

Sermon 14, The Resurrection and Exaltation of Christ, Ephesians 1:19b-22a

Read and sing Psalms 8 & 110

κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ 20 ἦν ἐνήργησεν ἐν τῷ χριστῷ, ἐγείρας αὐτὸν ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις, 21 ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος, καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος ὀνομαζομένου οὐ μόνον ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι· 22 καὶ πάντα ὑπέταξεν ὑπὸ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ (Eph 1:19b-22a BYZ)

According to the operative power of the might of His potency which He powerfully operated in the Christ: He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all authority and power and active working and lordship, and every named name, not only in the present age, but also in the coming one. And He put all things under His feet.

“The dust of the earth now sits on the throne of the universe.” — Dr. John Duncan

Proposition: You need to know God’s awesome Resurrection power.

- I. The Power of the Power of the Power of God, v. 19b
 - A. God’s Power Is Operative, Potent, and Mighty
 - B. God’s Power Goes Beyond Human Language
- II. The Power of the Power of the Power of God Saves His Anointed, vv. 20-22a
 - A. God’s Power Raised Christ, v. 20a
 - B. God’s Power Set Christ at God’s Right Hand, v. 20b
 1. This Position Is Above All Powerful Beings, v. 21a
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 - C. God’s Power Subjected Everything to Christ, v. 22a

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul is in the middle of recounting the blessings and benefits that we have in Christ. He has described these benefits and prayed for us to understand them, and now he returns to his project of sketching these benefits in brief but powerfully suggestive terms. He focuses on the resurrection, first the resurrection of Christ and then our spiritual resurrection at the beginning of the next chapter — and the overarching category under which he looks at the resurrection and session of Christ is the category of God’s power. You need to know hope; you need to know riches; and you need to

know power! All three of these things require experiential knowledge, of course. To know hope, riches, and power is to experience all three — it is to have hope, to have riches, to have power. And brothers and sisters, that is exactly what you have in union with Christ.

More than once in this letter, Paul tries to describe the immeasurable. He wants us to know how large the boundless love of God is. And he also wants us to know how powerful the immeasurable power of God is. The best idea of it that he can give us is in asking us to look at the most signal exercise of that power. At the Resurrection of our Lord, God's power worked, well, most powerfully. The point of today's sermon is simply this: You need to know God's awesome Resurrection power.

I. The Power of the Power of the Power of God, v. 19b

Paul is in the middle of praying for the Ephesians to know God's power when he, as it were, opens his eyes and says to the camera, "This power is the energy of the might of His potency." Let me just read you some of the ways that English translations have rendered this over the years.

- the working of his mighty power (Eph 1:19 KJV)
- that working of the strength of his might (Eph 1:19 ASV)
- the working of the strength of His might (Eph 1:19 NAS)
- the mighty strength (Eph 1:19 NIV)
- the working of his great power (Eph 1:19 NRS)
- the operation of the potency of His virtue (Eph 1:19 Vulgate)

The point is that the apostle uses three different words for power here — literally talking about "the power of the power of the power."

When you need to mention the power of God, is that how it comes into your mind? Do you think of God's power as basically power cubed, power³? Because that's how the apostle thought of it. When he thought about God's power, he thought about power to the nth degree. He thought about power that is beyond powerful, the omnipotence of God's omnipotence!

A. God's Power Is Operative, Potent, and Mighty

So if we look at each of the words he uses, we can see that God's power is operative. It actually does things. It is potent; it has a huge reservoir of raw potency to draw from. And it is mighty. Think about the power required to drive the earth through space. Think of the power released in that recent collision between two neutron stars. I read that scientists believe that the collision made two or three hundred earth masses of pure gold, and another hundred earth masses of platinum. Can you imagine two hundred Earths made of gold? That's power. But God's power doesn't just sustain those two neutron stars; it sustains an entire universe full of hundreds of billions of *galaxies*, each of which has hundreds of billions of stars.

B. God's Power Goes Beyond Human Language

Indeed, folks, the bottom line of the this triple genitive is that God's power goes beyond human language. We simply don't have a word for this kind of power. Sure, we have the word

“omnipotent.” But we can hardly even imagine, except in the most abstract way, what that word means. The scale is too big. The power is too much.

Does this comfort you? You serve a king whose power cannot be measured in earthly terms, whose ability cannot even be described by human language. Do you think that your problems are too big for Him? Do you think that your sin and your puniness can somehow stop Him? Some of you sci-fi fans have probably looked into what it would take to save the Earth from an asteroid collision. The raw power of an impact at speed by a rock the size of Manhattan is simply staggering — far more than humans could hope to contain or control. But to God, that kind of power is nothing. He hangs the Earth upon nothing.

