

Eph. 1:15-23 - Resurrection Power from a Resurrected Savior

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're in Ephesians chapter 1 this morning. James wrote that song because I asked him for a song about the power of God and he thought that would be good. Continuing our study in Ephesians, we're picking up where we were a couple of weeks ago, this great doxology where Paul revels in the blessings that we have because we're connected to Jesus.

He's going to continue this morning with some remarkable personal and encouraging words. So look with me at Ephesians 1 verses 15 through 23.

This is God's inerrant and infallible word in a world of fleeting things, something eternally permanent. In a world of things that fail, something absolutely reliable.

God's holy word. 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.

[1 : 14] 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 heart 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 His head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Will you pray with me? Father, this is Your Word. And so would You use it this morning by Your Spirit to give us a great and glorious picture of who You are.

Would You have Jesus exalted here that He would be lifted up, that we would be drawn to worship and praise and find comfort in Him. Oh Jesus, would You be made great.

[2 : 34] Holy Spirit, do that in each of our hearts. Speak to our hearts where we need to know this, Your truth. Teach us, we ask, in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to start this morning by looking at the first two verses of this passage for a minute. Paul rejoices in the good news he's heard about the Ephesian church, particularly their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints.

Now, Paul's talking especially about the church in Ephesus, but I've got to tell you what a joy it is to be given the occasion to rejoice in what God is doing through you, Southwood.

It only took me a few minutes of sitting down and thinking to make just a short list. Just in the last couple weeks as this year has started, how is it that God has worked this in us and in this place? I think of the way you pray for and visit and encourage those in the hospital to the point that you've been running into each other and bumping into each other while you're there crowding the room and running in on the way out.

[3 : 46] I think of the meetings I've been in this week with the deacons and the elders, praying for this flock, intentionally caring for them and what a blessing that is.

The ways that you overwhelm new mothers with love and support and mostly food to where they're putting stuff away in their refrigerators and freezers for later because you've given them so much their families can't eat it and you've loved each other so well.

I had a member call last week looking for resources to help two older ladies who were being displaced from their home. A really painful situation with a lot of difficulties and moving parts. I was at a loss, honestly, to know which direction to point him. And I was thinking about that this week. Please keep befuddling your staff. Please be loving people in such a way that we don't even know where to point you.

You're trying so much and so often to love people. I think of how much you trust Jesus and his love for you that you'd come out of a great weekend of an Express Grace conference last weekend and I'd have conversations with people thinking about moving their families to another part of town to love on people there.

[5 : 03] That's what the grace of God they heard about then did in their heart is it caused them to think about maybe I need to move. I love my house. I don't need another one but maybe I could live somewhere else and love people there.

A member organizing food and tutoring and prayer for kids at a local school. I think of the way in the last few weeks you've loved a family facing terminal illness.

The time, the tears you've shed with them, the work and sweat you've put in on their home to make it ready for this season that they're in.

Corporately you open the doors freely for a funeral from another church whose sanctuary was flooded. Please come, use ours. Loving all the saints.

I think of the intentional ways you care for your pastors and your staff that's such an encouragement and blessing to us. Y'all, we thank God for those things.

[6 : 05] This is not a list. I love this church. I didn't mean to do that. It's not a list to tell you how wonderful you are so you'll get puffed up with pride and think, aren't we so great?

That's not the point. Who does Paul thank for what he's heard? I thank God because what's happening when you see that, when you see love demonstrated, is that the gospel is taking root. What you've received from him is something that's changing you in such a way that you actually care about others. I thank God for that. And it's evidence that you trust God enough to care for others sacrificially because God's got you taken care of.

That's what it says. I hope each of you have an opportunity to give and receive that kind of love here at Southwood. Because what Paul's going to say is, keep doing that.

That's a priority. That's what I thank God for. It's so important. Because I see those things are gospel priorities. It's evidence of the gospel taking root and bearing fruit among God's people.

[7 : 14] That's what that looks like. When you see that, when you look around and see that, rejoice that God's given you the privilege of being part of a community like that. What a great gift that is.

Before we look more closely at the rest of the passage, which is Paul's passion, his prayer for the church, I want to tell you about an event that was part of the story of the church in Ephesus.

