

Power That Makes The Difference

Ephesians 1:15-23

Years ago I owned a little car, a Buick Skyhawk, that I really enjoyed driving. One day I had stopped at a place of business in Clarksdale, Mississippi, where I parked right up against the sidewalk, with the front tires down in the gutter. When it was time to back away and leave, I found that my little car didn't have enough power to even pull those tires out of the gutter!

There was a problem with the catalytic converter, they told me. They also told me that the problem was repaired. But I found in the months ahead that anytime I needed to go up an incline, the car barely had enough power to make it to the top of the hill. In fact, if I didn't already have a running start, the Skyhawk wouldn't get there at all. I guess it was a good thing that I lived in Clarksdale at the time, where there aren't many hills! More than once did I find that driving a car without much power can be a dangerous thing! I struggled with it for quite a while until I finally had to trade it in for another.

Power makes a difference, whether we are talking about an automobile, a running back on a football team, or politics. And usually, the ones with the most power are the ones who come out on top. Here in Ephesians 1:19, Paul told us about an "*incomparably great power for us who believe.*" And it is the Power That Makes The Difference.

Because this is a thought that flows from verse to verse, it is impossible to get the whole idea of this passage unless we back up just a bit. Verse 15 begins a prayer that Paul was praying for the Christians in Ephesus. He tells them that he never stopped praying for them, and then in verse 17, he tells them that he prayed that God would give them "*the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.*" There are three specific things that Paul was praying we might know. He told us that when we know these three things, we will know God better.

First, in verse 18, we can know God better when we know the hope to which He has called us. Second, we can know God better when we understand what we already have as believers, a thought found in the phrase in verse 18, "*...the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*" The third thing we need to know in order to know God better is in verse 19: "*...and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*"

When Paul started talking about this great power, he didn't even mention the blind eyes that Jesus illuminated, or the deaf ears that Jesus opened. Not one mention did he make of the lepers that were healed, or the five thousand people who were fed with just a little bit of food. But what Paul did mention was the Power that raised Jesus from the dead.

But let's focus on two words which describe that power: "*incomparably great.*" The King James Version uses the words "*exceeding greatness.*" First the word "*incomparably*" means "to excel, to surpass," something which is far beyond the usual. In today's language it would mean hitting the ball out of the park.

Then consider the word translated "*great.*" When we try to describe something very large, we put the word "mega" in front of it. We'll say someone is rich, and we'll say that he has mega-bucks. A very large church is known as a megachurch. Put these two words together and we see that Paul is trying to use human words to describe power that can't really be described! It is mega-power, power that goes far beyond anything known to mere mortals. It is "*incomparably great*"; it is "*exceeding greatness.*"

Paul then says this power has accomplished three very important things. Verses 19-20 tells us that this power of God raised Jesus from the dead: "*That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead...*" Then we read in verses 20-21 that this power has seated Jesus at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms, "*far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*"

And finally, in verses 22-23, this power has exalted Jesus and made Him Lord over all: "*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*"

Or another way we could describe these three things God's power has done is to say that God's power has accomplished the **Resurrection** of Jesus, the **Ascension** of Jesus, and the **Exaltation** of Jesus. Such power had never been known before in the entire history of the world. It could never be duplicated, or even counterfeited.

Because this is true, how does this power make a difference in our lives today? We can read this passage and we can easily see how this power made a difference for Jesus—but since Paul says in verse 19 that this power is ours, how does it affect

us? We have received hope, riches and power because we are part of His Body. How is this lived out? This same passage answers that question for us. This power makes a difference through...

1 A Faith that cannot be contained, v. 15

Paul said in verse 15, “...*ever since I heard about your faith.*” They may not have known or realized that they had this incredible power at their disposal, but that did not prevent their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ from spreading. Many Bible scholars believe that Paul was in prison in Rome when he wrote this letter; in fact, he does refer to himself as a “*prisoner for the Lord*” in chapter 4. Distance could not prevent their faith from becoming known to Paul. Not even the prison dungeons of Rome could hold back the news. Paul had spent some time there earlier, but in the years since he had been there, their faith had grown and multiplied. The power at work within them caused a faith that could not be contained.