But not only does God have this kind of power. The reason Paul brought it up is not simply that you can be in awe and say, “Might makes right and the Almighty must always be right”! Yes, the Almighty is always right. But the point here, in this passage, is that His might is for you! It has been exercised on your behalf. God’s power saves His Anointed, and if there’s one thing this chapter has highlighted, it is that every believer is united to Christ and partakes of the benefits and blessings of everything that belongs to Him. In short, the message that God has exercised His power on Christ’s behalf is a message that He is exercising it on your behalf!

II. The Power of the Power of the Power of God Saves His Anointed, vv. 20-22a

Brothers and sisters, the power of the power of the power of God saves God’s Anointed One. Paul refers to Jesus here as “the Anointed,” the Christ. Where did God’s omnipotence preeminently work? What is its most typical act? It was to save Christ. As the psalmist says over and over in different ways, “Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with the saving might of his right hand!” (Psa 20:6 ESV). The might of God and the right hand of God feature prominently in this passage. What Paul wants you to know, and what I want you to know, is that this truth of Resurrection by the mighty power of God is the core truth of the Christian faith. Without this, the rest of it is worthless. If God does not save His anointed, then you should get up and leave right now. This church should close. It is a complete and total waste of scarce resources that could be better used in all kinds of ways.

A. God’s Power Raised Christ, v. 20a

But the whole point, of course, is that God really did save His Anointed from death. God raised Jesus from the dead, and Jesus lives forever, embodied as a man like us. Anyone and everyone who is united to Christ by faith will be raised in the same way, because the Resurrection of Jesus is the exemplary cause and efficient cause of our resurrection from the dead. Where does the energy that will pull us out of our graves at the last day come from? It comes from God right through the physical body of Jesus Christ. When we are resurrected, it will be for the purpose of being made like Him. How He looks is how we will look; what His resurrection was is what ours will be. And all of it is only possible through the power of God that raised Him from the dead.

Jesus died at the hands of wicked Jews and Romans. They envied Him and hated Him because He was so perfect. But in that death, He took the punishment we deserved. He bore the wrath of God directed against our sins. He took the penalty of death on Himself. *And God*

approved of His suffering and death in our place. That is what the Resurrection means. Jesus was truly dead, yet His physical body came back to life, was reunited with His soul, such that He walked out of the grave under His own power. Death did not have the final word; life conquered it. The indestructible human life of Jesus Christ beat up death and undid the works of the Devil. And it is through His indestructible human life, which is empowered and preserved by nothing short of the omnipotence of God, that you and I have the promise and hope of eternal human life with Him.

It was not nature that raised Christ. It was not electricity. It was not demonic forces making a dead body walk and talk, zombie-like. It was God's power. God made the dead live.

Do you see how important the Resurrection is? Do you see that it is one of the greatest acts of the Triune God?

Brothers and sisters, if you truly believe in resurrection power, then how will you live? First of all, you will stop fearing death! Death is only a minor hiccup. Death is only a door through which you must walk to enter Heaven. Death pretends to have the last word, but it doesn't! My homiletics professors told me not to use *Lord of the Rings* analogies in sermons, but this isn't strictly from *LOTR*. It's from *The Silmarillion* and *The Children of Hurin*. In those books are told two heartbreaking tales of love cut short by death — the love between Beren and Luthien and the love between Turin and his dragon-enchanted sister Nienor. Both stories end with the death of one of the lovers, and reading them as a teen I was moved more than ever before to long for the resurrection of the dead. Brothers and sisters, within the confines of this world death is the end! But according to the word of God, death is not the end. Beren need not live forever sundered from Luthien. Nienor and Turin need not be permanently separated by death. Why? Because the power of God has conquered death in the flesh of Jesus Christ!

If this is not the best news you've ever heard, then you simply don't understand it! Pray that God would take away the deadness of your heart. Pray that you would know and feel the pain of separation that death brings, and that you would know the passionate, overwhelming desire for resurrection!

In other words, you will stop fearing death and you will start living with an overpowering hope! You will not be driven by fear, but by joy. You will not be afraid of what men can do to you; you will be delighted by what God will do for you! If you understand God's power, you will also understand that death is not the end of your story.

Christ is risen. He lives, who once was dead. And if you are in Him, you will live also! That is a promise, and it is made and guaranteed by the power of the power of God's power.

B. God's Power Set Christ at God's Right Hand, v. 20b

But God's power didn't stop with raising Christ from the dead. It also brought Christ up to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places.

As I said when we looked at v. 3, "Clearly, Paul wants us to think of Heaven not primarily as the location of a future life, but rather as the place in which we can find communion with God here and now." The heavenly places are simply the places where God and other

spiritual beings dwell — where they are present by their power. Obviously Heaven is a place, too, because Jesus is there as a man and as a man, He is circumscriptively in a place. But we should think of it not as a place far away, somewhere outside the universe as we know it, but rather as a place accessible to us at any time — the spiritual place where our Father is and where we too are in Jesus.

