. Not only mankind in general but believers in particular (those with God's Spirit within) are aligned with the rest of creation, which intuitively reaches out to God for deliverance. We know what God intended for mankind and the earth, and therefore we have an object for our longing. We groan for what creation groans for—redemption." By the resurrected power of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ!

That is resurrection power. *"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God."* In his commentary on this verse John Calvin wrote: "I understand the passage to have this meaning—That there is no element and no part of the world, which is being touched, as it were, with a sense of its present misery, that does not intensely hope for a resurrection." In 2 Peter 3:13 the apostle Peter writes: *"According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."* In Revelation 21:1 the apostle John said: *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more."* Someday we will be resurrected from death into eternal life, just like our Jesus - and all of creation will be made new with us. That's the *"the immeasurable greatness of his power"* that is available *"toward us who believe."*

On May 18, 1980, there was an incredible explosion which was estimated at 500 times more powerful than the force of the atomic bomb that destroyed Hiroshima in World War II. This explosion occurred in the state of Washington, and it was so powerful that it ripped 1,200 feet off the top of a 9,700-foot mountain known as Mount St. Helens. Although the mountain volcano had been dormant for 123 years, within minutes, incredible power was unleashed. Thousands of tons of volcanic ash were thrust into the atmosphere. It was said that the cloud of ash literally turned day into night in the surrounding communities. Towns and cities were virtually immobilized by the powdery ash that fell and piled up like snow. What was once considered prime hunting and fishing country was decimated. 26 lakes, 154 miles of trout streams, and 195 square miles of wildlife habitat were destroyed.

But Mount St. Helens was not very powerful compared to a volcano which erupted in 1883. Mount Krakatoa, in Indonesia, erupted with a force that was equal to 30,000 atomic bombs, 60 times more powerful than Mount St. Helens. During the eruption of Mount Krakatoa, tidal waves killed 36,000 people in Java and Sumatra, and a cloud of ash cooled the earth's climate for almost two years. Brothers and sisters, what we have seen and know of in natural eruptions of power is just a small example of the power of God in the universe. The truth is that we human beings haven't begun to comprehend the limitless power of God. But we can see an even bigger display of His power that goes beyond even Mt. Krakatoa. That event was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that power is not a destructive power as in an earthquake or the eruption of a volcano. The resurrection is an example of the sovereign power of God. It is unlike any other power. It is the glorious power of life over death.

Those of us who are truly in Christ can come to know and to live out all of the spiritual blessings that God has given us - by the immeasurable greatness of his power of the risen Jesus Christ. Ephesians 3:10-12 tell us why we have that *"power."* *"Through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."* This should literally stun our souls and take our breath away.

Dr. John Piper describes it this way: "Christ fills the universe with his glory by showing the universe his church, his body - how he chose her, how he destined her, how he came for her and taught her and suffered for her and died for her and rose for her and reigns for her, how he called her and justified her and cleansed her and kept her and will raise her and glorify her and satisfy her forever and ever with himself." What this means is that as a people of God we are to pray that we might know God so that the fullness of Christ would be seen powerfully in us by all of creation! This is who we are. This is our identity in Christ. This is our identity as the church of Jesus Christ. We can *powerfully* and passionately proclaim the glory of God *in Christ* for the joy of all people. Amen!

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