

“The Greatness of His Power”
Ephesians 1:18-20
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It was approximately 2300 years ago.

Alexander the Great had risen to power like a meteor.

Streaking across the known world he had conquered everything in sight.

But dying in his early 30s, his kingdom was divided between his four generals.

Then 300 years of fighting between the descendants of those generals finally opened the way for the rise of the Roman Empire under the leadership of Pompey.

Those who lived on the narrow strip of land called Palestine had seen war for several hundred years.

Hardship, slavery and death had been their experience for centuries.

Amazing that under such conditions for so long, there should still be a people who held out hope of a bright future.

There among those small villages and farms were a people called Jews who still believed a Messiah would come and change their future forever.

All four of the Bible's Gospels tell us about one of those people -Mary Magdalene.

Although life for her was anything but easy, she held onto that same thread of hope.

And then she met a man like no other man who had ever lived.

She watched him perform miracles, she heard his words, she began to believe that this man might indeed be the Messiah, the deliverer that she and her people had waited for so long.

Her faith grew and her hope grew.

She did not understand some of what he said but what she did understand she believed.

If you read closely the incidents of the three years of public ministry of Jesus, you can imagine the growing hope of those around him.

And that hope for a bright future reached its zenith when Jesus entered Jerusalem hailed as the king – the Messiah.

Imagine then the mental anguish, even the despair, when that Messiah was hanged on a cross and executed.

With his death their hope died.

As Mary watched the body lowered from the cross and carried limp to a tomb, there was within her a deep grief.

Not only was a relationship severed by death but also her own future died that day.

Maybe the cynics were right – everything dies!

Is it any different today?

Look around and what do you conclude about the future?

In spite of budding trees and blooming flowers, we are not fooled. The things that really count die.

Our loved ones either have or will die and we will die and we can do nothing about it.

And because of that fact, many live simply avoiding the thought of death.

They live life at a frenetic pace to avoid really considering their own demise and that of their loved ones.

They deny the inevitable as long as they can.

- As Nero fiddled while Rome burned.
- And the European aristocracy attended concerts while Hitler's Panzers swept across Europe.
- Americans search for new and ever more titillating distractions even while they are dying and heading into eternity with no hope.

Some of you might ask, "Can people really convince themselves there is nothing beyond this life?"

I would say that if it were not for the resurrection of Jesus I would conclude there's nothing beyond this life.

If I had no hope of a future, I would rule out the future.

My sanity would not allow me to believe in an afterlife if I had no way of knowing what my place in it would be.

Maybe there are some of you who can hold onto some vague idea of a blissful future with no assurance of your relationship to that future, but I could not.

**But one event changes everything.
That event is the resurrection of Jesus.**

There standing in the middle of history is an open, empty tomb.

The real hope of mankind is not in denying the reality of life beyond death but in the knowing that the one who was dead is now alive and holds the future in his hands.

Everything I hope for hangs on that man, that God-man Jesus, and his resurrection.

The Apostle Paul summed it up this way: 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 “What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins...that he was buried, and that **he was raised on the third day** ...”

That resurrection was pivotal in history and for you and me.

Please look in your Bible today at Ephesians 1:18-20.

“I pray also 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 the saints, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, ²⁰ which he exerted in Christ when he raised him 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 title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet...”

This text includes these words: “That **YOU** may know (experience) ...his incomparably great power for us who believe.”

Please notice first God’s “incomparably great power.”

The supreme manifestation of God's power is described this way in verses 19-20: "That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ **when he raised him from the dead...**"

What kind of "raising from the dead" was that?

Death is a bitter and relentless enemy.
It will come to all of us one day.

A man tells of being called to visit a woman in the hospital who was dying.

He said, I expected to find her at death's door but instead when I entered the room, she was sitting up and smiling.

She said, "When they brought me in, the doctors all said I was going to die. But I decided I wasn't going to die!"

Oh that is a spirited and optimistic defense but it wasn't true.

She wanted to believe it and she tried to believe it.

But she couldn't escape it and neither can we.

And when we die we certainly cannot reverse death!

But something happened to Jesus that had never happened before.

It's called resurrection.

First God stopped the natural process of decay, refusing, as it says in the Psalms, to allow his holy one to see corruption.

But he did not just reverse the process; restoring Jesus to the life he had before.

Instead he transcended this life and raised Jesus to an altogether new life – a physical but immortal life which no human had ever before experienced.

Others, such as Lazarus and Jarius' daughter, had been raised from the dead.

But as marvelous as those reversals were they were only brought back to this life with the certainty of facing death all over again.

Jesus' resurrection was of a wholly different kind – this was a resurrection to immortality.

The incomparable greatness of his power resulted in a quality of life, the likes of which the world had never seen before.

This was not just power to raise the dead but the power to raise the dead to a life that would never end.

A life free from death, sickness, and the limitations of mortality – this is a resurrection to life that is forever.

But I don't only want you to see the power of this resurrection I want you to see the extent of this resurrection.

Ephesians 1:19-22: "That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand...far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet..."

The resurrection of Jesus not only defeated death but also conquered evil itself.

When the text says that Jesus was "raised from the dead and seated at the Father's right hand" it is not so much a reference to geography as it is to absolute authority.

Jesus returned to the place of authority that was his before he came to earth as a human baby.

He is sovereign Lord – all things are subject to his will and control.

So absolute is his control that although not everyone is currently yielding to his authority, there is no doubt that one day every knee will bow.

That is why Paul says, "God placed all things under his (Jesus') feet..."