So Christ ascended after His resurrection and now sits at God's right hand. Obviously, the text is not trying to tell us (as our Mormon friends believe) that God the Father has a physical body, including a right hand, and that He sits on a physical throne and Jesus sits on another throne next to Him. Rather, the idea is that Christ is in the place of superlative honor. If you read Psalm 110, which is where Paul got this phrase, you will see that the term is not being used literally because first the Psalm says that the Son is at the Father's right hand and then it says that the Father is at the Son's right hand. The point is that they are with each other, honoring each other. The Father honors the Son by seating Him at His right hand, and the Son relies on the Father by keeping Him at His right hand in battle.

Do you think about the Heavenly Session of Christ? Do you recognize that the Jesus you serve is a man like you but is seated in Heaven with God, subduing you to Himself, ruling and defending you, and restraining and conquering all your and His enemies? Brothers and sisters, our faith does not celebrate a dead Jew in the way that some strands of Buddhism celebrate a dead Indian or that many strands of Islam celebrate a dead Arab. We don't rejoice simply that Jesus lived; we rejoice that He lives and reigns!

This Heavenly Session is supremely relevant to you. It's what gives you confidence that history is being planned and run by someone who knows you and is like you. We really do have a friend in the highest place, and His name is Jesus. We don't have to go to Mary or some other saint or angel or mediator who understands us better. Jesus understands you perfectly. He too is a man, but He is your God. "The dust of the earth sits on the throne of the universe," as 'Rabbi' Duncan used to say in 19th-century Scotland.

1. This Position Is Above All Powerful Beings, v. 21a

Christ's position is above all powerful beings. Some believe that these are good angels; others believe that they are bad angels. Paul is not particularly concerned here to enumerate every class and rank of angel or demon. He is simply saying that whatever powerful beings, benevolent or malevolent, might be out there, Jesus is above them all. We have no need for saints, no need for angels, no need to placate demons, because the Lord we serve is exalted far above them all. They cannot do anything without His permission and direction. The Principalities, Powers, Might, and Dominions, whoever and whatever they are, are subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

This is a small point in this sermon to a bunch of white people in Gillette, Wyoming this morning. If I were to preach this same sermon in Africa or Haiti, this would need to be my biggest, most important point. People in many parts of the world today live in fear of malevolent spirits, or place an unhealthy reliance on benevolent ones. Jesus Christ rules over the powers! Paul needed to make this point to the Ephesians because their city was a noted center of power

and magic. Magic books worth huge sums of money were burned by ex-magicians who became Christians under Paul's ministry in this city. And brothers and sisters, our friends in places nearby like Pine Ridge Reservation and Wind River Reservation and the Crow Reservation might still believe in a very active role played by spiritual powers in their daily lives. Paul encourages us not to discount that role, not to say that thrones, dominations, powers, etc. don't exist and don't do anything to human beings. They certainly do, he says — but only by permission from Jesus. Archangels submit to a man. A human being orders around the most powerful spiritual beings and forces, things virtually unimaginable to us, beings whose very presence would overwhelm us. Jesus is far above them all because of the resurrection power of God.

2. This Position Is Above All Powerful Names, v. 21b

N.T. Wright's translation of the New Testament has here "every name that gets itself talked about." Naming names and knowing names is an important part of magic and power in every culture. And we all know what names get themselves talked about in our culture! Donald J. Trump comes to mind. Thomas Aquinas had a different take than N.T. Wright; he described anything that could be named as ultimately being a created substance. Anything that can exist as a creature can receive a name, but Christ is not a creature and therefore is above every name. He is literally ineffable — that is, incapable of being captured or exhaustively described or controlled by a human word. Finally, most modern exegetes take the reference here as being to the first Adam, who gave every creature its name. Christ, the second Adam, is the true namer of every name, the one who determines what everything that exists is and will be by the name that He gives to it. This position does not exclude the other two, of course; rather, it sums them up while respecting the context of the verse and its reference to Psalm 8. Everything has been subjected under the feet of Christ, as we will see — and Christ the man names everything.

Who are you? Jesus decided. He decided who you would be, what your skills are, what your talents are, what your heritage is, what events you would experience in your life; He decided what your name is the fullest sense of the term. And that is true not just for nobodies like you and me, but also for national leaders and international celebrities, earthly powers and heavenly principalities. Christ is above every named name. Christ as man is the real Adam, calling every living creature by its name.

So where is your fear? Christ rules! Christ sovereignly determines what everything is, and He is exalted far above everyone with worldly status, position, power, and influence. He is far above all angelic status, position, power, and influence.

