

Ephesians (5) ~ 1:19-23

Someone said to me recently: "Sam, think big thoughts about God." That's exactly what Paul is encouraging us to do in verses 19-23. Today, we're breaking into the middle of Paul's prayer – a prayer where he wants them to know more of the attributes of Christ in verse 17 ... and more of the achievements of Christ in verse 18.

In this final section his desire is for us to know more of the power of Christ as seen in his ability and for us to become more familiar with the position of Christ as seen in his ascendancy.

There is a fascinating similarity between this prayer and the benediction recorded at the end of chapter 3. There he commends them to one *who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work in us.*

What we glean from both these statements is that our God is a great God. He is a God of power, a God who is able, a God who can surprise us. He is a God who can do absolutely anything for nothing is too hard for the Lord. He is a God for whom nothing is impossible.

He is a God who is working his eternal purpose out in each of our lives, for we read in Jeremiah 29 that his plans for us are to give us "hope and a future." He is patiently shaping our lives and moulding our characters so that Jesus might be seen more and more.

By making us his inheritance, he has shown us his love. By promising us a wonderful future, he

has encouraged our hope. Now he offers us something to invigorate and stimulate our faith. You see, God's call looks back to eternity past, to the very beginning, and God's inheritance looks forward into the future, then God's power spans the gulf between yesterday and tomorrow!

Think about the magnitude of the power of Christ in verses 19 to 21. The NIV adjectives really say it all. It is *great* power. And it is *incomparably great* power. There's nothing quite like it. You can't compare it with anything else. This is real power, power that stands alone.

You can see its direction in the opening phrase in verse 19. Lift your eyes to the starry heavens, look around you in the world of nature and what do you see? Nothing less than an awesome display, a stunning exhibition, of the stupendous power of God.

The old hymn says it so well: *O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the works thy hand hath made, I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed.*

O yes, we can behold the exceeding greatness of his power skyward and earthward. But take another look ... in the tremendous work of redemption we see his power as it reaches out to you and me.

To create, God only had to speak. But to draw us savingly to himself, he had to suffer for our sin on Calvary's cross. An endless universe is the

unmistakable demonstration of his act of creation, an empty tomb is the indisputable evidence of the other.

Paul reminds us of the direction of God's power – it is channelled to us for it is towards those who believe.

That means, there's no need for us to be defeated in our Christian lives, there's no need for us to live our lives on a downer, there's no need for us to be disheartened and discouraged – for, advises Paul, we have his power coming in our direction. It meets us where we are!

You can see its dimensions in verse 19b. The apostle here uses four different Greek synonyms to describe the incredible greatness of the power of God. He speaks of "power, working, mighty and strength."

The word 'power' is 'dunamis' – we get our words 'dynamite' and 'dynamo' from it. It is explosive. It is spiritual Semtex. The potential is phenomenal. This is what God has given to us. When we are saved we receive all of God's grace and all of God's power. This breathes assurance into our hearts for it means that one day our hope will be realised. Peter says more or less the same thing in 1:5 when he reminds us that we are kept, we are shielded, by the power of God.

'Working' is the word from which we get our English word 'energy' – the thought here is of the energising force of the Holy Spirit. It means active power. This is what enables us to live for the Lord for he is the one who empowers us, who equips us and who enables us. The bottom line, in John

15, without him we can do nothing. This aspect of his power finds an echo in the statement recorded in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power ..."

'Mighty' has the idea behind it of a power which has been endowed or an ability which has been given. This is marvellous for it tells us that every one of us in the body of Christ has been gifted in one way or another. Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 that every believer has been allocated at least one spiritual gift – it's up to us to find it, then use it.

The word 'strength' can also be translated as 'dominion' – you find this alluded to in 1 Timothy 6:16 and Hebrews 2:14. It is the ability to conquer, it's a force that overcomes resistance, as when Caesar conquered Cleopatra. This is the divine sway - it is used only of God, never of believers. When you put them all together like pieces in a jigsaw the end result is staggering. It's even more breathtaking when you recognise that this supernatural power is available to each of us – we have power to witness and evangelise, power to endure trials and suffering, power to do the will of God, we have power to be the kind of person that God wants us to be.

This is the divine dynamic in the life of the Christian; eternal energy accessible and available to us.

In verse 20 we see its demonstration. When men had done their worst to him, when all hell had unleashed its forces against the Lord Jesus, when unthinkable anguish had been endured by him, when unbearable pain had been felt by him,

when midday was midnight as the Father turned his back upon his only Son, when incredible loneliness and a sense of utter abandonment swept over his soul, when he died, when he was buried in a borrowed tomb in a beautiful floral garden, they thought, this was it. End of story. Period.

