

09/29/2019 - Ephesians 1:15-23

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Preacher: Benjie Slaton

- [0:00] The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Oroah.
- You can find help more by visiting gracepeacechurch.org. Our Father, we do pray that you would help us to see the power of Christ at work in our lives in profound ways.
- Help us, Lord, to see that by your Spirit. In Christ's name, amen. So I had one of those experiences this week that many of you will be familiar with.
- I had a friend from Texas that went through this really... We came from Texas this past year. I've got a lot of friends and family there. And one of my friends went through a really challenging conflict in his job.
- And the result of that conflict was that he got fired. And it was super sad for me and really painful because I just wanted to help him.
- [1:11] I really wanted to, like, be there for him, but I was completely powerless. There was absolutely nothing I could do in this situation for this friend of mine. And you've been there with situations like this.
- We've got a family friend who is way too young for a cancer diagnosis, but she got one. And you feel powerless to help them. If you've ever had a family member that has... that you've discovered that they've got an addiction, you feel completely powerless to help them. That sense of powerlessness, I think, is something that is something that we all feel at times.
- I mean, you may feel that every time that you read about national politics. You feel powerless. You may feel powerless every time that you are trying to help your child with a teacher that is difficult to work with.
- I felt powerless because twice this week I've had people put Domino's pizza in front of me for the last two dinners and I am powerless to not eat it. I need to stop.
- [2:15] We feel powerless with our health habits. Powerless to change some of our persistent relational conflicts. Powerless with our ingrained sin patterns.
- Powerless when you look out and see continued racial injustice. Powerless with all these things in our life. But that's nothing new.
- Every human struggles with that sense of powerlessness. Think about the Ephesians who Paul is writing to. We don't know everything about their demographic orientation, but we can be pretty sure that they were primarily of the lower class.
- Now, these were people who lived in... Ephesus was one of the biggest cities in the ancient world. Multiple hundreds of thousands of people. And in a city like that, at that time, it would have been cramped urban quarters.
- Lots of people living together in closed spaces. They didn't have plumbing. They didn't have sanitation workers. They had... There was trash. It was a dirty place.

[3:18] Disease would have been rampant. Healthcare was non-existent. Food would have been fairly insecure. This would have not been an easy place to live. The Ephesians would have been a religious minority in the culture.

They would have... Most of them would have been working as indentured servants or somehow low-skilled laborers for the wealthy and the powerful. They would have been people who...

who didn't have a lot of access to justice in their society. Now, don't get me wrong. The Roman Empire was a way better place to live than some other places at that time.

But nothing like the kinds of freedoms that we enjoy now. This would not have been an easy place to live. Every Ephesian would have been powerless to change...

to fundamentally change their circumstances. They were powerless. This is the story of human life. There is nothing in this world that you can do to avoid that feeling of powerlessness.

[4:18] You can't do it. But you can be united to the one who holds all the power. That's the point of what Paul is talking about.

Paul is talking to these people and praying that they would know Jesus' power. God at work through Jesus among his people. And that's what Paul wants you to know.

He wants you to know Jesus' power at work. And he gives three kind of perspectives on that power. The power of Jesus' resurrection, the power of Jesus' ascension, and the power of Jesus in the church.

It's pretty simple. So what does the power of Jesus' resurrection look like? Well, I've got to tell you. This passage, I remember where I was sitting the first time that what Paul is saying actually dawned on me.

I was at my friend Tali Bernard's lake house. Natalie and I were in our 20s and we were there for the weekend. And I remember getting up early one morning and we were in this big bunk room for some reason.

[5:17] And I was in this upper bunk. And I remember thinking, well, I can't get up and wake everybody up. So I guess I'll just read the Bible. And I opened up and I was reading in Ephesians. And I read this passage and it blew my mind. Look at what it says.

Verse 19. And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward? Actually, a better translation there would be the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe.

So people who have been united to Christ by faith in salvation, that the power that is in you, according to or like or the same as the working of God's great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

You hear what that's saying? Let me summarize that. The power that Jesus used or that God used to raise Jesus from the dead is the same power that is coursing through your veins right now because of your being united to Christ.

That blew my mind. That something definitive, the resurrection of Jesus was this definitive thing that happened. And it has these ongoing consequences of which we haven't yet experienced all of.

[6:32] But its power is actually at work in us. It reminds me of weddings. I do a lot of weddings.

I love weddings. It's one of the perks of, you know, being a pastor is you get to like a front row seat at a wedding. So I was doing a wedding about a month ago of these friends of ours. And they were up on the stage with me.

And they were right here. And, you know, I'm preaching to the congregation, but I'm kind of talking to them. And there's all this interaction just between me and the couple. You know, we're doing vows and I'm doing prayers.

