



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1:19-23

Ephesians

"Realizing the Power and Fullness"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Nice to be back with you, studying the book of Ephesians 1:19-23. I'm going to begin reading at verse 18 because that really begins the sentence and the aspect of this prayer, so I'll begin with 18 and then we'll continue to the end of the chapter.

Paul writes: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory, of His inheritance in the saints, and what is a surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might, which He brought about in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, now only in this age but also in the age to come. He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him to fills all in all."

Now in our lesson we will spend some time on that word, "the fullness", what it means. And it can mean one of two things: it can be taken either in an active sense or a passive sense. If it is active then he's saying the church fills Christ, which is an unusual thought. If it's passive, then it is Christ -- then the fullness -- if it is passive then it is the church that's filled by Christ.

Now I mention that now just to sort of alert you to it because it is one of the great interpretive problems of the Book of Ephesians and we'll spend a little bit of time on it this morning.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's bow now in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our gracious God and Heavenly Father we are thankful to You for the great blessings that we have. We are reminded of those by the apostle who begins this great chapter of this great book by reminding us that we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And he begins to outline some of those for us. And we're reminded of our blessings this morning in the passage that we will consider as Paul prays for the Ephesians, prays for the whole Church of Jesus Christ, that we might know our power; we might know what we are in Him, and the place we occupy, the place of such great privilege with Your life within us.

Father, we are oftentimes living lives without any real thought of what we have and what we are. So we pray, Lord, that this morning You would awaken our minds to these things, that you would enlighten the eyes of our heart to great truth, the great truth that we have, the great blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ. We thank you that you've given us too much, more than we could ever comprehend in this life.

What we have is merely the earnest, the down payment of what's to come. And yet that down payment is far more than we could ever enjoy, and yet we can enjoy so much more than we do. We can live in the power of the Holy Spirit, more than we are doing. And I pray, Father, for all of us that you might enlighten us to these things. And in giving us a greater knowledge of Your Son and of all the spiritual blessings connected to Him you might give us a genuine stimulation and motivation to live in it and live lives of faithful, bold service for You.

We commit this hour to you, Lord, to that end that You might teach us and instruct us. You are our teacher; You are the one that opens our eyes to spiritual things and enables us to be obedient to the truth that you have given to us. And so we look to you for these things, look to you for blessing. Bless us spiritually and bless us physically as well, Father. We are men and women with needs, material needs. And we look to you to supply.

We pray for the sick; we pray that You bless with healing and comfort for those who are recovering from surgeries, or those who are in the hospital at this present time with maladies that are inflicting them; we pray that You bless with healing; we pray that you bless the doctors, the nurses that attend to them, give them skill. We pray for those who are in financial distress; bless them, encourage them, strengthen their faith in the midst of times of trial, and may they see your hand in a special way.

We pray for all of us, Lord. We may not, in the present moment, be experiencing a difficulty but at some point in our life we will. We pray that you prepare us for that, equip our minds and our souls that we might endure the physical hardships of this life, and so do in a way that pleases you.

We know, Father, that all things are passing away in this world and the momentary light afflictions of this life are just that: they're momentary and they're really light compared to the glory that is prepared for us and what we will gain in return for enduring the difficulties of this life. Father we thank you for the fact that this life and its difficulties are short-lived and that we have all eternity before us. And we pray that you'd help us to live for that.

And we pray for our meeting this evening as we come together again to remember our Lord's death and His resurrection and His coming again. We pray that you bless us, prepare our hearts for that and may it be a meeting that is pleasing to you and edifying to each of us. And we pray that for our time together now. We pray that you bless us. We pray that you would open our eyes to the truth and prepare our hearts for this time of study with our final hymn; may it be good preparation of our souls.

May we gain a real appreciation and a thanksgiving for the power that's in us. We pray these things in Christ's name, amen.

David Martin Lloyd Jones was one of the finest preachers of our generation, a man who had a profound ministry in the City of London for many years, and who did quite did, series of sermons on the Book of Ephesians.

He said, in the opening statement of his sermon on our text that the most urgent practical question for every Christian is this? Are we aware of the fact that the Almighty Power of God is working in us? Are we aware of the fact that the Almighty power of God is working in us. He said that's the most urgent practical question that every Christian can ask himself or herself, and I think we can add to that a second question which is just as urgent. And that is, "Are we aware of the fact that we are the body of Christ?" Are we aware of what we are as Christians, of what it means to be in Christ?

