

Unlimited Power

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[0:00] This is God's word. For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 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.

[1:20] Let me pray. Lord God, we thank you for your word, the Bible, and we thank you that this is the way that you have decided, ordained to speak to us, to speak to us as a body together, but to speak to us as individuals too.

And so we pray as we come to your holy word that you would minister to us that we'd be built up and edified and taught and changed in our hearts to serve you in the fullness of life.

We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, one of the things, a favourite pastime of mine was kind of around Christmas time. I used to, maybe you've watched this, used to watch the World's Strongest Man competition.

Used to be on, I don't know why, but it was always on at Christmas time. And it featured, you know, if you've seen it, huge guys, massive guys doing insanely strong things.

Sometimes they'd be about how many repetitions they could do. Sometimes it'd be the sheer amount of weight they could lift. Sometimes there were time challenges. But my personal favourite is the timed event where the one man, literally, they had to get a harness on and pull an aeroplane.

[2:33] And it's just, it's ridiculous, isn't it? They'd start off and it seemed like they were going nowhere. They'd actually get up some speed by pulling this aeroplane along the runway. And one of the things that's crossed my mind is, when you watch that, you're like, he would be exactly the guy I would need if I was ever moving house.

Now, I have a friend, actually, he lives in another part of the world now. But I have a friend who used to be, in his younger days, he used to be into bodybuilding.

Doesn't compete anymore, but he still kind of retained the strength. So I would actually call on him whenever I was helping moving. Because to every one box that I could lift, he could lift three more.

And the thinking kind of goes like this, doesn't it? Like, if he can lift all the heavy weight, the big weights, if someone can pull a literal aeroplane, then moving some heavy boxes is no bother.

That's kind of how the logic goes. The world's strongest man could probably, like, carry me when we were moving house, if I got tired.

[3:47] Here's the logic. Because he's already done the significantly harder thing of pulling a plane, and he can definitely do the much easier thing of moving boxes or me.

This morning, as we look at Ephesians chapter 1, that same logic is exactly what Paul uses as the ground, the basis of his prayer life.

Because the basis of Paul's prayer life is in the unlimited power of God. And specifically, he roots it in God's power to raise the dead.

It is the strong man logic at a cosmic level. If the living God, if he's able to do the hardest, the harder thing, the hardest thing imaginable, of conquering death and raising Jesus from the grave, then we get the how much more question.

How much more is he able to answer Paul's prayers? My hope and prayer for us this morning is that by the end of this, we can maybe start to come to God with that same mindset.

[4:59] That we might actually begin to pose that question to ourselves, and maybe ask, what if we could pray with that same resurrection expectation?

Because of what Christ has done, our prayers, our prayers, get to become more than just daydreams, but faith-filled requests, based in a deep belief in the unlimited power of the living God. Our prayers are more than just daydreams, but faith-filled requests, based in a deep belief in the unlimited power of the living God. And so that's where we're going to go.

And the first thing we're going to look at is the posture of expectant prayer. The posture of expectant prayer. When we look at the opening few verses of our reading this morning, we see Paul doing exactly that, and what he talked about in his own prayer life.

He's not daydreaming, he's not crossing his fingers or carrying a lucky charm. No, he's praying with a deep expectation. Look with me what he says. Verse 15, he says, For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

[6:23] He says, for this reason. Now, it's right to ask, well, what reason is he talking about? For this reason, for what reason, you might ask Paul, tell us. Well, it's actually everything that he said before that.

It's what we've been looking at over the last two weeks. It's because of the gospel he's saying, in light of the good news, remembering those from verses 3 to 14 of the same chapter, he's almost been in song, in poetry, praising God because of all that he's done, because Jesus has chosen us before the creation of the world, because he's forgiven and adopted us, because he died for us and gave us hope.

He's saying, in light of all that, being marked by the promised Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our faith, all to the praise of his glory, being predestined according to his will, in light of all of that, for that reason, that is the reason, that ever since I heard it, he heard about the Ephesians' faith and love, he can't help but give thanks and remember them in his prayers.

Paul, here, is modelling for us the posture of expectant prayer that prays in response to what God has done. Now, given that, okay, given that his prayer is based on the gospel, I wonder what naturally you might expect Paul to pray for.

Because, I want us to just, we need to pause here and consider the context in which Paul finds himself and the people who he's writing to. It's, you know, he's writing to the church in the city of Ephesus, in Turkey, but it's not just the people in that church, it's the churches in that whole region that he's writing to.

[8:11] It's important to remember what it was like in those times, what the believers of those churches were up against. This is a time when the whole political and ruling landscape was dominated by the power of imperial Rome.

Caesar was in charge, the Roman army was present and they governed right, left and centre and imperialistic Roman culture was there for all to see. But that's not all.

I mean, that's kind of enough, but that's not all. Alongside that, Ephesus itself, the city, had a long-standing spiritual history. A spiritual history, not in connection with the God of the Bible, but with the Greek God Artemis.

It even had a temple right in the middle of the city in her name. And the temple, let me tell you, it wasn't some relic in the corner. It was the centre of life.