That’s the way it was the night Jesus was born. The shepherds were the first evangelists and could not help but tell about the Christ Child: “*When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them*” (Luke 2:17-18). In Mark 1, Jesus healed a man with leprosy, and told him not to tell anyone. But here is what happened: “*Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news.*” The man’s new-found faith in Jesus and what He had done for him could not be contained, and he couldn’t help it.

Jesus healed a man who had been demon-possessed, and when the man wanted to go with Jesus, he was told to go home and tell everyone there what God had done for him. But the man couldn’t stop there—his faith could not be contained. This was his reaction: “*So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis [which was a region of ten cities, not just his home!] how much Jesus had done for him*” (Mark 5:20). He couldn’t help it!

One more. Jesus healed a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. In Mark 7:36-37a we read, “*Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement.*” They couldn’t help but talk about their new discovery.

All these long years later, we find that still to be true. When you’ve experienced the power of the Risen Christ in a way that changes your life, how do you NOT tell

everyone you know? A little girl was riding in the car on the way home from church. She said, “Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me.” The mother said, “Oh! Why is that?”

The girl replied, “Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?” “Yes, that's true,” the mother replied. “He also said that God lives within us. Is that true, too?” Again the mother replied, “Yes.” “Well,” said the girl, “if God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?”

She understood it better than most adults. The incomparably great power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at the Right Hand of God cannot be contained. It spreads to those we know so that they at least know about it.

Second, this power makes a difference through...

2 A Love that includes others, v. 15

Rome is more than five thousand miles from Ephesus, and even that far away, Paul heard about more than just their faith. Look again at verse 15: “...ever since I heard aboutyour love for all the saints...”

The words are very important here. It's too easy to just skip over these words and not really see what they say. Dean Martin used to sing “Everybody Loves Somebody,” but that's not what Paul is talking about here. He's talking about the Power that raised Jesus from the dead, remember, so this love is totally different. This love includes others. This is “*love for all the saints.*”

The Bible also talks about loving others who are outside the Family of Faith, that our love should extend to the entire world. But here specifically Paul is focusing on the kind of love that is shared within the Family. There's a reason why this is so important in our lives as Christians. This is not a love that just tolerates others, but a love that reaches out to them, loving others even if we have no hope of getting anything out of it. This is love that believes the best about others, a love that is patient and forgiving, a love that always trusts and protects. It is love that never fails and never gives up and goes home.

No, this is a love that is so long and high and wide and deep that it includes “*all*” the saints. This means that the Power that raised Jesus from the dead also makes a difference in our lives by enabling us Baptists to love the Methodists, and the Catholics, and the Presbyterians. It empowers us to love believers who like

different kinds of music, and those who live elsewhere. It even endows us with the ability to love—really love—those who don't even look like we do. This is much, much more than just getting along with others.

This is a love that says “Your past doesn't matter. Your upbringing doesn't matter. Your social status doesn't matter. How much money you have doesn't matter.” This is a love that would never dream of leaving someone out, or cutting them out. It reaches out and includes everyone who names the Name of Christ. Having the Power of the Risen Christ in our lives makes that kind of difference, that we are enabled to love others, even if we disagree or have differing opinions.

Third, this power makes a difference through...

3 An Inheritance which is shared, v. 18

We looked at verse 18 last week when we were talking about getting to know God better. But look at it once again, particularly the end of it. One of the things Paul said we needed to know was this: “...*the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.*” Our eyes immediately go to the phrase “*the riches of his glorious inheritance,*” and we overlook that this glorious inheritance is “*in the saints.*” Clearly, this is something we share together. The things that God has prepared for us, He prepared for us together. He never intended for us to do this by ourselves. That's why one of the metaphors the Bible uses to describe us is as a Body. “*The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' ...If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it*” (1 Corinthians 12:21, 26-27).