So comprehensive is the power of this resurrection of Jesus that when the Apostle John describes what will happen when Jesus comes again, he says it this way:

Revelation 19:11-16 “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called faithful and true. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns... Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with a rod of iron... On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.”

God’s incomparably great power is a power that raised Jesus from the dead conquering death itself and extending even to the eventual conquering of evil.

He is the risen, living, victorious, sovereign, coming King of kings and Lord of lords.

Secondly, this morning I want you to see that this incomparably great power is “for us.”

It is one thing to know that Jesus was raised from the dead and defeated death and evil, but what has that to do with me?

This is the whole point of the Ephesians 1 text.

Paul prays “that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened in order that **you may know**...his incomparably great power **for us**...”

First of all it is that same power that will resurrect us!

Romans 8:11 “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies...”

There is no greater truth in all the world, when you face your own death or the death of a loved one, than to know that God has promised that as certainly as Christ was raised from the dead so too that same power will raise our bodies.

Not only is that resurrection power able to raise our bodies when Christ comes again, **but that same resurrection power is**

what keeps us day by day and enables us to become more like Christ.

The Bible says, Jude 1:24 Praise belongs “to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy...”

Dare we think that once we are saved by grace, we can somehow draw from our own resources to live the Christian life?

Dare we forget that it takes resurrection power to sustain us each day?

It is that same incomparably great power that raised Christ from the dead that works in us to change us and enables us to obey God.

It is resurrection power that is sustaining us right now.

But that resurrection power is not only necessary to raise us from the dead, and to sustain us once we are Christ-followers, **it is that same incomparably great resurrection power that is required to draw us to Christ in the first place.**

Do you realize that your very believing in the Gospel, if you do, is by God’s power?

We speak so glibly of believing in Jesus as if it was an easy thing to do; as if it was something anyone could do anytime they feel like it.

There is a subtle suggestion that anyone who wants to become a Christian can easily accomplish it.

That is not true.

It takes the incomparably great power of God, the same power that raised Christ from the dead, to break through our sin-blinded minds and sin-hardened hearts to respond to his gracious offer of mercy and life.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14 “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually understood.”

The Bible teaches that belief in the gospel is a miracle that requires resurrection power to accomplish.

And when we think of our condition without God's intervening power, we understand why it requires such miraculous power.

As we have already seen in 1 Corinthians, we are naturally incapable of understanding the gospel.

I don't mean that we can't understand the words about Jesus' death, resurrection, and offer of life to us.

But every person's spiritual faculties are paralyzed; we are incapable of understanding the importance of what we hear and incapable of responding in faith.

Not only are we incapable of responding but also we are stubbornly resistant.

There is nothing so characteristic of the human soul as pride. Jesus himself said that unless we become as little children, it is impossible for us to accept the gospel.

The prophet Jeremiah said the heart is deceitful.

This means that we are always lying to ourselves, telling ourselves we don't need God.

- This explains why we try to rationalize away our sins,
- why we try to persuade ourselves that we are better than we really are,
- and why we deceive ourselves into believing that a certain amount of good will certainly outweigh any bad we have ever done.

And because of that spiritual ignorance and stubborn resistance, if we don't explain God away, we retain him only as an anemic caricature of a god who overlooks sin and who only exists to play nursemaid to our every whim.

In light of this is it still possible to say that anyone can easily believe the Gospel if **they** decide to do so? NO

To bring any person to saving faith in Jesus as saving-Lord demands the incomparably great resurrection power of God.

Here is how the Bible says it, Ephesians 2:1-5 “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... Like the rest we were objects of (God’s) wrath. But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...”

So you see, the Bible says it takes the resurrection power of God to bring us to himself AND to keep us following him in this life AND to resurrect us to life immortal when Jesus comes again.

Christian, the whole of your life and life-to-come are energized, empowered by the resurrection power of God.

- We would not have believed but for the power of God that broke through our darkened, resistant hearts.
- We would even now fall and be held under the power of sin were it not for God’s resurrection power keeping us.
- We would have no future, no real hope, were it not for the incomparably great power that raised Christ from the dead guaranteeing our resurrection as well.

And what about you, you who do not yet call yourself a Christ-follower?

What about you who are still resisting his grace; you who are not sure you can believe all of this?

Has God’s Spirit been working in your spirit to open your eyes that your life is pointless, in spite of your unfounded optimism or fatalism, and that your future is hopeless without Christ?

- Is he showing you that you rightfully come under his judgment because of your darkened and resistant heart?
- Is God’s Spirit showing you that Christ’s death and resurrection are for you?
- That your sins can be forgiven and you can be given life?

For some of you here this morning, your hearts are as cold as fish.

You have no more sense of the Spirit stirring in you than you have desire to hear this sermon again.

But for some, God is calling you.

- He is at work in your heart.
- He is drawing you to himself.
That incomparably great power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in your heart now.
- You know that Jesus died for you.
- That Jesus paid the penalty for your sin against God.
- That Jesus is now convincing you of your need for the forgiveness that only he can provide.
- And that He is calling you to concede his right to be Lord of your life.
I beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Mary Magdalene when to the tomb on that first Easter morning with all hope having died when Jesus died.

She found the tomb empty and through grief stricken eyes, she saw who she assumed to be the gardener.

She asked him where he had taken the body of Jesus.

In probably one of the most poignant scenes in the Bible, Jesus, the resurrected, living Lord, answered her by calling her name: "Mary."

What her teary eyes could not discern, her ears could hear – that was the voice of Jesus.

Is he calling your name today?

Will you respond?

Will you respond to his incomparably great resurrection power that is right now breaking into your life?