Jesus has gone and for his enemies that was a cause for joyous celebration. They were dancing on the streets. It was party time. To say the least, it was a bit premature for we know the sequel to the story! Thank God.

Three days later, Easter Sunday AM – it's a great while before dawn has broken, before the sun has risen in the east – and, look at the tomb, the stone was miraculously rolled away. Jesus Christ arose. Up from the grave he rose. He tore the bars of death away. He was alive. He is alive! How did Jesus do it? We read in Romans 1:4 that Paul attributes it to the power of God. What a brilliant exhibition of the energy of God. In a single divine masterstroke, God did what man could not do, he did what man could never do! He raised Jesus from the dead. Ah, the resurrection of Jesus Christ pays eloquent testimony to the incalculable and immeasurable power of God. What does that mean for you and me? It means he can, and he will, do exactly the same for us. The power that lifted Jesus from the grave to the earth, and from the earth to heaven, that's the power that will ultimately take us home to glory. So, you have nothing to fear or dread about the unknown tomorrow - it's all in his capable hands.

We have nothing to worry about for he'll make sure you reach your final destination. He will take you home - he will get you home.

When we move on to look at the close of verse 20 and into verse 21 we discover the distinctive nature of this power. The power that raised him from the tomb has taken him back to the throne. Can you visualise it in your mind's eye?

He's standing there on the summit of the mount of Olives to the east of the golden city of Jerusalem, he's saying a final fond farewell to those he had come to redeem, he would look one last time into the faces of his shell shocked disciples, he gazed for a fleeting moment into the eyes of his loyal and devoted mother Mary, then he raised his hands, he summoned an escort of angels, and he rose towards the sky.

He ascended, he went on through the clouds, he continued beyond the stars. The earth gradually receded, heaven's gates appeared and in he went. There were hallelujah's in heaven, a burst of spontaneous praise from the angelic host.

Jesus made a beeline for the throne of God where he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. That's where he went. That's where he is. All seats of power are beneath him. In his exaltation, the Father promoted him to the place of supreme honour. In so doing, he fulfilled the messianic promise of Psalm 110:1.

Around him are twenty four other thrones and those who sit on them cast their crowns before him. At the four corners of his throne are four living creatures who sing his praise. An

innumerable company of angels hang on his every word and rush to do his blessed will.

Look a second time and see what he has subdued. We marvel at his might, but here we are confronted with his stunning majesty. We see Jesus "crowned with glory and honour." Where is he, is the question on everyone's lips. The answer comes back, he is 'far above all'.

He is far above everyone else, far above everything else. He is above Satan and his world system, he is above the holy angels and the fallen angels, he is above the saved people and the unsaved people, he is above it all for time and eternity. God has exalted him far above all!

I think of the words of the song: *Far above all, far above all, Jesus the crucified, far above all, low at his footstool adoring we fall, God has exalted him, far above all. Or again, The highest place that heaven affords, is his by sovereign right. For the Lord Jesus, Psalm 24 has become a glorious reality. Enthroned is Jesus now.*

The apostle speaks about 'rule, authority, dominion and power' – these are the names given to various ranks of angels in the host of heaven. He has gone beyond them. He surpasses them. He outshines them.

Hebrews 2 concludes that Christ is greater than angels. It is not only every spiritual seat of power which he is exalted over but so too with every secular influence as well.

It is 'every title that can be given' – it doesn't matter who they are, or what name or title they assume. They are subject to king Jesus. Earthly

kingdoms come and go, empires rise and fall, but his throne is for ever and ever. He reigns on high. He rules over them all. He is sovereign. God has set his King on his holy hill of Zion.

No power in heaven, no power on earth, no power in hell can alter that. All bow the knee before him; all, no matter where they are in the pecking order of the good and the great, are subservient to him. The common denominator is that in his presence and before his throne everyone finds themselves on a level playing field.

And, it's not only in the present age, but also in the one to come. That's what Paul reminds us of at the end of verse 21. Our God is a God of omnipotence. All power belongs to him.

When we see all that is happening in today's world, we sometimes wonder, why does he stay his hand, why doesn't he intervene. It's true that in an age where sin abounds, the grace of God super abounds.

Because we live in an age of grace, injustice often seems to triumph, and the abuse of power appears to go unchecked – it may look like that today, but it's only short term.