Folks, this life in Christ is something we share. Christianity is not a “Lone Ranger” type of faith.

One young man was 19-years-old when, without explanation, he disappeared into the woods in Maine. He lived alone for 27 years, living on what he could steal from camps in the area. People in the area had never seen him, and they weren't even sure he existed, that he was only a legend. They called him “The North Pond Hermit.” Now they know his name is Christopher Knight, and police estimated he committed more than 1000 burglaries. When he was arrested this past week (April 2013) after being caught on a surveillance camera, he spoke to a police officer, the first human being he had had contact with since a brief hello to a hiker on a trail in the mid-1990's.

It's a fascinating story, but there is a remarkable parallel between that story and the large number of people who claim allegiance or membership in some church somewhere, but who have simply disappeared, without a word. They live without fellowship with other Christians and with no spiritual support from a local body of believers. There are others who show up every once in a while, but who disappear for weeks or months at a time.

And this is a wide-spread problem, unrelated to any particular denomination or geographical location. A woman was talking about the small attendance at her church on a recent Sunday. "It gets so bad on Sunday morning," she said, "that when the minister says, 'Dearly Beloved,' it makes me blush." Billy Graham once observed, "Jesus spoke about the ox in the ditch on the Sabbath. But if your ox gets in the ditch every Sabbath, you should either get rid of the ox or fill up the ditch."

So the Power which God worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms is a Power which makes a difference in the way we live out our faith as we do it *together*. And while following Christ is a personal decision and one that no one else can make for us, God never, *never, never* intended for Christianity to be a "just me and Jesus" way to live.

Do you need this reminder? "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:23-25).

And then fourth, this power makes a difference through...

4 A Body that is complete, vv. 22-23

Verses 22-23 sum up for us what God's original intention was: "*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*" We see several things right here in these two verses.

First, we read that God "*placed*" all things under his feet. This was a military term, which meant "to line up under," "to arrange by rank" under the command of a leader. God's plan in Christ was that everything should be lined up or placed under

Christ. The Power of God exerted in the Resurrection, Ascension and Exaltation of Christ completed that mission.

Not only are all things under His feet, but we read here that God also appointed Christ to be head of the church, which is here called His “body.” So Christ is the Head, and we are the Body. If we are the Body, then we are not complete with the Head. We are given life and made complete because of the Power that raised Jesus from the dead. But more than that! If the analogy holds up, then the Head is not complete with the Body! Dare we even think this? That we certainly need Jesus as our Head, but that He as the Head needs us, the Body. If this were determined strictly based on our merit, then, no, we could not even utter those words. But this is something based on the plan of God, that as the Resurrected Lord, Jesus would have all things placed under his feet, and He would be Head of the Body, the church. We are incomplete without Him; according to the Eternal Purpose of God, He is incomplete without us.

Paul then describes the Body as “*the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*” We’re talking about something that is absolutely complete, with not a single thing lacking. We are filled with His fullness. These are words which convey the idea of something being packed, like the cargo hold of a ship, or permeated through and through, like salt in meat. The Bible here says that God has placed all things—every rule and authority, every power and dominion—in subjection to Christ. ***But not without the Church!*** That’s how big a deal this is! God’s plan to send His Son to the cross also included the amazing truth that we would become the Body of Jesus following the Resurrection. It included the amazing truth that we are being constantly filled with the fullness of Christ.

This “*incomparably great power for us who believe*” as we read in verse 19 means that we will have **a faith that cannot be contained, a love that includes all the saints, an inheritance that is shared, and a Body which is complete.** And it could very well be that this very morning, you want to step out and begin a new walk with Christ, one filled with power as you realize that the same Power which raised Jesus from the dead is the same Power at work in us today. Surrender to Him today, and you can have it.