And there's little directions, rings and whatnot. And so there is this kind of intimacy in that moment between the three of us. But this couple, I mean, they were off the hook.

They had like laser eyes for one another. And they were in this moment that there was nobody else in the room. And it was like, it was exploding in cuteness.

[7:29] It was amazing. And they were kind of whispering to one another. And they were just enraptured in this moment. And as I pronounced them husband and wife, and they kind of marched out of the room, you could just see that there was this kind of weight that had lifted off of them.

And this happens at almost all of the weddings. There is a joyfulness at that moment when the service is concluded. And you can just feel this freedom from the couple.

They're going out. And they can now go and eat and drink and dance and celebrate with their friends and family. This incredible thing. This definitive action has happened.

And it's changed things. But they're not experiencing all of its effects yet. They're going to go have a party. But they haven't even gone on the honeymoon yet.

They're going to go on the honeymoon and enjoy one another. They haven't built a marriage yet. They don't have a family. That's all coming later. But this definitive thing has happened. And that's very similar to what's happening in the resurrection.

[8:37] Is that Paul is saying that the resurrection power that God used is at work in your life with ongoing effects. That you will not fully experience until you are raised to new life with Him.

So what does that mean? How does that actually... What does that mean for us? Well, I think there are two lessons we can learn from that. I'm sure there are hundreds.

But I'll just pick out two. The first one is this. The first one is that your future is absolutely secure. Because of the resurrection of Jesus. Have you ever heard people say, Death gets the last word?

You hear that phrase? See, because of the resurrection, that is no longer true. Death no longer gets the last word in this world.

Death is not the most powerful force in this world. Death does not control your destiny. There's a Nigerian scholar that has written on this passage that I really like.

[9:43] His name is Yusufu Takari. And Yusufu Takari says this. He says, The enemies of Jesus thought they could harness the power of death to silence Him.

I love that image. They thought they could harness the power of death to silence Jesus. And isn't that the way that it works in the world? People are trying to silence the power of righteousness and goodness and justice and peace by trying to use death.

You've seen this is true in every mob movie. I mean, think about The Godfather. Luca Brazi sleeps with the fishes. If you're a millennial and if you've not seen The Godfather, you need to go home this afternoon and watch it because it's amazing.

We see it in tyrants in places like Syria and in places like North Korea. They use death as a weapon because they think that death is going to get the final word.

That death is going to be the thing that will end the challenge of true justice and righteousness and goodness in the world. But because of the resurrection, that's not true.

[10:50] Because of the resurrection, what that means is that your life can be lived with courage and boldness and hope and love for God and for the world, no matter what the consequences turn out to be.

You and I will all die. The question is, will we die with courageous lives, lived in service to God, knowing that the resurrection will one day be the final word for us?

Or will we die with fear, thinking that death is the end? Your life is absolutely secured. You will be raised with Christ.

That's the first lesson. The second lesson from the power of the resurrection is this, that sin doesn't rule. Sin is not the ruler. Think about the logic here in Paul's mind.

If sin and death has been defeated in the resurrection of Jesus, and if that same power is at work in you, then the sin in your life is not the most important thing in your life.

[11:58] It's not the most powerful thing in your life. Boy, it doesn't feel like that, does it? It sure feels like sin is really powerful, but the power of the resurrection is more powerful than the power of sin in your life.

Your sin doesn't rule over you. Your pride doesn't rule you. Your greed doesn't rule you.

Your rage doesn't rule you. Your lust doesn't rule you. Your fear, your anxiety, none of that rules your heart if you are in Christ.

Boy, that doesn't just take a weight off. To realize that the power of resurrection is in you. When you were united to Christ in salvation, the power of sin was taken out of the place of ruling your life.

It no longer has dominion over you. Now, the effects of that resurrection are still being worked out. The presence of sin is still there.

[13:05] You're not going to get rid of it fully, but it lacks the power. And one day in the resurrection, we will lack its presence. Amen.

That is going to be a good day when I don't have to repent of my pride again and again and again. And my fear and my anxiety again and again and again.

I can't wait for that day. That's the power of the resurrection. It is stronger. Sin does not rule over you. Okay, so that's the first thing.

The power of the resurrection. The second thing is the power of the ascension. Now, Paul thinks that the power of the resurrection, the power of the ascension are linked together.

That Jesus has not only been raised from the dead, but you remember the story at the end of the Gospels that Jesus was taken to heaven and it says that he is at the Father's right hand.

[14:01] Look at this in verse 20. 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. Isn't that a great image? What Paul is doing is he's using this word image, word picture.