Part of their history. Luke writes about it in Acts 19. It's during one of Paul's trips to Ephesus. And so many people are hearing and believing his message and coming to trust in Jesus that the craftsmen of the city start to get worried.

They make a living off the economy surrounding their gorgeous temple of Artemis. And all the idols they make and sell associated with that. And they get concerned.

These people are starting to worship another God. They don't like having competition for who is greatest in Ephesus. So they grab Gaius and Aristarchus and whatever Christians they can find and they drag them down to the theater.

[8 : 18] I want to show you a picture of this theater. It's still standing today. You can go see it. I haven't, but it's really easy to see on the internet. This huge, huge stone theater seating 20,000 people.

It's a small college football stadium. And can you see in that picture the people? You can see some of them sitting, some of them standing down there on the floor. It gives you a little bit of an idea of the size of the place.

And so there they were. They dragged the Christians into that theater and put them right there. Little Christians down at the bottom of the theater.

Listen to what happened. Acts chapter 19. Alexander, one of the Christians, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew for about two hours, they all cried out with one voice, great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

For two hours, the people filling the theater shout them down. Just a side note on biblical reliability. One of the things that can strengthen your confidence in God's word and being able to trust the historicity of what you're reading about.

[9 : 35] Think of 20,000 some people who participated in this event and even more who heard it in the town around. And then the book of Acts written describing this event given to them not long after, just a couple decades, many of them still alive and eyewitnesses of what's being written.

And do they debunk this story? Is that what happens? That all the people in Ephesus say that didn't really happen? No, they support the veracity of the story in the scripture.

Be encouraged. This is a great example of a passage where people who had no investment in Christianity going anywhere would have said, I was there. I know what I yelled for two hours.

And so the Christians feared for their lives because of this riotous crowd. You can imagine. They told Paul who was in town, don't go near the theater. Paul wanted to go. They wouldn't let him. They were afraid he would be killed.

They tried to speak, but they were drowned out. Shouted down by the crowds for two hours. The crowds wanting to make sure that everyone knew who was really great, who really held the power.

[10 : 46] Imagine how these first century Christians would have felt. They were killed, silenced in the public square, facing a culture seemingly out of control and violent, rejected perhaps by many friends and neighbors, mocked by those in seats of power.

Certainly they were afraid, right? Certainly they felt small and insignificant in that huge theater. They couldn't even speak to defend themselves.

So great were the shouts of those worshiping the pagan goddess. Can you relate to any of those emotions they would have experienced? Have you ever turned on the news lately and felt a world out of control and violent?

Does it ever seem like there's nothing you could do? Makes you feel fearful? Small? Make you think that God or good has been defeated? Maybe closer to home, maybe you've experienced feeling silenced in the public square, rejected by friends and neighbors, mocked by those in power.

Do you feel like the church of Jesus Christ is losing ground or being beaten down all around the world in your neighborhood or city or country? It's not Artemis of the Ephesians whom people are shouting about these days.

[12 : 03] I've never heard anybody shouting about Artemis recently. Although there certainly are some following other gods. But I think in the theater of our own culture today, the voices that are loud, the voices that would be shouting at us as we seek to follow Jesus are saying things like, great is the autonomous self.

Voices of moral relativity, self-determination. They often seem unchallenged. They can get away with anything. Of course they're right.

Great is the almighty dollar. Certainly strength and security and power comes through having enough or being able to control the ability to make more.

Those voices and others, some just in our own hearts, would be shouting today at those seeking to worship Jesus. You know what you hear. You know what you struggle with and battle against.

And Paul writes to these Ephesian believers and to us and says to believe and remember that there really is a God greater and more powerful than all other powers, authorities and philosophies.

[13 : 17] Notice that his prayer for them is that they would know not what but who. That they would know him. Verse 17. The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of him.

Just knowing him, a personal experiential knowledge of the reality of God himself is what Paul prays for. It's priority number one of the Christian life.

Knowing God. Being in a relationship where you learn moment by moment and one life experience at a time, more of who he is and what he's like. And this is what we talked about a couple of weeks ago.

Not knowing stuff about God, but day by day in your life knowing him more. Actually having a relationship, being connected to him, knowing who he is.

