

Ascension - 6-1-3, 2019 - St. Paul's, New Ulm, MN
Ephesians 1:18-23 "The Incomparable Power of God"

Ephesians 1:18-25

¹⁸I 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, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹far 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. ²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Introduction

In respect to actual strength, which is stronger, a 1-month old baby or a full grown, healthy bull elephant? There's no comparison is there? In respect to being able to weather a storm in the middle of Lake Superior, which is more dependable - a canoe or a high-tech ship built for the harsh weather of the Great Lakes? There no comparison, is there? In respect to food, which would most people prefer to eat - Spam or a prime-cut New York strip steak? There's no comparison is there? Which is capable of going faster - a tricycle or a well-built racing cycle? There's no comparison, is there? These examples provide choices that are so far apart they are incomparable.

The same thing is true with the power of God. Nothing compares with it. It is **incomparable**.

On this Ascension weekend focusing on what happened 40 days after Easter, when we remember and celebrate Jesus' ascension into heaven, we focus on....

"The Incomparable Power of God...."

..... 1) The power to raise the dead, and 2) The power to rule the universe.

1. The Power to Raise the Dead

One has to wonder about the Apostle Paul's knowledge of the human anatomy. He writes, **"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened..."** Our eyes are in our head! What's he talking about? Paul uses this idea to refer to our inner being, our soul. Actually, Paul was thanking God for the faith and love he had given the Ephesian Christians. He also prayed that God would give them the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation so that they would know God better.

These believers had already received the Holy Spirit who made them believers in the triune God and especially in Jesus as their Savior. Paul prayed that these believers would now grow in their knowledge of the revelation of God, something that comes through the study of God's Word. Paul, in a sense was saying that the spiritual eyes that God had opened in conversion would see more clearly and regularly. What Paul specifically hopes they see is **"...the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people (saints)..."**

Why does Paul emphasize eternity when these Christians are probably struggling with time? After all, they had jobs, families, financial problems, crime, corruption in government, loneliness, pain and pressure in their life. In a way, these ancients were similar to us. Paul prays that they think more often and positively about heaven because this is a big help getting people through the here in time. You see, when I'm suffering, if I know that things will eventually get better, I have hope and am helped to endure. Aren't you willing to suffer, to sacrifice and to stick with it if you know things will get better? Also, I'm not going to get so wrapped up in the here and now if I'm thinking about there hereafter. I don't have to get wrapped up in all the greed and all the other things. I know that in heaven, I will have glory, I will be satisfied, I will not suffer, I will have pleasure forevermore. I will have the

gift of God earned by the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

Paul also wanted these Christians to know "*the incomparably great power for us who believe (v.19).*" This was the power of God the Holy Spirit which the Ephesians and we became believers. Really this is power by which God raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life bringing us to faith. This is the power of God that keeps us in faith. This power works in us through the means of grace – the gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Have you had those down times when you're crabby about everything and everything is wrong? But then you read something from the Bible or you hear something on the radio or someone says something spiritual and encouraging with the result that your attitude and outlook change. Do you find yourself thinking that there's no way you will be able to bear some burden or cope with some catastrophe? But perhaps through something from God's word you read, heard or recalled, it was as if you received a strength you could not explain? Do you ever get on a "spiritual roll" where you are reading the Bible regularly and it seems like you are on fire within and that you have a power to produce all kinds of things? This is the **incomparable power of God**.

Paul says that this power is like that power by which God raised Jesus from the dead. That takes power doesn't it - to raise someone from the dead? If I die today and on Saturday my family or someone else tries to revive me, it won't happen. In spite of all our sophisticated gadgets and gizmos and all the techniques known to science, it won't happen. But God made it happen in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus had suffered and died to pay for our sins. He took the punishment we deserve for eternity. He died. The soldiers made sure Jesus was dead by piercing Jesus with a spear. But on the third day of death, early on that first morning of the week, Jesus rose from the dead. The soldiers guarding the tomb testified to this fact; the woman who went there on Easter did too. So did the disciples and many others. Jesus rose to show that he is the Son of God who paid for our sins in full. He rose to show that there is eternal life and the resurrection of the body. The power of God behind this resurrection is a clear example of the incomparable power of God.

The Greek text for these verses piles on a whole bunch of different words to refer to the power of God. There is one that indicates that power is part of God's very being. Another indicates that God's power makes him capable. Another indicates that God's power is not latent but a laboring, a working power. Another word indicates that God's power is exceedingly great; another that it is unsurpassed. It takes such power to raise the dead and God has it – **the incomparable power of God**.

2. The Power to Rule over All

This power of God not only raised Jesus from the dead but restored him to the position of all authority which he, the Son of God, left when he humbled himself, became a man and carried out his mission of saving the world. Paul wrote, "**That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ 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. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.**"

Imagine that. He who was born in a stable, whose parents had to take him and flee from Herod, who stood almost silently before Pilate, who died on the cross, is over every power, whether in the spirit world (the devil and demons, the angels) or in this world, governments and peoples personally lives. He who seemed at times to be powerless has all power and authority and dominion. He has the power to ascend into heaven, which he did – no cranes, no planes, no jet packs, nothing but the incomparable power of God.

Paul writes that *God placed all things under his feet*. This is the picture of the ancient conqueror before whom the conquered would bow. The conqueror would put his foot on the back of the neck to symbolize authority and subjection.

Now he makes and breaks governments. He's got more authority than the president, the congress or the supreme court. He governs the wind, waves and weather; the sun, moon and stars. Time is under his control. Time is under his control. He can make time stand still if he wishes. He has authority over you and me. He can expect us to bow before him.

Do you bow before Jesus? Do you acknowledge him to be the Lord of life? Hopefully we would all say, "Yes." But is not this subjection, this spiritual bowing a selective thing? There are areas of life we submit to Jesus and his rule but there are areas where we like to call the shots ourselves - the things we like to excuse from the dominion of Christ. So we try to find loopholes to get out. Doesn't it happen with money? With the use of God's Word? With worship? With lifestyle - living together or condoning it.

Thank God we have a Savior raised and ascended by the power of God. He is at the right hand of God interceding for us as our Savior. But because of this don't we want to bring those areas of our lives where there are breakdowns to our Lord and say, "Lord, I submit even this area to you?"

The Lord will take care of you. He rules all things for the church. The church is all believers in Jesus. The church includes you and me. Paul says that the church is the body of Christ. It's the fullness of Christ. It's not that the church fills Christ. Christ fills or takes care of the church. In him we live and move and have our being. he is what gives us life. he sustains life. He gives hope.

Do you ever think to yourself, "What is the world coming to? We see change, corruption and uncertainty all around. We see the sinful effects of the last days. We see things out of our control – for example, we just heard of another senseless shooting in Virginia Beach. This is the result of sin in the world and the people who live here.

Nevertheless, Jesus is in control. He rules over all for the church. He rules as almighty God. He wields the **incomparable power of God**. We need not fear. His church, while it may change, will never fail. Amen.