

The Power *of the* Exalted Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 1:15–23, Eph. 3:14–21, 1 Thess. 5:16–18, Deut. 9:29, 1 Cor. 15:20–22, Ps. 110:1.*

Memory Text: Through the Holy Spirit, believers may know “what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places” (*Ephesians 1:19, 20, NKJV*).

Human beings, it seems, are always reaching for more power. Auto manufacturer Devel Motors, for example, showed off the prototype of its Devel Sixteen, a vehicle with a 16-cylinder, 12.3-liter engine producing more than 5,000 horsepower. Or, if that is not enough, consider the Peterbilt semitruck that sports three Pratt & Whitney J34–48 jet engines. Boasting 36,000 horsepower, the truck does a quarter mile in 6.5 seconds and regularly hits 376 m.p.h. before deploying its two parachutes.

In contrast, Paul prays that believers in Ephesus, under temptation to admire the various powers and deities of their culture, will experience through the Holy Spirit the immensity of the power God makes available to them in Christ. This divine might is not measured in horsepower, or magic, but is seen in four cosmos-shifting, salvation-history events: (1) the resurrection of Jesus; (2) His exaltation at the throne of God; (3) all things being placed in subservience to Christ; and (4) Christ being given to the church as its Head (*Eph. 1:19–23*).

In considering these four events, believers may begin to grasp—and experience—the vast scope of the power God exercises on their behalf.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 15.

Praying and Thanksgiving

Motivated by news that believers in Ephesus are thriving in faith toward Jesus and in love toward each other (perhaps news shared by Tychicus, *Eph. 6:21, 22*), Paul reports to them how he prays for them.

Compare Paul’s two prayer reports in Ephesians—Ephesians 1:15–23 and Ephesians 3:14–21. What themes do the two reports share?

Sometimes our default tone in prayer can be doleful, mourning over this challenge or that problem. Paul’s prayer reports in Ephesians suggest that thanksgiving is the native language of prayer. We gather up the blessings of God and thank Him for them. We seek to perceive God at work in difficult circumstances and praise Him for His transforming presence in our lives. Celebrating the grace and power of the exalted Jesus (*Eph. 1:20–23*), we thank Him for blessing those in our circle of influence. Here is Paul’s transforming secret for prayer: *prayer is the key of praise and thanksgiving*.

Paul also said that he does “not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (*Eph. 1:16, NKJV; see also Phil. 1:3, 4; 1 Thess. 1:2; and 1 Thess. 5:16–18*).

What does it really mean to “pray without ceasing” (*1 Thess. 5:17*)? It cannot mean that we are always kneeling before God in prayer. It does mean that, blessed by God’s Spirit, we move through life with hearts open to the presence and power of God, seeking cues for thanksgiving to Him. It means a readiness to process the issues of life in the presence of God, to seek divine counsel as we experience the twists and turns that life brings. It means living not in estrangement from God but in engagement with Him, ever open to divine leading.

We too often view prayer as a nicety, an add-on to discipleship that is to be exercised when convenient. Paul illustrates a different view. Paul takes seriously the task of praying for the believers in Ephesus, doing so both by giving thanks for them (*Eph. 1:16; compare Eph. 1:3–14*) and by interceding for them (*Eph. 1:17–23; compare Eph. 3:14–21*). For him, prayer is a central, or even *the* central, task of Christian faith. These verses provide a moving call to prayer, an invitation for each of us to consider our own “prayer ministry” in the light of Paul’s dedication to it.

Why is it important always to thank God in prayer for what you have to be thankful for?

Experiencing Insight From the Holy Spirit

“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:16, 17, ESV).

In reporting his prayers, Paul records one central request that he places before the throne of God. He has already noted that the Holy Spirit has come into believers’ lives at the time of their conversion (*Eph. 1:13, 14*). Now Paul prays for a fresh blessing of the Spirit to give needed spiritual insight focused on a deepened understanding of Jesus (“in the knowledge of him,” *Eph. 1:17*).

Paul prays that the Holy Spirit will bring special insight to believers on what three topics? See *Eph. 1:17–19*.

When Paul prays for insight for them about “the hope to which he has called you” (*Eph. 1:18, ESV*), he prays that they will be alert to the past actions God has already taken for their salvation (*Eph. 1:3–9, 11–13*) and to the glorious future He has planned for them (*Eph. 1:10, 14*).

When he prays for insight into “the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (*Eph. 1:18, NKJV*), he is recalling the Old Testament idea of believers as God’s inheritance (*Deut. 9:29, Deut. 32:9, Zech. 2:12; compare Eph. 1:11*). He wishes them to know that they not only possess an inheritance from God, but that they are God’s inheritance, and Paul wants them to understand their value to God.