Well, it's Paul's concern that we be aware of what we have and what we are that moves him to pray in this last half of the first chapter of Ephesians, pray that we realize the riches that we have in Christ Jesus. Christians are not people like anyone else in the world who just happen to be saved, happen to be forgiven, happen to be on their way to heaven. But in the meantime we are living our lives as best we can. We're just sort of muddling through.

Now I suspect that there are many people, many Christians who have that idea, that we've been sort of left to ourselves to make it in the meantime. And yet that is a false idea. God has not left us to ourselves; he's not blessed us with forgiveness in the past and blessed us with a great future and expects us to sort of make it on our own. Not at all. God has not left us to ourselves. And a failure to realize that is, I think, a source of many problems today. It's a reason for worry, it's a reason for anxiety and a lukewarm spiritual life. And often it's the reason for people being drawn into a legalistic pattern of life. It's all left to them and their own strength and ability.

We are not like anyone else. We are new creatures in Jesus Christ and we have the very life of God within us. And it's necessary that we be aware of that and so Paul prays that we would be aware of it, that we would have the knowledge of God and of our spiritual blessings. And it's through the knowledge of God that we come to know those blessings.

And in his prayer Paul puts a special emphasis upon having our eyes, or the eyes of our heart enlightened so that we would know the power of God. This seems to be his special interest, at least in the last part of this chapter, the power of God

toward us who believe. Now Paul doesn't pray that we have power or that we have some new empowering experience of some second blessing.

Many people seek that today; they are seeking at some extra blessing as though we come into the Christian life defective, as though we lack a little something when we become Christians. And so in many Christian circles there is a preoccupation with the charismata, with tongues and healings and prophetic revelations. There is an emphasis upon mystical experiences.

Well Paul doesn't point us in that direction. He has the opportunity to do that but that's not the direction he gives us. He doesn't pray for some extra experience or infusion of power. He prays that we gain knowledge, that we gain enlightenment of what we already have, what we have had from the moment of our new birth. In fact what is the very reason for our new birth, what we come into this Christian life with and that is power.

He wants us to know that but he doesn't want us to just know that we have power; he wants us to know the surpassing greatness of that power so that we will appropriate the resources that we have; we will live in them; we will enjoy those riches.

We have great power within us. And to make clear just how great it is Paul sort of piles up words, or piles up synonyms for power. In verse 19 he speaks of the working and the strength and the might that is in us. This is what we have. And then he illustrates it in verse 20.

Now there's a number of examples that Paul could have cited to illustrate the surpassing greatness of the power toward us who believe and that it's in us who believe. For example, he could have cited the power of God in creation, the power that brought all things into being out of nothing, which He brought into being by merely speaking the Word, by merely thinking it all into being. This whole creation came into existence by divine fiat. Now we can't do that. We can't think things into being; we can't speak things into being. Man can't create anything. We can at best only reshape what is already in existence. But we can't create; only God can do that, and He simply did that by speaking, and in speaking He brought the stars and the galaxies and the planets all into existence.

All that is, all that exists He willed into existence. And that's the same power that's working within us. Paul could have also given the example of God's

providential power, the power that keeps all things in existence, the power that holds all things together and carries all things along. It's bearing history along to its appointed end. He could have given some magnificent examples of that.

One of the great examples of the power of God and the faithfulness of God that you find throughout the Old Testament is the power of God in the Exodus, when He brought his people Israel out of Egypt, out of slavery, out of bondage there. And to do that he divided the Red Sea, in a great demonstration of power brought all of His people, hundreds of thousands of them, through on dry land and then buried the mighty Egyptian army under those same waters.

Could have cited all of that; that's a great measure of the surpassing greatness of His power. But Paul doesn't cite that or any of these examples that I've given you. The illustration he gives is something greater yet: it's the power of God and the resurrection, power which he brought about, Paul says, in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, power over death itself, the ultimate display of power. No power on Earth could do that. There is no power that man has or angels have that can bring life out of death. When death comes it is over. And yet the power of God overcomes death. It defeats that final enemy of ours and nothing but the power of God could do that. Nothing but the power of God could raise Christ from the dead and not only raise him from the dead but as Paul will explain, exalt him to the highest place in the universe, over all things, at His own right hand.