Somebody asked the pertinent question: why doesn't God stop the trouble all around us? The reply was given: why should he, he didn't start it! Let's be clear: he could do it, he can do it, but he chooses not to do it. This is not the day of divine intervention.

There's an even greater mystery when you reflect on the cross of Jesus. Think of all that happened

there ... when he could have called ten thousand angels but he chose not to. Ah, this is the age of grace. Man today has further opportunity to get right with God.

This is not the day of vengeance of our God as we read in the book of Isaiah. That day will come – and when it does, man will know all about the power of God. Read Revelation and zoom in on chapters 6-19 – it makes the hair stand on the back of your neck.

In that day it will be obvious to a watching world that God has given him a name above all other names and that before him all men must bend the knee.

The final thought in Paul's prayer is found in verses 22 and 23 where he switches his emphasis to the position of Christ. There are two facets worth thinking about.

The first one is an unusual one - it speaks about the feet of the Lord Jesus. It may seem strange to talk about his feet, but it is appropriate. Those feet which evil men pierced and nailed to a cross, one day when Christ returns he will put them on the neck of his enemies and the earth will be his footstool.

I think about old man John exiled on the isle of Patmos – remember his vision in chapter one, when he saw the Lord in all the splendour of his unveiled glory and untarnished majesty, his face shining like the sun, his feet glowing like burnished bronze, his eyes flaming like fire – what did he do?

He fell at his feet as if he were dead! That's what John's reaction was and he was a close friend of the Lord's. One glimpse of the glorified Lord and John was prostrate on the floor. He bit the dust.

What will be the reaction of his foes? What about Caiaphas, the self seeking high priest? What about Herod, who scoffed at Jesus? What about Pilate, who signed the death warrant of an innocent man? What about those who have maltreated him? What about all those who have cursed his name, who have spurned his grace and, in our community, who have refused his offer of salvation?

Well, you know, we are left in no doubt, just like the devil, they're all under the feet of Jesus. A day of reckoning is coming when he will yet trample on that old serpent and crush his head.

The second facet worth mentioning in this final paragraph is that of the Lord's fulness. We find in verse 22 that the church finds its fulness in him for he is the head. We are blood bought believers, we are saved by the amazing grace of God, we have been immersed by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, we are indwelt by him – that's the experience of the true church of Jesus Christ.

It knows no labels of denominational ties or of religious affiliations. It has no boundaries of geography. It is not limited by race or creed, colour or class, time or space for many of its members are now in heaven. She is universal, mystical and invincible.

You can see here his appointment in relation to the church. He is the head. That's what gives the

church her air of dignity combined with a real sense of destiny. Members of the church find their fulness in their relationship to him. That is exceptionally good news. But that's not the end of the story.

For we find in verse 23 that Christ finds all his fulness in us. This can't be fully grasped and because of that it should make us gasp. We're scratching the surface as we try to come to terms with the implications of such a beautiful relationship.

God says that the Lord Jesus, the one who fills all and the one who is in all, the one who is higher than the heavens, the one who conceived and created the universe through his omnipotent power, the one who holds it all together, the one who is the object of angelic worship and the ceaseless theme of seraph song – he is incomplete without us. Yes, that's what I said.

We can understand with no problem that we are incomplete without him. But I can't understand for a moment how he can be incomplete without us. And yet the more you allow your mind to meditate upon it, the more it makes sense.

After all, he is the head, and we are the body. The baseline is that we need one another – what's the point in having a head if you haven't got a body! What's the point in having a body if there is no head? You see, one complements the other.

In our study we have focused on the power of Christ and on his position. What's the link in our lives. Well, and I say it reverently, we need to plug our lives into the socket of his salvation, we need

to flick the switch on and allow his current to flow right through us.

When you go back to the four gospels you can see many manifestations of the power of God at work in the ministry of the Lord Jesus. Page after page is full of what God can do. Then go forward into the book of Acts and you see the same power working in ordinary men and women.

I suppose Peter, the big fisherman-cum-apostle, is the classic example. What an incredible transformation took place in his life between the end of the gospels and the beginning of the Acts. What made the difference so that people sat up and took notice? One thing, only one explanation, the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

My dear friends, the greatest power shortage today is not in our generators or fuel tanks. It's in our lives. The enigma is that some of us may be running our lives on an empty tank.

If that is the case, wouldn't it be great if Paul's prayer was answered in your life right now; let's pray these words for our church family, let's pray them for ourselves. Let's think big thoughts about God. That's what chapter one is all about - it's all about amazing grace and an awesome God.