And so Paul reminds us of two of the highlights of the first section of the book that come when we know God. We know the hope to which he's called us and the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

[14 : 29] Both of those he's already mentioned in these chapters and wonderful spiritual blessings, right? Among the list of every spiritual blessing that he catalogs in the first 14 verses.

Now these two he points out again. Things we have in Christ that we could talk about more, but we already talked quite a bit last time. Eternal security and riches that we have because we're connected to Jesus.

Because of what he's done and because of who he is. But then in verse 19, the third result of knowing God, the third thing Paul's praying for that's going to happen is we know him.

What else are we going to experience? It's experiencing the immeasurable greatness of his power. Look at verse 19. He prays that we would know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

Here's where Paul's focus begins to go in this passage. And so it's going to be our focus for a few minutes this morning. The immeasurable greatness of his power. So mighty that you can't measure it or compare it to the strength of anyone else.

[15 : 41] What is it like, Paul? Tell me. Give me an image for it. What can I compare it to? How strong is he? And Paul's got nothing. All other analogies fail.

And so Paul uses an example of God's power itself. It's according to the power that raised Jesus from the dead. That's what his power is like.

Paul says that there's resurrection power. It's not like anything else I can describe to you. It's the power that brought life from death, that conquered sin, death, and the grave.

Literally in the Greek it says it's power according to the energy of the power of his strength. It doesn't say that in English because that doesn't mean anything. He's piling up words about power, right?

He's trying to say it's all of these things. It's the active working of his strength and his power and his might. Every power word Paul knows. That kind of power that raised Jesus from the dead.

[16 : 41] That resurrection power. Not just narrow influence over hunting and wild animals like Artemis would have had. But power over death itself.

Over all of creation. That's how strong your God is. That's the kind of power that is yours at work in you who believe. Paul says I want you to experience that.

To know that personally and in your life. But Paul's not done yet with this power. He says that resurrection power brought Jesus out of the tomb and set him where?

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. That's what this power has done with Jesus having raised him from the dead.

Paul says the power of Jesus is greater than all other powers. Greater than all rulers. Caesar included. Greater than every name that is named.

[17 : 45] Artemis included. And oh by the way not just these that you know of. Let me make sure you understand how exhaustive this list is intended to be. Any powers, rulers or names in the age to come.

Ones you haven't heard of yet. No one will ever be greater. The autonomous, independent, educated self included. People, spirits, philosophies, ideas.

All bow to Jesus. I'm reminded of the passage we started this service with from Philippians chapter 2. Do you remember it? What has happened to Jesus?

He's come and he's suffered and died and risen. And therefore God has highly exalted him. And bestowed on him the name that is above every name. So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.

In heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue confess. That Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Everyone. Do you see how Paul goes all inclusive in these passages?

[18 : 48] Let me tell you. Every time. Every place. All of them. Bowing to Jesus. Every knee will bow. And every tongue confess. Not great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Not Caesar is Lord. But Jesus Christ is Lord. Every knee and every tongue. Because all things are under his feet. Right? This is indeed the promised Christ.

The one who would have his enemies made his footstool. All things under his feet that he'd reign forever as king over everything. Stop and think about what Jesus has gained power over.

He's conquered sin. The kind you battle against. He's conquered spiritual forces. The kinds that wage war on you every day.

He's conquered death itself. The great foe of life that God created. And so Jesus reigns. And he will reign in power. He's conquered all his and our enemies.

[19 : 50] They are all being put under his feet. His power is without parallel. Incomparably great. You can't measure it. And you can't compare it to anything else.

All this power. All this majesty. All this authority. And to what end is he going to use it? What's he going to use it for? Who's going to benefit from his unchallenged eternal reign? It's the church, isn't it? It's the church.

He is, verse 22, The head over all things to the good of the church. For the benefit of the church. He loves his bride.

The corporate gathering of his people called out to be his very own. His body. The organism through which. The means through which he rules fully over all things.

[20 : 46] That's who his power is for. Let me go back and read you, church. The description of the power of Jesus for the sake of his church from the beginning of this section.

At verse 19. This is the power at work in you as his church. And for your good as his church. 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.

[21 : 44] That's incomparable power working for us. Paul is going to tease out in places later in Ephesians. Some of the implications of this incomparable power.