That's the power that is at work in us. It is saving power. The power that raised Christ physically, has raised us spiritually, brought us to faith in Christ through the gospel -- Paul will develop that in more detail at the beginning of chapter 2, which is something of a development of this power of the resurrection what we see in Christ. But that's the power of God that's in us. That's the power of God and the gospel that saves us. That's what Paul says in Romans chapter one and verse 16 where he says of the gospel that it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes there is life-changing power in the gospel of Christ.

No one is beyond the saving power of God. There is no sinner too great for the saving work of the cross of Jesus Christ. God's power is so great that it can save the chief of sinners. It did. Saved the apostle Paul. Saved the thief on the cross and countless others down through history. That's the work of God. That's the power of God.

And one of the reasons that we sometimes live anxious lives or consider our Christian experience to be dull, to be devoid of any real experience with God is because we forget that very fact, or we don't even understand the greatness of our salvation, what we once were and what we have become and what it took to make us that. It says we realize that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Or as Paul goes on to say of these Ephesians, these Galatians, these gentiles who had come to faith out of paganism, that they had been without God or without hope in the world. It says we realized what we were and what we now have that we gained, the wonder of our salvation, and the joy of it, and the confidence to live in the power that we have because it's the same power with us that raised Christ from the dead and the same power that is with us from beginning to end. And because it's with us from beginning to end it's not only saving power but it's sanctifying power, it's life-changing power.

And that's what God is presently doing within us. Through His power He is changing our lives and He is bringing us into conformity with His son and in so doing He is equipping us to effectively deal with the challenges that we face in this life. And there are great challenges, great forces that are against us.

The world, for example: it's one of our great enemies. The cosmos. That word means "adornment". That's the way the Greeks thought of the universe. And we can see why: the universe is a glorious thing. The material world is beautiful, and it declares the glory of God. And so they used that word. They described the universe as adornment. We get our word "cosmetics" from the word "kosmos". And it's appropriate because you look at the world itself, the system of the world, the system of men which we call the world, and there is something attractive about it -- very attractive. It's glamorous, it glitters, and it's very influential upon our own lives. There is a grate pull on us from the world. It appeals to our pride. We see the beauty of it and we want it. We look at the rewards that it offers and we want to be a part of it and a part of its society, and gain the respect of its people. So one of the great things that we fear is that the world will look upon us as being foolish or being odd. And so the great temptation that we face is to try to fit in with the world and be like the world and enjoy the world.

And then there's the flesh -- another great opponent. There's the world from without and there's the flesh within. That's another great power that we have within us but it's the power towards evil, the temptation to live for pleasure and to live for

self. And the power of our appetites and habits that hinder us and that we cannot control or curb. It's another great opponent that we face. And then of course there's the devil, whose power and skill Peter compares to that of a roaring lion who seeks someone to devour. And he could devour every one of us, easily, except for the power of God that's with us. He's the arch deceiver whose power of suggestion can seduce any one of us. And we are constantly under that attack.

Doesn't seem like we are. That's why Paul, in chapter six, will go into some detail about that attack, that warfare that we're in. We are constantly in a spiritual warfare. And not battling material enemies, at least not at this point in our experience. But we are constantly battling against rulers and powers and spiritual forces in the heavenly places. And we're no match for, for the power of the devil, or any of these other forces that are against us. But God is. And His power is within us, preserving us, it's protecting us and enabling us to overcome the world, the flesh and the devil.

Paul explains how God's power works in us in Philippians 2:13, really verses 12 and 13, but in verse 13 he says that God is at work in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. He's working within us. And it's a working of God that is constant. It's the same word that he uses over here in verse 19 when he speaks of this power which is in accordance with the working of the strength of His might. It's the word "**enerigil**" -- we get our word "energy" -- He's energizing us is what Paul is saying, and constantly doing that: constantly energizing us in a way that will change us. He does that through his word, through the Scriptures as we read them. And as we read them He does that through the Holy Spirit, who operates upon our minds and operates upon our wills and operates within us to give us new desires and new longings.

He gives us the desire to read the Bible, for example. He gives us the desire to pray. That comes from Him. It's the result of the spirit of God moving upon our hearts, stirring our will, stimulating us to spiritual activity and giving us the power to do that, to actually act in a spiritual way, and in a way that is pleasing to Him. And he's constantly at work within us, doing that.