When Paul prays for spiritual insight about “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (*Eph. 1:19, NKJV*), he imagines the Holy Spirit bringing fresh understanding of the immensity of God’s power and actualizing it in their experience.

In all these prayers, Paul wants these people to experience for themselves what they have been given in Jesus.

How can you better experience “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe”? What does this mean in daily life?

Participating in Resurrection Power

In the remaining verses of Paul's prayer report, Ephesians 1:20–23, Paul expands on the third topic of insight he hopes that the Holy Spirit will bring to believers: the enormity of God's power, which He exercises on their behalf. Paul begins by pointing to two salvation-history events as the premiere illustrations of God's power: (1) the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and (2) the exaltation of Jesus to the throne of the cosmos (*Eph. 1:20*).

How is God's power expressed through the resurrection of Jesus? *Eph. 1:20; 1 Cor. 15:20–22; Phil. 3:8–11; Heb. 13:20, 21; 1 Pet. 1:3.*

The resurrection of Jesus is a nonnegotiable belief of the Christian faith (*1 Cor. 15:14, 17*). It is because Christ is risen that faithful believers await the grand, future resurrection to eternal life at the time of Christ's return (*1 Cor. 15:20–23*). It is because Christ is risen that we can look to Him today for all the blessings of the gospel, including the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The imagery, that God “seated Him [Christ] at His right hand” (*Eph. 1:20, NKJV*), is drawn from Psalm 110:1, the most frequently cited passage in the New Testament (all of the passages just cited seem to draw on it). The exaltation of Christ has a high profile in Ephesians. Believers are “seated with . . . him [Christ Jesus] in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 2:6, ESV*). In addition, Paul refers to the ascent of Christ as a prelude to Christ's filling all things and giving gifts to His church (*see Eph. 4:8–11*).

In Ephesians 4:8–11, Paul warns us away from adopting a merely static image of Christ on the Father's throne, presenting rather “the dynamic NT picture of the exalted Christ going forth by His Spirit in all the world, conquering and to conquer.”—F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 133. So, Paul portrays the exaltation/coronation of Christ, not simply as an illustration of the divine power offered to believers but as the source of that power.

What are the ways that you need Christ's power in your life, and how can we better avail ourselves of that power? What practices might hinder our access to His power?

Christ Above All Powers

Paul has celebrated the exaltation of Jesus, who now sits with the Father on the throne of the cosmos. Having defined the position of Christ in relationship to the Father (“seated . . . at his right hand in the heavenly places” [*Eph. 1:20, ESV*]), Paul turns to the relationship of Jesus to “the powers.” As coregent with the Father, Jesus is “far above” them all (*Eph. 1:21*).

Compare Paul’s mentioning of evil, spiritual powers in Ephesians 1:21, Ephesians 2:2, and Ephesians 6:12. Why do you think Paul is so interested in these powers?

Acts 19:11–20, with its story of the seven sons of Sceva, illustrates that Ephesus at the time of Paul was a center for the magic arts. “The overriding characteristic of the practice of magic throughout the Hellenistic world was the cognizance of a spirit world exercising influence over virtually every aspect of life. The goal of the magician was to discern the helpful spirits from the harmful ones and learn the distinct operations and the relative strengths and authority of the spirits. Through this knowledge, means could be constructed (with spoken or written formulas, amulets, etc.) for the manipulation of the spirits in the interest of the individual person. With the proper formula, a spirit-induced sickness could be cured, [or] a chariot race could be won.”—Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians*, p. 18.

The interest in naming deities and powers in spells was a feature of religious life in Ephesus (*see Acts 19:13*), and among some even today. Paul wishes to make clear the relationship between Christ and “the powers”: The exalted Jesus is “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (*Eph. 1:21, ESV*).

Just to be sure that his audience understands that there is no power outside of the sovereignty of Jesus, he adds an allusion to the practice of gathering up the names of deities in spells: “and above every name that is named” (*Eph. 1:21, ESV*). Turning from the dimension of space to that of time, Paul stresses the unlimited chronology of Jesus’ exalted rule. His rule over all powers applies “not only in this age but also in the one to come” (*Eph. 1:21, ESV*).

What are some present-day manifestations of these same evil forces, and how can we make sure that we don’t get caught up in any of them?

Jesus, All Things, and His Church

Early Christians saw in Psalm 110:1 a prophecy of the exaltation of Jesus: “The LORD says to my LORD: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” (*ESV*). They read Psalm 8 in the same way, with its affirmation that God has “put all things under his feet,” (*Ps. 8:6, ESV*), the feet of “the son of man” (*Ps. 8:4, ESV*). While they believed that the powers of darkness in the heavenly places were over their heads and threatened to subjugate them, they laid hold of the truth that those powers were under Christ’s feet.