He's saying that Jesus is above, he's seated above every rule and authority and power. We need to say that again.

Jesus is over every power in this world. Jesus is over every political power in this world. Jesus reigns over every social power in the world.

Jesus reigns over every spiritual power in the world, every relational power in the world. There is nothing in this world that Jesus does not fully reign over right now.

[15:10] Now, again, we could talk about that for months. And we will. But Paul's language is interesting. He actually uses Psalm 110.

He quotes one, well, not quotes, but he alludes to it. And this is what Psalm 110, this is how it starts. The Lord, meaning the God, Yahweh, the covenant Lord, said to my Lord, meaning the Messiah, the King, sit in my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool.

Now, here's what you need to know. This is like one of those Bible trivia facts that you can break out at parties because everybody loves the guy who has Bible trivia at parties. That Psalm 110 is the most quoted Psalm, the most quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament.

So the apostles and the Bible writers are consistently looking at this passage and saying, because of the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, we know that this is true, that this passage has been fulfilled in Jesus.

Jesus even claims that David was writing those words about him in Mark chapter 12. See, the gospel message that the New Testament writers want you to hear is that Jesus reigns over everything and Caesar doesn't.

[16:30] Nothing else reigns, but Jesus does. Okay, let's try and make this a little bit more personal. I mean, we can talk at the big picture level and that's good, but let's make it personal. I love this phrase in verse 21.

He reigns above every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the age to come. Isn't that fascinating that he doesn't talk about these abstract powers, you know, political power, social power, whatever.

He talks about every name that is named because isn't it true that just a name can raise up for us the sense of incredible powerlessness? So there was this boy in the neighborhood I grew up in and he went to kind of the other elementary school in our neighborhood.

So we played on rival soccer teams and I knew him kind of around the neighborhood a little bit. I didn't know him great. His name was John Enigenberg. I've always remembered that name.

And he was at this other school and I remember him particularly because I had a, in sixth grade, I had this girlfriend that I really liked.

[17:43] And there was this community party or event. I can't really remember what the event was, but I remember that John Enigenberg was there and so was my girlfriend and so was I. And I knew that he had been talking to my girlfriend.

And in fact, I started to hear through the grapevine a few days later, probably from nosy, gossipy, boy crazy sixth grade girls, that John Enigenberg had called my girlfriend.

And furthermore, I was told that my girlfriend was going to break up with me to go out with John Enigenberg. And, like, this was devastating. Devastating.

Because John Enigenberg was cool. And I was not. John Enigenberg had, like, he had, like, cool hair and he was kind of artsy.

And he, and of course, he had the thing that I could never have, which was he was the mysterious boy at the other school. You know, the mysterious boy. And so, like, I couldn't compete with that.

[18:46] And I remember laying in bed one night thinking, like, just filled with anxiety thinking, I'm going to get broken up with for John Enigenberg. I can't believe this.

This is amazing. And isn't it fascinating that, and it didn't happen, thankfully, but that name has stuck with me.

And that name, just thinking about the name, this is like 30 years later. I still remember that name. And while it doesn't affect me emotionally now, for a long time, it would remind me of that feeling of powerlessness and sixth grade angst.

Just the name John Enigenberg. I can't remember half the people I went to elementary school with, but I remember his name. Isn't that fascinating? That what Paul is saying is that Jesus is over every name that is named.

It's important that you know that whatever names you have associated with powerful forces in your heart, in your life, Jesus reigns over them.

[19:52] Maybe it's the name of your boss, who every time you think of their name, it brings up this sense of inadequacy and fear because you just can't give them what they want.

Or maybe it's the name of a political figure that you are just angry about. Or maybe it's the name of a painful relationship that you just feel sad for and loss.

The name of someone who abused you and you feel shame. The name of someone you abused or took advantage of. And you feel guilt and regret.

See, Paul wants you to hear that Jesus reigns over every name in heaven and on earth. There is no name in this world that reigns over Him.

That feeling of powerlessness. See, if you're just trying to get rid of the feeling of powerlessness, it won't work. People have all kinds of strategies to grab control of their life and to make themselves not feel as vulnerable.

[20:54] The question is not how do we get rid of powerlessness and vulnerability. The question is, to whom can we be united who has the greater power? That's the question.

How can we be united to the one who does rule over everything so that we do not have to be afraid anymore? Even if we are powerless, we find the one who gives comfort in it.

How do we do that? Well, thankfully, He gives us an answer to that in the power of the church. So power of the resurrection, power of the ascension, and Christ's power in the church. He wants God's power to be revealed in the church.

But He gives us a word picture. Did you catch the word picture here? Go back to 22. And God put all things under His, meaning Christ's 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.