And for our part we make the connection with that power of God through faith. And so we're not to ignore the promptings of the spirit, the stimulation of the spirit of God that is within us. We're going to respond to it. We'll respond to it in faith and obedience. But faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,

Paul tells us in Romans 10. And so we need the knowledge of God, we need the knowledge of Christ, we need the knowledge of our blessings and our power. And so to that end Paul prays that God would enlighten the eyes of our heart to the surpassing greatness of His power towards us as He enlightens our minds we can have the faith to accept it and to appropriate it, open our minds and our eyes to that so that we would live in confidence in the power of God toward us.

Now having said all that, having said something about the power of God we'll say more in a moment. I think we need to clarify something about that power. We shouldn't misunderstand what this power is. It is not something for our convenience, or for our enjoyment and pleasure. It's not something that we can manipulate or regulate. We cannot put a control on the power of God. I think you see a lot of that today in the attempt to do that, or the belief that we can do that, that we can somehow manipulate God.

That's what Simon Magus wanted to do. You remember Simon Magus from the Book of Acts, Acts 8. He was a magician who lived in Samaria. And when a revival took place up there through Philip the Evangelist he was amazed at what he saw, at the power that he saw demonstrated and the lives that were changed. And so he became a believer, seemed to be a believer for a time.

Turned out all he wanted was some of that power. As a magician he saw that he could tap into something very great, something greater than he'd ever had. And so he wanted that for his own use. So he went to Peter who by that time had joined Philip in that region and was ministering there.

And he goes to Peter and Philip and the others and wants to purchase the power. Peter was appalled by it, told him to perish with his money. Really the meaning of that is "Go to hell with your money". Peter wasn't just responding in anger; he was speaking the truth. The man who thinks he can buy grace or buy the power of God with money is headed for hell. Told him to repent.

I think we see that today to some extent, this desire to deign the power of God and manipulate it. We can't do that. We don't use the power of God. God uses His power in us to make us the kind of people that he has chosen us to be, which is, as Paul's explained earlier in verse 4: "Holy and blameless". That's the purpose of the power of God; it is in us to change us and to make us more like Christ. We merely

appropriate it by faith, we experience it through obedience and are enabled by it to do what in and of ourselves we could never do.

And so to bring us to that point where we will do that, we will trust in God and we will act in obedience oftentimes we go through very difficult periods in our life. The pleasure of life is removed to some extent, the comfort of life is removed and we're placed in hard places, difficult positions so that we are forced to look to the Lord and trust in Him.

Have a good example of that in the apostle Paul. Paul went through great difficulties in his life and he speaks of one specific instance in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. He had prayed three times that God would relieve him of a crippling thorn in the flesh. We don't know what that thorn was but obviously it was a great affliction just from the metaphor you can tell that: it's a thorn in the flesh. And he prays that God would remove it but God did not. He refused to answer that prayer.

And finally the Lord answered Paul in verse 9: "My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness". So Paul says, "Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me/Therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distress, with persecution, with difficulties for Christ's sake/For when I am weak then I am strong/Strong with the power of God that enables us to live supernatural lives by faith." That's really what we live. We are in a materialistic world, we're in a naturalistic world -- at least that's the world view of our age, for the most part. And yet the reality is we as Christians live supernatural lives. We are not like the people of this world; we have the power of God within us. And Paul had that and he would gladly be weak and afflicted for that power to be seen in his life and experienced.

Well obviously from Paul's life it is not a life of ease and comfort, this life of faith and life of power. We don't become men and women of faith and then through that faith experience easy sailing through this world. Paul's life, as I say, proves that not to be the case but so do the lives of all of the great men down through history.

Luther was a man who was greatly afflicted all through his life. Calvin -- Calvin would make a great chapter in a medical textbook on life of affliction. He had numerous diseases and afflictions that he had to struggle with. And yet he worked diligently. Amazing what he accomplished. Amazing what he would have accomplished as a healthy man, but to consider all of the physical affliction that he

had throughout his life it's a demonstration of the power of God, through the life of faith and the life of obedience to grow in the grace, the knowledge of the Lord does not mean to have an easy life; oftentimes that is a life of greater affliction. The struggles against the world, the flesh and the devil are not easy, they're difficult and they're constant.

J.I. Packer writes: "The battle for Christ's likeness is as grueling as it is unending." That's a realistic look at the Christian life, and we shouldn't expect anything different. But we shouldn't be discouraged by that because we have the power within us to struggle against those opponents and to prevail because we have the power that raised Christ from the dead and more. Paul says, "Having raised Him He seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places." Christ was not only raised but he ascended up to heaven itself. That's the completion of the resurrection.

