

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1

“15 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. 22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Matthew 28: “18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.

“Our Great Commission”

As promised, this morning brings my final message on this first chapter of Ephesians where the Apostle Paul has presented the grand truths of the Christian faith and revealed his prayers for the Saints there at Ephesus. I have been drawing heavily on the insights from Pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones who said this in summarizing the Apostle’s prayers:

“We bring to a conclusion our study of the message of this noble and moving statement, and indeed this chapter, which is in many ways the greatest which the Apostle Paul ever wrote. He prays without ceasing that these Ephesians might know the ‘exceeding great power of God, the energy of the strength of God’s might’ which is working in them. He prays thus urgently because there is nothing which is so strengthening to faith, nothing which so enables us to continue in the Christian life & warfare, as a realization of these things.”

My final messages have been focusing on the Apostle’s comments about the resurrection power of God:

We have seen how it empowers us in our Christian walk, how it empowers the Body of Christ of which we are all members! And now this morning we will focus on Paul’s final statement about how God the Father of Glory, “put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

I also read the related & familiar words of the Great Commission which can sadly become too familiar and thus be read or heard without really letting its truth sink in & reflecting on questions we should always focus on, which that text clearly answers...

- How much power and authority does Jesus have?**
- Where does Jesus have that power and authority?**
- Where does He send us?**
- How do we disciple those nations?**

Many of you know my son-in-law Greg Uttinger who is an elder at Reformation Covenant Church here in Sacramento and has taught at Cornerstone Christian School for many years.

Greg is an author in his own right and I have been reviewing a proposed book called Halting Toward Zion which is intended to help young people, especially those wanting to be politically involved to better understand the role of God's power in their political endeavors.

His chapter on the Sociology of Dominion was very insightful...

- **So, I am going to shamelessly borrow from his wisdom to help us once again see what our proper role should be as the Holy Spirit uses the resurrection power of God to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus!**

Elder Uttinger began with a discussion of religion and power, which is something that must be considered when thinking about the Great Commission:

- **Just how is it carried out in history?**

Greg suggests that there are three religious approaches to community and freedom, which determine how we view the growth of the Kingdom of Jesus:

The first abandons politics and society at large in the name of religion. We have discussed this as part of the history of the Church with monastic orders where they are generally small and the degree of personal freedom is often rigidly limited on behalf of the community. Greg rightly labels this the religion of escape and/or retreat.

The second approach uses power and technology to create, maintain, and advance the life and health of a given community. This can apply to a small village or a vast empire. Here the degree of personal freedom that members enjoy erodes and declines over time. Thus those in charge must impose greater and greater restrictions and controls and then justify their increasing tyranny in the name of public safety, the common good and even liberty and brotherhood...

- **Things we see far too often in our day!**
- **Greg labels this the religion of power and domination.**

He goes on to discuss the third option which creates community and freedom through individual transformation and personal responsibility: It does so in the context of covenant authority and ethical absolutes, and yes it should remind us of the Great Commission! Here we have the supernatural religion of regeneration, faith, and dominion. This is Biblical Christianity.

Elder Uttinger points out that for Christianity, freedom and community belong to the life that is in Christ. As a man comes to Christ individually through faith, he is engrafted into a Spirit-created, covenant-bound society that grows through truth, grace, and service as we shall learn at length when we come to chapter four of Ephesians.

- **Learning to obey all that Jesus commanded leads the Saints to serve God and their fellowmen, who are made in the image of God.**

When they serve according to God's absolute truth and law, God blesses this obedience with greater and greater responsibility. This all takes time; it requires patience and self-discipline. Under this Biblical model dominion comes through service just as Jesus taught His disciples.

- **With true Christian religion political freedom is the outgrowth of spiritual freedom and personal responsibility and service.**

So, we have three models for how we as Christians are to approach the public square:

- **Those who retreat or withdraw, those who seek power and those who seek to serve.**

Keep those in mind as I continue to review the examples that Elder Uttinger gives in that important chapter: He next makes the case that in most cultural conflicts the religion of power usually opposes the religion of godly responsibility & service...

- And of course, those in the religion of retreat watch from the sidelines, where sadly many of our dispensational brothers and sisters find themselves today.

He points out that proponents of the power religion [who by the way can be conservative or liberal or just about any other label thrown around today], have a simple strategy.

- They must accumulate more and more power until they can successfully recreate the world in their own image.

They work diligently to control the civil government, the universities and schools, the media, the economy, and eventually the private lives of individuals. They speak of social concern and love for the poor and the planet, but in the end move toward the world described by the novels *Brave New World* or *1984*.

- The proponents of godly dominion usually oppose the moves of the power religionists to some degree.

They preach and write against their basic tenets, methods and goals. Some few will run for political office with the hopes of effecting change. A few more will start committees or organizations dedicated to social reform. But for the most part, these people devote their time, money, and energy to their families, their churches, and their vocations. [sound familiar?]

- With their tithes and gifts, they support schools, hospitals, orphanages, and rescue missions.

Their often meager savings together provide a tremendous amount of investment capital for business and industry. An important economic reality!

- At election time their votes often make a difference but when it come to political power, they are rarely a driven people.

History has shown us that as Mr. Uttinger points out the power religion fails again and again. The power State fails to deliver on it promises and eats up its own resources. Often it falls apart violently and sometimes goes out with a whimper. Those who have been faithful in their covenantal responsibilities survive into the new era, and many help to pick up the pieces of the broken order and occasionally a handful become major players in recreating society.

So again, as disciples we can be those who want to retreat, those who grasp for the levers of power or those who seek to serve responsibly as individuals, families and Churches.