That we can know and experience in Christ. But this morning three points of application. Three areas that Jesus power addresses in our own hearts.

First. First. It addresses our fear by bringing comfort. His power is such that he will care for and protect you.

Imagine the feeling of being threatened. And dragged into the Ephesian theater by rioters. Think of Christians around the world today. Being chased. And tormented.

That has and will happen closer and closer to us. Think of people in this room facing suffering. In ways they've never anticipated.

[22 : 45] Feeling out of control. Helpless. This is the sentiment of the psalmist and others in the Bible. When they face those things. God is my helper.

I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? That because God. The one with the incomparably great power is his helper.

He doesn't fear what man can do. They may threaten. And they may even kill you. But they can never snatch you out of his strong hand.

His powerful hand will hold you. He's not merely all powerful. He's all powerful for you. For your good.

Cancer may be beyond your control. But it's not beyond his. All things are under his feet. Terrorists. Intimidating power brokers.

[23 : 45] Godless rulers. They may seem stronger than you. But they're not stronger than he is. Jesus is seated far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. For your good.

For your good. What makes you afraid? What keeps you up at night? His incomparable power addresses your fear by bringing comfort.

His power is such that he will care for and protect you. Second, it addresses our timidity and insecurity. By bringing boldness and confidence.

His power is such that he will equip and embolden you. I suspect we all know what it's like to feel powerless. Small. Like those Ephesian Christians on the floor of that theater.

Feeling insignificant. While people are chanting, great is Artemis. And it's echoing all around them. We felt silenced at times by the ones wielding power in our culture.

[24 : 51] Made to feel small by the mockery of friends or family. Maybe timid because of the expectation of rejection when we share our faith. Hopeless to overcome our besetting sin and ready to give up.

But the incomparable power of God says this. If God is for us, who can stand against us? Who can? If that's the kind of guy on your side.

The one with the incomparably great power. Who can stand against us? It's the emboldening of a young boy who's being bullied. And he's cowering back until the biggest kid in the class walks up beside him.

On his side. And all of a sudden the little kid stands up a little stronger. A little straighter. All of a sudden there's a boldness and a confidence that he didn't have in himself.

Who or what has intimidated you? Nothing stands before the resurrection power of Christ that is for you. Sin no longer is your master, Christian.

[25 : 57] United to Christ. It doesn't own you any longer. It doesn't have power over you or greater than you. Your resurrected king has conquered sin and death.

It's a defeated foe. Even when you don't feel it. There's hope in your evangelistic efforts with your friend. God has raised Jesus to life and has the power to give life to dead hearts too.

Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Who or what makes you feel small and hopeless? His incomparable power addresses your timidity and insecurity by bringing boldness and confidence.

His power is such that he will equip and embolden you. He's that strong. And he loves you. Finally, and I think most painfully for us perhaps, his power addresses our false perceptions of strength.

His power is such that he will require weakness and dependence from us. Here's what I mean.

What do I mean by that?

[27 : 08] His power addresses our false perceptions of strength. It's that sometimes we do feel weak. We do feel insecure. We do feel powerless.

But if we're honest, sometimes we don't feel weak at all, do we? Perhaps the strongest message to us from this passage is not to settle for counterfeit, lesser versions of power than God's incomparable power.

And the point is, all others are counterfeits of that true power. The people of Ephesus were proclaiming Artemis to be the great one. We often think we have all the power we need in ourselves.

I don't need others. I can make my own decisions. I can handle my own problems. The spirit of our culture says that's power. Strong, independent, self-sufficient, autonomous.

Or maybe we look to a political party, an online community. The amount of money we can accumulate or a unique experience to give us true power.

[28 : 13] That's where power is going to come from. And Jesus says, hear me well, those are counterfeit sources of power. They're not true. No matter how impressive they appear and how strong you think they are or they'll make you, they can't compare to his power.

Jesus says, apart from me, you can do nothing. And you connect with me. And you see my power at work primarily in my church.

Oh, listen. Forget what I said at the beginning. The church is not perfect. That's not Jesus' point.

No. The church is a dysfunctional body oftentimes.