Note carefully that having “put all things under his [Jesus’] feet,” the Father “gave him as head over all things to the church” (*Eph. 1:22, ESV*; compare “gave Him to be head over all things to the church,” *NKJV*). While “all things” is a universal, inclusive term, Paul still has in mind “the powers” mentioned in Ephesians 1:21. All things—the cosmic, supernatural, spiritual powers included—are under the feet of Christ, subservient to Him.

What benefits does the exaltation of Christ to the throne of the cosmos, and His rule over all things in heaven and on earth, provide for His church? *Eph. 1:22, 23*.

God has made Christ victorious over all evil powers. The church, closely identified with Christ and supplied by Him with all it needs, is itself guaranteed victory over those foes. The power of God, on display in the resurrection and His exaltation over every cosmic power, has been activated for the church. God has given the victorious Christ to the church, which is so united with Him as to be called His body.

How can we believers know the exalted Christ and experience God’s power in our lives? Paul does not directly address any mechanisms or strategies by which this occurs. However, the fact that the passage is part of a “prayer report” is suggestive. Paul believes that God will answer his prayer. He affirms the efficacy of celebrating God’s power, revealed in Christ, in God’s own presence and asking for it to be active in the lives of believers.

What has been your own experience with the power of prayer? That is, not just answered prayers but prayer in general, and how does prayer draw us closer to God and the power offered us in Jesus?

Further Thought: Study these two descriptions of Christ’s exaltation from the writings of Ellen G. White:

“When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was Heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.”—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 38, 39.

“The Father’s arms encircle His Son, and the word is given, ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ Hebrews 1:6.

“With joy unutterable, rulers and principalities and powers acknowledge the supremacy of the Prince of life. The angel host prostrate themselves before Him, while the glad shout fills all the courts of heaven, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.’ Revelation 5:12.

“Songs of triumph mingle with the music from angel harps, till heaven seems to overflow with joy and praise. Love has conquered. The lost is found. Heaven rings with voices in lofty strains proclaiming, ‘Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever.’ Rev. 5:13.”—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 834, 835.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Ponder the “now” and “not yet” of the exaltation of Jesus. In what sense is Jesus already the Lord of “all things,” with the demonic powers subservient to Him—that is, the “now”? And in what sense does His full reign over all things look toward the future—the “not yet”? (See 1 Cor. 15:24–28.)
- ② To what extent are you living in the light of Christ’s rule over all things? Or to what extent are you living under the authority of these other powers, the fallen powers, whose authority is ebbing away anyway? How do you know which is which, and how can you get away from the forces of evil that, though certainly defeated, are still prevalent in our world?

Three Books, One Answer

By JOHN BRADSHAW

As a child, I had a lot of questions for which I couldn't find answers. Why did I have to confess my sins to a priest? Why should I pray to saints when Jesus could surely hear my prayer? Would God burn people in hell forever?

I enjoyed going to church, and I was happy to believe in Jesus. But attending church didn't clear up the questions. I attended many churches. Every church claimed to believe the Bible, but none could answer my questions.

When I was 16, an older brother gave me a book. He had joined another church that did strange things—church on Saturdays?—but the change was obviously good for him. He was happy, which led me to think the book might just be worth reading. I promised to read the book, which he said was about history and prophecy, but I didn't get beyond the introduction.

Several years later he asked me if I had read it, and when I told him I had not, he gave me another copy. I assured him I would read this one. This time I started on page one. I read most of it. Most of page one, that is. I put the book down intending to read it later, but I never got back to it.

More years passed. I left New Zealand, my home country, and was living in England. On a trip to Ireland, desperate to find a meaningful relationship with God, I went to church. But as I left it, I told God I was never going to church again “until You show me the truth!”

When I returned to London, a package was waiting for me. I had asked my brother if he had any idea where I might be able to find the book that he twice had given me. I had looked in several bookstores but hadn't been able to locate it. And here in the mail was the third copy of the book that would change my life, *The Great Controversy*. This time I started reading in the middle of the book, and when I got to the end I went back to the beginning and read what I had missed. I encountered the power of God's Word in a book that not only explained the deep prophecies of the Bible but also connected me with Jesus. A call to the operator connected me with a church in London, and thus began in earnest my walk with Jesus.

I still read *The Great Controversy*, having found that I continue to find new blessings and insights into the plan of salvation.

Outside of the Bible, no book has had a greater impact on my life.

Join the global church in 2023 and 2024 in the mass promotion and distribution of *The Great Controversy*. Visit greatcontroversyproject.com for more information or ask your pastor.



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