It had the central bank inside the temple. All the local tradesmen and merchants would take out loans. The locals believed Artemis protected the city.

[9:15] They even carried around amulets of the goddess to protect them from evil spirits. Ephesus was deeply entrenched in dark spiritual arts and magic.

And so it was, you have this bunch of upstarts, this Christian church, very much the new kids on the block, who would naturally be oppressed.

In the shadows spiritually and with the Roman Empire dominating law and order. Think that's who he's writing to. Now given that, and given that Paul is praying in line with for this reason for the gospel, what would you expect Paul to pray for?

You might expect him to pray for their safekeeping, protect them. You might expect them to pray for their comfort, to pray for specific circumstances that they might face every day.

That's what we would pray. That's what I would pray. And let me just say, there's nothing wrong with praying for that. And this isn't the only word on prayer in the Bible.

[10:23] But we're looking at what Paul writes here. Prayer after all is just talking to the living God. But notice with me what Paul prays. Let's go to verse 17. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glory and inheritance in his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

I wonder if we can read between the lines of what Paul is praying. Because notice with me, he's not praying or he's not telling them that he's praying for a change in circumstances.

But he's praying that they would have everything they need to live through it. To live through the hardship, the oppression, the difficulty, being small, that they would live through it with wisdom, that they would know how to live with a deeper sense and awareness of God's character and how he works.

Not despite their circumstances, but because of it. And that that, living through it, would lead to greater hope. Would lead to an understanding of their, a deeper understanding of their precious future and how much power God has to not avoid difficulty, but the power to live through the hardship.

[12:03] that might seem strange to us. And the question we might ask is, why is he praying that way? Why is he not asking to just stop all the hardship?

Just because that is what we would pray, right? Why pray to get through something? Isn't it surely better to not have to face it in the first place? Or to get rid of it all?

And so we need, we've seen, if we've seen how Paul prays, we need to think, why does he pray like that? Why does the good news of Jesus lead him to pray like this?

It's where we're going to kind of move to the principle of the passage. What Paul believes about the gospel. The gospel is the reason Paul prays, but it's the reason, but he prays, it has more layers to it.

There is more to it than meets the eye. Why does the gospel of good news lead Paul to pray this way? Because the gospel is founded upon something that supersedes, that cannot be measured.

[13:09] It's because of the unlimited power of God is the foundation of the gospel. Look with me what he says. Paul explains the power that he wants them to understand that is at work in the situations of their life.

Verse 19, see what he says? This is what he wants them to know, his incomparably great power for us who believe. Which did what? That power is the same as that mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at the right hand in the heavenly realms.

God's power is not a theoretical idea or abstract concept, but a measurable fact that is proven by an empty tomb. That is the foundation of the gospel, the unlimited power of the living God.

And why Paul prays with resurrection expectation, God is the strong man who has no limits.

Because you could say the same about the cross, right?

At any time, at any time on Good Friday, the living God could have taken the suffering away from Jesus. He could have done it, got him down. He could have done that.

[14:24] I mean, do you not think that's what Mary was praying for? What his friends, his disciples, even though they'd all scattered, they might have scattered and run away, but I'm sure they were praying.

Do you think they were praying that he would kind of just get through it? No, they were praying for Jesus' tortuous circumstances to cease. I'd be sure of it. But then the gospel without his death would no longer be good news.

Like the strong man who can pull a plane, God's ordaining his son to go through death was only because that through his death he would only then be able to resurrect him and roll over it. There is more power on display in death followed by resurrection than if he took him off the cross. If he can do that for Jesus, by his power, help him through Good Friday to get through it and then raise him, how much more can he answer our petitions and supply us with everything we need, resurrection power to get through the messy life circumstances we find ourselves in? how much more can he supply what the Ephesian church needs to get through this spiritual heavy oppression living in a city that was full of spiritual dark magic?

[15:52] Infinitely more. and yet we know that. The question that still plays on our conscience if God's that powerful and the tomb is empty why do my prayers still feel so weak?

We've touched on Imperial Rome the temple of Artemis already how the believers lived in that shadow. It's the exact problem that the church faced and you can imagine how that felt.

When a system of government dominates when it feels superior and makes all the cultural rules there is subtle or maybe not so subtle suppression involved even if you're allowed to meet together. They'd find themselves not wanting to step on eggshells trying to keep on the good side of the local authorities in their case the Roman army. it can feel oppressive like the worldly authorities are the ones worth watching and paying attention to.

It feels like they're in the ascendancy and it's the them that can possess the greater power. Can you imagine? Can you imagine the social and economic cost to define Artemis?

[17:13] Everything went through that temple. It is the ancient version of cancel culture. they would lose their job and probably be marginalised very likely.

Next to all that you have this group of believers who look incredibly small, vulnerable and weak who are asking what can our prayers do?

We see that but we see these powers listed in the text don't we? Verse 21 they're listed. Paul mentions those who rule are in authority who have power and dominion in the world.

These are the people who've made a name for themselves whose names carry real weight. It's the exact same concern that Christians throughout the ages have felt and that we will feel.

Aren't there names people maybe groups of people today that you simply wouldn't want to get on the wrong side of as a Christian? And if you did you would feel intimidated.