It's really one act, for Christ to be raised and then ascend was really one act of God: He raised Him from the dead and brought Him up and seated Him in the heavenly places. He's not raised from the dead to resume His life on Earth; He was raised in order to be exalted to the right hand of the Father, to the place of honor, to the place of authority, to the place of power. And there He is presently seated -- verse 21: "Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion," Paul says. He's above everything, everywhere. Every earthly power, every heavenly power, every king and congressman, every angel and devil. And, Paul says, "He is above every name that is named." Caesar, Satan, every human or spiritual force in the universe, good or bad, He is above it all and He exercises authority over it and He exercises power over it.

You shouldn't think that the devil is like a roaring lion without a leash. Christ is in complete control of him. He's His creation. Every force, every being in the universe is under His absolute and complete control. As He sits upon His throne in heaven He rules. And that same power that raised Christ, exalted Christ, is at work in Christ, that power is at work in us. And that should give us the greatest confidence to live by faith in the Lord. The kind of confidence that we see in Martin Luther when he took his bold stand for the truth at the Diet of Worms. He stood before a great company of men. There he was, this young monk, standing alone with his books, on trial before Charles V, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and his ministers, his political magistrates. And then all of the powers of the Church, the representatives of

the Pope; they were all there against Luther. Luther stood alone. And he was demanded to recant things that he had written. But he refused to recant, in fact said, "Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen." Famous words that Luther declared on that day: "Here I stand."

Afterward he wrote to a friend a statement that expresses his mind about all of this. He wrote to him, "The devil knows that I would have gone into Worms, thought there were as many devils as tiles on the roof." If you've been to Europe you know the significance of that statement because the roofs of Europe, their houses and buildings, all have tile on them, the red tiles, a multitude of tiles. And so if the devil had marshalled all of his devils there against him and they were as the number of the tiles on the roofs he still would have gone in.

And he goes on to say, "And I would ride into Leipzig now, though it rained Duke Georges for nine days." Duke George was a German prince who was Luther's implacable opponent. He was willing to stand against all of that, not because he had strength within himself; he didn't. In fact, he was trembling at that Diet of Worms. He came out exhausted from it. But he prevailed because of the power of God.

Now there are times when we are called upon to make a similar stand. It may not be as historically significant as that one but there are times when we will stand before authorities. Maybe with some of you businessmen at work when you have to make a stand for your faith, stand before powers of the world in which we live. And maybe it's not that. Maybe it's not that dramatic, but it may be that we simply stand before our peers. That can be pretty intimidating, just to stand for the truth, with those we play golf with, or those we are with at the office.

And yet in all of those situations the Lord promises to be with us and to care for us. He told His disciples that He'd do that. In Mark 13, when He forewarns them of what they're going to go through. There's going to be difficult times coming and they will be arrested, He says. And He says, "When you're rested don't become anxious about what you're going to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour for it is not you who speak but it is the Holy Spirit."

That doesn't mean, "Don't worry about reading your Bibles. Don't try to work out the Scriptures and doctrine in your head and think about that. You can go into life with a vacuum in your mind and the Spirit of God will just pop good thoughts into your head at the right time." That's not what He means. It's as we think on these

things and equip ourselves with this truth and speak it, that God gives grace to us and power to our words and order to our thoughts.

Perhaps you've experienced that. You found yourself unexpectedly called upon to give statement of your faith or to explain something to someone and you do and it comes out rather well. You're a little bit surprised by what happened. Now that's the power of God. And that's the experience that you will have as you live by faith and you trust Him. The Spirit of God gives grace to your utterance.

So when we face those circumstances of life that can be very intimidating and we don't feel sufficient for the hour, well realize you're not. None of us are. We're not sufficient for anything in this world. We're not sufficient for the ministry into which we have been called. But the Lord is and He works through His spirit, through the Holy Spirit, and he promised to enable us, and He is in a position to do that. He is far above all rule and authority. There is no authority, or no power in this world that we will stand before that Christ is not over and Christ is not in control of. It's very significant where He is seated -- significant for us: far above all rule and authority and every name that is named, not only in this age, Paul says, but also in the one to come. In other words, there is no end to His authority and no end to His power.