But she's my body, Jesus says. I'm the head. And so it's okay that she's weak because my power is perfected where? Oh, you know the answer to that.

Where is his power perfected? It's in weakness. So it's okay, body, if you're weak. The head is strong. He's incomparably powerful.

[29 : 21] So plug in to the church. The promise of this passage is that the power of God is at work for the benefit of his church as we are corporately connected to him.

And because of that, to each other, because we have the same head. And you say, well, Will, you're preaching to the choir. Go out there and say that we're in church.

Here we are. You know, we've got that. And that's true. True enough. But are you seeking power from the true head of the church, Jesus Christ, or something else?

Is the head of the church you are a part of, a pastor or a leader? Do you feel like true power comes from a pastor, a previous pastor?

A current pastor? A future pastor? Is that where true power is? Is that the hope for the church of Jesus Christ?

[30 : 18] Is that where the church's true power comes from? Is it a church where the budget looks good because money is where your security and power really resides?

Is it a church where things need to be done my way or I'm totally at a loss? Is it a church where the church is? Is it a church where the church is? This is really hard for those of us who love our church, that last question.

Because you can love your church and you can talk about Southwood as the church I love, but she's not my church or your church.

I'm not the head. You're not the head. Jesus is the head of his body, the church, so we have to trust that the power comes from him, not from things being done our way.

And that's hard and I hate that. Because I like things to be done my way. It doesn't come from things being done our way, not from any amount of money, not from any human leader.

[31 : 19] What would it look like if we were all corporately convinced that his incomparable power was at work on behalf of Southwood? What would it look like for all of us together to plug into the power that rules over all things and controls them all, everything in this world for his church?

I suspect among other things we'd pray a lot more. I would. Prayer is just that opportunity for our weakness to show up rather than our strength, isn't it?

We acknowledge we don't have the wisdom or the resources or the strategy, but we're plugging into the one with all the power. Do you really believe he has that kind of power, that that's really where it is?

Do you really believe he employs all of that power on your behalf, for your sake, to your good? Then come to him, the one whom to know and experience the reality of in your life is the pinnacle of life itself.

Every knee will bow to him someday. Will you bow yours now? Will you trust him? Will you actively depend on him? Will you acknowledge your weakness so that his strength may be great in our lives and in our church?

[32 : 34] When we're plugging into that true source of power for the church, I suspect we will find individually and corporately, we'll find ourselves moving boldly into conversations and even countries that are beyond our ability to manage.

We'll begin going places and doing things that didn't seem possible in our own strength that would have certain failure written on them if God didn't show up, if his power didn't come to bear.

And so it leaves us how? Desperately dependent on him to show up. Sound like fun to anyone?

Sounds a little scary and uncomfortable to me, I'll be honest.

But it sounds like fun when the one who reigns over all things, the one with all the world's power at his disposal, is using all of that for us.

He's the one we're desperately dependent on. The one who's strong is the one you're desperate for and dependent on. That's fun because he's eager to show himself powerful on your behalf.

[33 : 47] Wow! What might happen? What might he do? To show his power in our midst. Artemis, of course, was revered broadly in Greek mythology by lots of people in lots of places, but Ephesus was a special one of those.

The Ephesians were particularly possessive of her. She was particularly their goddess. They were uniquely protected by her and very proud of that.

When they shouted, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians, they meant by of the Ephesians, the one who specially cared for the Ephesians, who particularly looked out for them.

Dear friends, Our Lord Jesus Christ is great above all greatness. His is the name above every name.

His power and dominion surpass all others. And he reigns in power for his church. We are uniquely protected by him.

[34 : 58] Specially cared for by him. Great is Jesus of his church. Great is Jesus of his church.

Great is Jesus of his beloved church that he gave his life for and now is the head of. May that voice drown out the others that would clamor for our loyalty and worship.

He is powerful and we are his. Amen? Amen. Let's pray. Holy Spirit, you know where in each of us we need to see your power be perfected.

You know where we feel weak. would we leave this morning with a vision of Jesus as exalted and powerful above all other things in a way that you make particular to the hurt places, to the insecure spots, to the places where we would think we'd actually be strong.

would we know your power in and through your church. We thank you and praise you that that's your heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[36 : 24] Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.

Amen.