[18:16] I wonder what it is what intimidating realities cultural lobbies or groups today make us feel small and sometimes in our own minds look more powerful than the living God.

Because if we're honest and it's great that we're meeting here you know right now compared to the world and everything that's going on the size of things even our church meeting doesn't look all that powerful does it?

There's a fear that lies behind it all and I think and it certainly does for me helps me realise something about myself that deep down beneath the water line of our hearts it often feels like those worldly powers are greater than God's and we don't want to rock the boat in our society because why?

because we desire the culture's approval and fear what standing out might mean for our future we worry are we going to be vilified are we going to be made a laughing stock or an example of by the very people that we like and care about and those fears are real and they play on our minds when we live with that mindset it has a direct impact on our prayers it impacts what we pray it impacts the faith we have that our prayers will actually change anything that fear and really that fear is the reason we default to only praying for our circumstances to change I'm not saying it's wrong to pray for circumstances to change but it's why we default to praying that only circumstances would change rather than praying for resurrection power to get through those circumstances with the living

God when we fear the world it's because we've given the world our admiration and in the midst of it the world whispers lies to us it offers its own solutions to our feelings of powerlessness the common most common lie what is it just compromise and blend in just keep your head down don't make a fuss and they'll approve of you or worse just accept defeat just shut up and stay quiet this is where we need to turn to the gospel of grace the gospel of unlimited power because the cross proves that the world is lying about who actually holds the power it's the gospel it's the only reason that we will ever be able to pray like Paul because every one single one of us at some point in our lives or maybe felt it recently that will have felt that fear about living as a Christian in the world wondering if our prayers are actually doing anything but in the gospel the true victory is that Jesus Christ takes his rightful place on the throne so what we see don't we end of 19 it says that power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and where is he seated at the right hand of the father in the heavenly realms and what is it above far above all rule and authority all power and dominion and over every name that is invoked not only in the now but also in every age to come and in every part of history that the name of Jesus the resurrected Jesus sits on the throne over them all and what does he do he placed God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be what head over everything head over everything is death and resurrection are ultimate good news because they defeated every enemy he conquered not only the sin in our hearts but all evil and every competing worldly power worldly powers like Rome and like those in our world today that hoard and abuse their own power to crush people

[22:31] Jesus surrendered his life on the cross so that we who have no power that we could share in his and that's why he's given the name above every name everything that intimidated the Ephesians will one day call Jesus Lord the massive temple of Artemis is under the feet of Jesus the Roman empire who rules over every power and every dominion is entirely subject to him and that sovereign reality extends directly to our lives today every person every institution every political party every ideology every intimidating leader will bow to Jesus will kneel before him and acknowledges him as Lord either willingly or they'll have to submit this is what

Paul desperately wants the Ephesian church to believe it's exactly why he prays that they would know that deep in their bones to see that their powerless and their fear were taken away and completely crushed on the cross because of Christ's finished work rather than living in that old way of fear and compromise we're free to live with resurrection expectation his shared victory empowers us it nourishes his body to make it through the mess of life that we face day in and day out that is the gospel truth for us to hold on to and so how do we respond in light of the cross how do we respond well the truth is our prayer life as a body as an individual reveals our heart it reveals what we think about God and what we understand about his character the hard thing is that situations in life don't always change and they can be really hard but the living God has all the power the same power to raise his own son to new life that power to get you through it and to get you through it without imploding without giving up you know this is really the opportunity for us today to move forward with resurrection eyes and to pray with that same reality to pray confidently like Paul because it's our reality that we step into Jesus victory because in him it's ours here's the startling reality we don't get to pray for God's power we pray because in

Christ we already have access to it and so as we come in for landing I want to leave you with this the end of verse 22 says he is head over everything and then we get the why the why is important he's head over everything for the church he's head over everything for us his body the fullness we are the fullness of him who fills everything in every way in us the fullness of his resurrection the fullness of his power the hope the riches they're all there for us let's pray that we have enlightened resurrection eyes to see like the strong man pulling the plane how much more can the living God answer your prayers if he can raise his own son from death to life it's the same power no less let me pray almighty God we praise you we praise you that we can boldly approach your throne of grace and know that when we pray to you you hear us and we come in the name of Jesus and so we thank you that the power of the gospel the unlimited power the foundation that you raised your son to life that when we pray for your power we know that we've got access to the same thing because we share in that we share in your victory we thank you that everything is under your feet and that your overall lists for us and so we pray that

I just pray that whatever anybody is going through here today you know the situations in people's lives you know the times when we feel like our prayers are weak you know the situations when and it's okay to pray that you remove the hardship and the difficulty we pray that alongside it but we also pray that through the midst of it whilst we wait and journey and struggle and mourn and sometimes weep and it's hard we pray that you would empower us with the same power to see reality to see our lives with the enlightened eyes so that we'd know you better with resurrection eyes so that we'd know you better so that we'd know the hope to which we've been called the immeasurable riches which we possess in him and the incomparable power to anything else give us courage Lord Jesus to live for you and so we ask for this in his name
Amen