Now all of that has great meaning for the Church, for each of us. Not only for the present but also for the future. And Paul develops that in the last two verses of our passage: "When Christ was exalted over all things God gave him complete dominion over all creation. He put all things in subjection under His feet." That's a statement in verse 22. Now those are words that are taken from Psalm 8, which is a Psalm about the dominion that was given to man over the creation. It was given to Adam and Adam lost it when he fell so that we now have dominion -- and in fact I think when David writes that psalm he's writing from his perspective and he's amazed that God would think so highly of man to give him such a high position in this creation. But the position that we occupy, the dominion that we have is nothing like it was when Adam had it. What we have is only a remnant of that. It's very limited and it's distorted.

But what was lost by Adam has been regained by Christ. "All things," Paul says, "are now under His feet." And the author of Hebrews makes a great deal of that too. And because He has dominion over all creation that dominion will be realized by everyone who is associated with Him, every believer. Now that's our future; that is

the hope that we have; that is the hope of our calling. And it is a certain hope it will come to pass because every believer is united to Him; every believer is in Jesus Christ. And so His destiny is our destiny. We're connected to Him. Where He goes we go. What he experiences we experience.

The power that raised Him and exalted Him will raise us and exalt us as well, raise us physically in the last day and we will reign with Him, we will fulfill Psalm 8 with Christ in His kingdom and rule the Earth with Him. We won't rule the Earth with Christ as His equals because we are not His equals, and Paul makes that very clear: He is Lord. God put Him as head over the creation and also, Paul says, "Gave him as head over all things to the church," meaning He gave Him to the Church as her head. And as head He is the beginning of the Church, He is the source of the life of the church, He is the rule and the guide and the defender of the Church.

And in saying all of this, all that Paul has said about our Lord, that He's been raised up, He's been seated, exalted over the universe, made head of the church, what He is saying to us is that we have a great savior. Paul wants us to understand that. He makes a great deal out of this. It's almost as though he's carried away by the thoughts of our Lord and what He is, the greatness of Him. He wants us to know that. And really there can be no greater thought that we can have in the greatness of our Lord. We need to know that. The Church has always needed to know that, how great our savior is. Nothing can be more edifying, more purifying than a clear and deep knowledge of Christ. He is a living savior; He is a sovereign savior, and He is our head.

And the Church, Paul says, is this body. That's what we are. What we have is the power of Christ; what we are is the body of Christ and that is one of Paul's favorite descriptions of the Church, and a description that is rich in meaning. It reminds us that we are a unity. Christians are joined together in a vital union with one another. We're not a mere collection of people who have common interests and common goals and who meet together like a book club, or like a political organization. We're more than that; we're a body.

And so we are linked together in such a way that we are one with one another. There's diversity within us, of course. But there's unity. There's diversity in the hand. You can look at your hand and you see it's got a thumb and it's got fingers and it's got a palm. And yet where do the fingers end and the palm begin? It's all one. It has its

parts. But the parts can't be separated from one another. We can't just toss the finger away. It's part of us. And so we are all part of this one body; we are joined together, we are united together in a vital union with one another, linked together in this way so that we depend upon one another.

The vitality of the Christian life and our worship and our service is in part dependent upon our fellowship with one another. John Wesley said, "The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." It doesn't. Doesn't speak that way. We have responsibilities that are individual responsibilities but part of those responsibilities are -- those responsibilities really are exercised in terms of one another as well. Bible knows nothing of solitary religion. And so we are to make every effort to be together. And Sunday is certainly the one day that we can do that. It's the one day that the apostles set aside for us to meet together and not forsake the gathering together of the saints. And so that's what we should make every effort to do: make it a priority in our life to be here together, to instruct one another, to encourage one another. We need it. We are a body. And we have been joined together and most importantly -- and I think this is Paul's primary point here -- joined to Christ, in vital union with Him. And that union is one that changes us and enables us to live the life that we've been called to live.

Our Lord said it also, in the upper room discourse in John 15 when He spoke of Himself as the vine and spoke of His disciples as the branches and said that apart from Him they can do nothing. We can do nothing apart from Jesus Christ. We draw our life from Him and He is always faithful to give us that life. And so we are to respond to Him moment by moment by faith.

Paul did. Because Paul did, because Paul knew the power of God he could tell the Philippians, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." He is our exalted head and we are His body. And not only that Paul says, "We are also His fullness. His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Christ fills the universe. He is the god-man, having forever joined himself to a human nature and human body. In His humanity He is located in heaven, seated, as Paul has told us, in the heavenlies.