So when you need something, where do you go? When you are low, where do you turn? When you are jubilant, whom do you thank? It should always be Jesus!

3. This Position Is Above All Power of Time, v. 21c

Indeed, this last thing over which Christ is exalted is perhaps the most relevant of all to our culture. Some cultures worship spirit beings. Some worship status and position (ours certainly does!). But some preeminently look to the created order and worship it as enduring and

unchanging. Brothers and sisters, our culture recognizes the power of time. We are profoundly aware of the temporary nature of all human striving. Perhaps more so than any other in history, our modern Western culture insists that we are creatures of the moment. We are taught that the universe is 14 billion years old, and that compared the span of geologic time we are nothing and less than nothing. We flourish for a few seconds before midnight on the evolutionary clock, and we are soon to be superseded by artificial intelligence, silicon-based entities that will render us carbon-based entities superfluous. Brothers and sisters, our culture doesn't accord much power to spiritual forces, and it accords little lasting power to those whose names are named. Andy Warhol's dictum that in the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes has long been trimmed down to 15 seconds. But we all believe that time will wear out everything human, that our age will pass, that humans are a blip on the historical timeline, destined for extinction either at the hands of a pitiless universe or of robots.

Paul has a different message for us this morning. Human things will endure because one human being, the man Jesus Christ, will live both in this age and in the age to come. Jesus is not subject to the ruins of time, as Edmund Spenser put it. The "wastes of time" described by Shakespeare have been overcome by the power of an indestructible human life. Jesus' life is not slipping away from Him moment by moment. He is not subject to waste, decay, or aging. He has conquered death and old age, because it is testified about Him that He lives. Christ's exaltation is permanent and enduring. And that means that His love and care for you is also permanent and enduring. It won't wear out; it won't vanish after a few years or a few centuries; it isn't a temporary phenomenon. The sun may run down and cease to shine in 5 billion years, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Brothers and sisters, humanity is not a nine-days-wonder that flourishes from 11:59:58 until midnight on the evolutionary clock. Humanity will last longer than nature, longer than time. You need not fear perishing. You need not succumb to the idea that we will all perish someday. You matter. You will last, because you are Christ's and He is yours forever.

C. God's Power Subjected Everything to Christ, v. 22a

Finally, God's power subjected everything to Christ. His enemies are His footstool, or are becoming so. Nothing exists which is not subject to Him. We don't yet see that, the author of Hebrews says, but we do see Jesus exalted and reigning.

How can we accept this doctrine that Christ reigns? Isn't it obvious that His Kingdom has not yet fully come? Isn't it clear that His will is not being done perfectly on Earth as it is in Heaven? What do we make of this truth?

The answer, brothers and sisters, is that Christ is working in history toward His chosen goals. He never intended to stop history, or to produce perfection in an ahistorical way. The pain and suffering and tragedy of history is not an accident. It is not something in the deck of cards that got dealt to Jesus that He cannot control. He rules, right now. He is Lord of history and of every power and name, even of time and change. We live on the backside of the tapestry. We cannot yet fully see the beautiful pattern that He is embroidering on the surface of history. We

only see the ugly ends of threads. But we know because we trust Him that He is in charge and that He is working all things together for our good and His glory.

What's the alternative? If you reject the Lordship of Christ in and over time and history, where does that leave you? You must accept either chaos — chance rules — or determinism — powerful forces rule. It is clear that the human race, and individual human beings, do not control history nearly as much as we might think they do. But our text implicitly says that Christ rules over the chaos of time and chance and explicitly says that He rules over the deterministic forces that sway the fates of nations and civilizations. So either you say “I know I don't have the whole picture in front of me, but based on what I do see I simply cannot accept that Jesus Christ has all things under His feet” — in short, you set yourself up as the authoritative interpreter of history and say that you won't trust God's interpretation of history — or else you say, “I know that I don't have the whole picture in front of me, and I know that what I can see hurts deeply, but I trust that Jesus is Lord. I stake my life and my historical sensibility on that truth.” Once again, brothers and sisters, the Christian life comes back to faith. We see here in the text that God is powerful. We see that that power worked on Christ, raised Him from dead, seated Him at God's right, and put all things under His feet. And then we look around and don't see everything under His feet. So how do we respond? With doubt? With scoffing? With a refusal to believe and a determination to set ourselves up as the ultimate arbiters of reality? Or with a believing heart that says, “God, I'm weak and you're powerful. God, I trust that your power is really at work saving your anointed. I trust that you, through Christ, will save me.” If you can believe in the resurrection of the dead, then you can believe that Christ rules time and history. He does. In Him, you can know riches. You can know hope. And you can know power. Trust that power. It rescued Christ from death, and it will rescue you. Amen.