Interesting. He's saying that Christ is the head of His church, which is His body, and He has put the church, His body, He has put all things under the feet of His body.

[22:10] Isn't that fascinating? He means this in both a general way and a specific way. In a general way, He means that Jesus is the head of the universal church.

All Christians, all people who believe and have been united to Christ in all places, at all times, we are His body in a general way. And as His body, only because of His death and resurrection and ascension, we are in authority over all things with Him.

Not on our own, but with Him. What that means is that you and I are to join Jesus as little, little rulers of this world.

That's what Adam and Eve were. They were God's representatives in the garden to rule in the world. And that's what we're still called to do. The church is not here to be a social club.

The church is not here to be the place where you just find your best friends and you spend all of your time with it. That's not what the church is. The church is the place where we gather together to be formed and shaped to be God's ambassadors out there.

[23:29] Now, the Roman Catholic Church and many others have gotten this all wrong. They assumed that that authority meant a political and a military power. And plenty of Christians have gone off the rails in that direction and we don't need to repeat that.

But think about this. Do you remember what Jesus said when He, His last words to His disciples in Matthew 28? He said, He said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Now you go, make disciples, baptize, and I will be with you always. He's saying, I have the authority and now I'm sending you with my authority and I'm going to be with you as you do it.

See, that's the mission of the church. We are to live as kingdom representatives, self-sacrificially serving for the good of this world.

Bishop, Anglican Bishop William Temple was famous for saying that the church is the only organization in the world that exists exclusively for the benefit of its non-members.

[24:39] The reason we gather together is for those people out there. that as we are shaped and we are changed, as we gather together here, as we worship God, as we, this is our mission statement, as we delight in the gospel together, as we belong with a sense of community, there should be, as we come together, there's a sending out in sacrificing for our world.

Delight, belonging, sacrifice. That's what our calling is as a church. That's what we want to be as grace and peace. And for you to join in with grace and peace, this is what we want you to do.

We want you to be out there gathering people, drawing them in. So that's the general way that Paul means this. But there's a specific way as well, a particular way.

Paul is saying that Jesus is the head of each particular church. He'd say it this way. Jesus is the head of grace and peace. Benji Slayton is not.

I am called to be his under-shepherd for a while in this place, but the ministry of grace and peace and Jesus' kingship over it will last decades beyond me.

[26:00] I serve as his representative, and we are accountable to him as our head. God. What does that mean? Well, what that means is that's because this is the place where Jesus' redemptive work is happening.

If you want to know how to be united to the one who has all the power, what Paul is saying is that happens in the church, in the local church, in a group of normal people like us.

You know? People who don't have it all together. A guy like me who can't figure everything out. People who are hot one minute or cold the next. People who are all over the place.

People who don't know how to make friends with people who are different from them. People who are trying to be something and they're not sure they can be it. People who are struggling in their jobs and their relationships and their families.

In that place, Jesus is at work bringing about his powerful redemption. This is the place where people experience what it means to be people of the resurrection.

[27:09] This is where his power's at work. Okay. I should read this quote. There's a longer quote by Yusufu Taraki. Let me read this. He says, Christ knows how to construct a new humanity out of the one ruined by sin.

He quickens that which was dead. He recreates that which was in ruins. He regenerates that which was deadened by the power of the flesh. He restores that which has been exhausted and impoverished.

He nourishes that which has been starved and withered. He pours his life into the church so that the church becomes the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

This must have been so encouraging to the Ephesians who were utterly powerless in their world. Paul had planted their church and now he was gone.

They had other pastors but can you imagine that they had never heard of Christianity before Paul got there and all of a sudden they're now this new body in this foreign place in which they are already powerless and now Paul is telling them that because Jesus reigns in their church the world transforming power is at work among them.

[28:37] That must have been such an encouragement that he was giving them this image of fullness that they were being filled by Christ. Filled in ways that they couldn't fill themselves.

It reminds me of Jesus' words blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness because they will be filled. You see the mystery that Paul is getting at here he uses mystery all through this passage the mystery that he's getting here is for those of you who feel utterly powerless the place that you're going to find the power to live in life is actually not by confronting your powerlessness and getting rid of it.

The mystery is that by in your powerlessness you can find the power of the risen and ascended and reigning Christ. It's right there for you.

That's what Paul is praying for you. Paul wants you to experience that in all of life. The only question is is will you pursue it?

Will you follow him and pursue him in his resurrection life? That's the question for all of us me included. Okay let me pray and let's ask the Lord to do that for us.

[30:00] Father would you give us would you give us the faith the belief the wherewithal the passion to pursue the life of the resurrection and the life of the resurrected Christ in and through us we pray.

Amen. Amen.