But in His deity He is everywhere. In His humanity He is at the right hand of the father. That body is located someplace in the heavenlies. But in His divine nature He is everywhere, He fills the universe. In Colossians 1:17 Paul says that, "In Him all things hold together. He not only sustains the Church; He sustains the whole

universe. Everything holds together by Jesus Christ. He fills it." And yet Paul says, "The Church fills Christ," or at least that seems to be what he says.

Armitage Robinson, who has written perhaps the best commentary on the Book of Ephesians, a classic commentary called this perhaps the most remarkable expression in the whole epistle. It's also one of the most difficult. What does Paul mean, "The Church is the fullness of Christ"? It can be understood in two ways. It can be understood actively, this word "fullness", or it can be understood passively. Actively it means that which fills; passively it means that which is filled.

So if we take it passively here then Paul is saying the Church is filled by Christ, who fills everything. Now that makes good sense, and it's certainly true. He fills the Church with grace; He fills the Church with truth and life. We are His temple. Holy Spirit dwells in us. He fills us.

The difficulty with that interpretation here -- it's a true explanation, it's a true statement. But the difficulty with taking that as Paul's meaning here for this word fullness is the word fullness is never used passively; it's always used actively. And let me give you a few examples of that that you can see what I mean.

In Matthew 9:16 the word is used as a patch. If you look at it in at least the New American Standard Bible the word patch is really the word fullness. It is literally there, the fullness, that which is put in a garment or in the whole of the garment to fill it. That's what a patch does, it fills a hole. So fullness in that passage is used as a patch that's put on a garment to fill it up. So it's used actively. The patch fills something.

And then we have it in Mark 6:43, after the Lord has performed His great miracle of feeding thousands, feeding a multitude with just a few loaves and fishes. He breaks it and multiplies this food. Afterwards there are pieces left over, pieces of bread, broken pieces that remained after he fed the multitude that are said to have filled 12 baskets. Now the pieces weren't filled; the pieces filled. They were active; they filled that basket. You see force of His word: filled is that which fills something. So if we take the normal use of that word is has an active meaning. And here it means the Church fills Christ. In some sense we complete Christ.

Now that sounds like a paradox, to fill one who fills all, but there's no contradiction here, and there's no suggestion in that that Christ is in any way lacking or defective. It's merely a way of saying that we, as the people of Jesus Christ,

complete Christ just like a body completes a head. A head doesn't function apart from a body. And so in a sense we complete Him, just like a bride completes a bridegroom, or a flock of sheep complete a shepherd. A shepherd without sheep is no shepherd, and a bridegroom without a bride is no bridegroom. And a head is incomplete without a body. And so Christ, as the head, is incomplete without the church, his body. He functions through the Church. It's through the Church that Christ, who is in heaven, lives and works on the Earth.

Paul learned the significance of this in a startling way when he was converted on the Damascus Road. You'll remember what our Lord said to him. Paul's walking along, he's got letters from the authorities in Jerusalem to persecute the Christians in Damascus and on his way the Lord stopped him in a blinding light and He said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" How was Paul, or Saul, persecuting Christ? He was persecuting the Church. Christ is in heaven. He wasn't on the Earth. But the Church is His body, and to touch the Church is to touch Christ.

Now that tells us something and that tells us that as His body we are very dear to Him. And so if we are touched by some affliction, an affliction from men or whatever it may be, some difficulty in a marriage or relationship of some kind or some physical affliction or some grief that we experience, when we are touched by that He's touched by that. And He's sensitive to that.

But it also brings out the grace of God in using us. He doesn't need us. It's not that we're great preachers or we're great evangelists or we're great men and women of faith and He needs that. We can't approve upon what He couldn't have done by Himself. But in His grace He has made Himself head of a body, and He uses us to do His work in this world, work that He could do Himself but by His grace He has included us in it as His agents of grace, as His representatives in this world. Now that should be great motivation for us to live lives that are pleasing to Him, lives that are befitting His body.

And as Paul has already assured us, He is supplying us with the strength and the power that will enable us to do that very thing. We cannot live lives that are pleasing to Him, lives that are befitting the body of Christ of ourselves. But we can through the power of God, and He is giving us that. He's living His life through us.