Elder Uttinger then describes what he calls the “dominion trap: He says that unfortunately, when the cultural crisis begins, some men and women who, in theory, are committed to covenant living suddenly start looking for political solutions. They forget their priorities and their fundamental assumptions. This time, politics will win the day! This band of reformers tends to be a driven, energetic lot, full of short-term vision, & wholly dedicated to the mission at hand.

They are often frustrated that their co-religionists won't jump on their bandwagon. Sometimes these men and women accomplish something significant: They elect a candidate or pass a proposition. But rarely can they maintain their own political or social movement for more than a decade or two. After all, most of their fellow Saints are very busy with their families, churches and vocations!

And of course those who are retreating are still in retreat!

This portion of Greg's essay really hit home because I have watched such things over the years and it often leads to burn-out and/or despair: Think of the Moral Majority nationally or Proposition 8, the marriage initiative here in California.

Now, let's remember the three groups Greg has presented here in the context of the Great Commission...

- **It should be clear that being in retreat does not fit the command to disciple all the nations!**
- **It should also be clear that Jesus did not say that we should go out and grab all the power we can in order to properly run the world.**

So, what does the proper model of servant leaders then look like?

Elder Uttinger suggests that we can learn much from the examples given to us in the Book of Beginnings that we have studied in recent years. First, he reminds us of the contrast between Abraham and his nephew Lot. Of course Abraham is our model for faithful living, but Greg does some interesting speculating about the life of Lot... Something we should not fear to do when meditating on what God has revealed. Lot is a conflicted soul: Scripture tells us he was a righteous man who was troubled by the wickedness that surrounded him. We know that he chose the best of the land when given the choice by Abraham and ended up in the big city of Sodom. What drew him there? Was it their culture & education? Did he perhaps think he could help bring Sodom under Godly rule by obtaining a seat at the city gate where the angels found him? In the end Lot loses everything and even the daughters who escaped with him had sadly been influenced by that wicked culture and the children they bore him through incest became the fathers of the Moabites and Ammonites, wicked peoples who were thorns in Israel's side for a thousand years.

Now of course Abraham stands in stark contrast with Lot...

Faithful Abraham led his family & followers in public worship: sacrifice and prayers and the reading of God's Word. He conducted his business with wisdom, skill, and honor. He earned the respect of those around him and taught them the fear of God. He practiced hospitality to friend and stranger alike. He was kind and merciful to his employees.

- **He trusted God!**

Abraham was a godly man who was motivated by God's long-term promises. He moved in terms of faith, family responsibility and service!

- **Greg points out that Abraham's faith changed the world – though it took time.**

He goes on to discuss how Genesis gives us the story of three other men, descendants of Abraham who carried on the work of God by faithful, humble dominion. They were all responsible, hard working and patient. They never grasped for the scepter and crown, but their choices laid the foundations for the nation of Israel and thus for Western Civilization.

We should go back and ponder their lives often: Think of Isaac who prospered and dug wells and when they were stolen, simply moved on to further blessings.

Jacob is a more difficult character, but one thing that always comes through is his willingness to work long hours...

- **Even when caught up in some very bad business deals, & thus in the end Laban's wealth came to him.**

We studied the life of Joseph at length in our series on Genesis and should remember that his faithful service and sacrifice brought him to the position of ruler of all Egypt at the age of thirty. Joseph went on to save Egypt and his own family. Yet Joseph never asked to be vice regent to the Pharaoh; Joseph served his way to the top, and he refused to cut moral corners!

Elder Uttinger's conclusion is very timely for both helping us understand Paul prayers here in Ephesians and our situation here in America today: "We are in the midst of a cultural crisis. There is a place for activists and firebrands. And the world always needs godly statesmen and civic leaders. But the reconstruction of a social order takes place in families and churches, in schools and in the workplace, as ordinary believers work out their salvation with fear and trembling. It takes generations and requires patience, wisdom, and self-discipline. The power religionists come and go, despite their schemes; but in the end, the meek inherit the earth."

This of course echoes the words of Psalm 37 where we read:

"For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth, And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

Words later recounted by our Lord in His Sermon on the mount: Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth."

So, I trust that none of us here at Church of the King would fall into the retreat mode after what we learned from the Book of Acts and Genesis!

We do have to be careful as we strive to carry out the Great Commission that we do not grasp for power, but rather learn to serve and allow God to be in charge of history, which is His story!

➤ Let us be those who learn to be servants of the King as the Spirit advances His Kingdom!

We will sing our conclusion with one of our favorite hymns this morning: Following The Son of God as He goes forth to war: A kingly crown to gain, can get us pretty excited, but pay careful attention to some of the lines we should also heartily sing with sincerity.

"Who best can drink His cup of woe, Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below-- He follows in His train."

"Like Him, with pardon on His tongue, In midst of mortal pain,
He prayed for them that did the wrong-- Who follows in his train?"

4 A noble army, men and boys, The matron and the maid,
Around the Savior's throne rejoice, In robes of light arrayed.
They climbed the steep ascent of heav'n Through peril, toil, and pain.
O God, to us may grace be giv'n To follow in their train!"

Communion Meditation: Jeremiah 17

"12 A glorious high throne from the beginning
Is the place of our sanctuary.
13 O Jehovah, the hope of Israel,
All who forsake You shall be ashamed.

"Those who depart from Me
Shall be written in the earth,
Because they have forsaken Jehovah,
The fountain of living waters."

14 Heal me, O Jehovah, and I shall be healed;
Save me, and I shall be saved,
For You are my praise."