And yet so often I think if we're honest we don't really feel like He is. We don't sense the power, or see the real evidence of it in our lives as often as we might

like. And so we're tempted to seek some new experience that will give us a boost in our spiritual life. That's what we're tempted to do. But that's not what Paul advises. His prayer is for knowledge. His prayer is so we know more. And we must know who we are, the body of Christ, the fullness of Him who fills all in all and know what we have as His body: we have His life, as have His power. And being aware of it we are to start living in it. In much the same way that we live our lives in our physical bodies.

What do we do when we become weak? Or if we realize that we're weak and we want to become strong? Well a way to do that is to become active. You don't become strong by sitting around thinking, "It would be nice to be strong. I hope something will make me strong." We become strong by exercise. And so we begin to walk. And we say, "I'm going to get to where I can walk three miles."

And so you start out and all you can walk is a quarter of a mile. But you continue to walk. And pretty soon that quarter of a mile becomes half a mile and so on and so on. And soon, because of the activity that you're engaged in you can walk a three-mile course, or you can begin to lift more and more as you seek to lift more and more.

And that's how we grow in the Christian life. We grow in the Christian life through obedience, by becoming spiritually active. We learn the truth of God and we trust it. We learn the truth of God and we respond in faith and obedience, and as we do that we are strengthened in our faith and enabled in our beings to where we can do more and more. We increase in that ability. The motivation to do that, the motivation to learn more, the motivation to act more consistently is the knowledge of Him, the knowledge of His grace.

Lloyd Jones had a good comment on this when he wrote: "The way to enjoy a rich experience in the Christian life, as I understand the New Testament, is to grasp the New Testament teaching, the New Testament truth. In other words, the way to a rich, subjective experience is, in the first instance, a clear, objective understanding of truth."

People who neglect doctrine rarely have great experiences. The high road to experience is truth, and to concentrate on experience alone is generally to live a Christian life which is bound in shallows and in miseries. When we focus on experience we don't have the best experiences. Keeping us from the shallows and

miseries is what Paul was trying to do for the Ephesians, and with his prayer, that we be given the knowledge of Him, the knowledge of God, the knowledge of Christ and the things of our Lord.

That's the road to a rich life and on a road to deep experience and that's what God has in store for all of us. That's why He invites us to know Him. And in knowing Him trust Him and experience Him. And that will bring us into the experiences that are really great.

One last thought before we close. Jesus is described as raised from the dead and seated in heaven at God's right hand. Now that presents Christ as king. He was rejected by the rulers and the kinds of this world but He is now seated over all of them. But it also presents Him as a priest. He is not only a king but a priest, and that means He's a seated priest.

And that fact is very unusual and it caught the attention of the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews because priests of Israel never sat during their service. There was no chair in the tabernacle or in the temple because their work was never done; chair was left out deliberately. A person sits down when his or her work is done, but the work of a priest of the old covenant was never finished because the offering of the sacrifices were never complete, they could never take away sins. And so they stood in the temple as they ministered. Every year, year after year as they made the offering on the day of atonement they would take it in to the holy of holies, they would sprinkle it on the mercy seat and they would stand the whole time, and repeat that the next year and the next year. Their work was never completed. And so they stood.

But Christ, who is our great high priest, has taken His seat in heaven, the true tabernacle. And the author of Hebrews starts out with that great thought. In chapter one in verse 3 he describes the glory of our Lord. He writes: "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature and upholds all things by the word of His power." And when he goes on to say, "When He had made purification of sins He sat down, at the right hand of the majesty on high."

Returns to that thought in chapter 10, verse 12, he writes: "He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time sat down at the right hand of God." Christ is a seated priest because He has offered the final sacrifice, the one that does take away sins, takes them away permanently, and that atonement, the purifying sacrifice is made for all who believe in Him.

And so I conclude with a question: have you believed in Jesus Christ? Do you know the forgiveness of sin? If not, then look to Christ, believe in Him as the one who died for you, who came to suffer the penalty in your place and in so doing, in so believing, come to know the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting.

May god help you to do that. May God help each of us to know the blessings that we have in Christ, the power that is actually ours now, that we might live in it.

Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious God and Heavenly Father we do thank You for the blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ, the power that is ours, your life being lived in us through the Holy Spirit. We thank you for that and pray that you might make us more receptive, responsive to it, to live by faith and obedience and grow in the grace, the knowledge of you. And that ultimately comes and can only come by your grace. And so we ask you do to that: make us people who are increasingly being changed into the image of Christ, that we might serve you well, serve you faithfully as the body of Christ, the fullness of Christ. It's in the name of Christ we pray. Amen.