

**Ephesians 1: 19-21; “The Exceeding Greatness”, Message # 7 in a series entitled –
“The Exceeding Greatness of His Power”, a Bible Study
prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 1st, 2019,
for those gathered at his home.**

This section of Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus is his relating to them what he had been praying for, for them, ever since he had heard of their coming to faith in Jesus Christ. If those of us who are older in the faith want to see those who are younger in the faith grow up more quickly in Christ; if we want them to grow up strong in faith and the exhibition of every grace, we must pray for them to understand the greatness of God’s power, both to save and to enable any believing person to do God’s will. If you don’t want children to grow up to be spoiled and selfish; you will have to teach them to look outside of themselves to behold God’s power towards everyone who believes in Christ. This will be of great help to them in many ways. Understanding God’s power to save will help all Christians to better know how they can glorify God with their life.

A mature Christian is like the apostle Paul. They will often be praying for other Christians around them to know God’s power so that they will catch better vision of what God the Father is doing through Jesus Christ our Lord in every generation of this Church age, and in the age which is to come. That is what these verses are describing. So this evening I want us to look 1st of all at – The Privileged People who God the Father exercises this great Power toward. And then 2nd – We will look at the Exalted Person who God the Father exercises all this great power for. I pray that each of us will learn to consider the greatness of God’s power and live and labor for Christ, remembering where the power comes from to live our Christian life.

1st – I want us to look at the Privileged People who God the Father exercises this great power toward.

Verse 19 says – “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power towards us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.” Those privileged people who God the Father exercises this great power toward are specifically called here – “Us who believe”. It is not just any person or all persons in the world towards whom God exercises His exceedingly great power. It is only towards those who are believing in God and in His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. What we as believers need to understand, Paul is saying, is that there is an “exceeding greatness of power” which is continually exercised toward us who believe, from the creation of that faith within us, to the time of our being brought to eternal glory. Faith is pleasing to God whereas our coming to God without faith is not pleasing to Him.

Turn with me over to Hebrews chapter 11, and verses 1-6, and we will begin to understand why this is so. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” “For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.” “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speak.” “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him, for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” “But without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

Now, I want us to think about the things that are said to us here, in the order that they are given to us. What is faith? We are told here that it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen. This is quite a statement. What do we hope for, when we believe? We hope to come to a real knowledge of God and have an experiential relationship with Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. That faith which we will exercise to come to have this relationship and live the Christian life by, is the substance (or assurance) of things hoped for. And we find this substance in our heart and mind

when we come to exercise true and saving faith in relation to the gospel. The evidence of the reality of the things which are unseen, being believed by us; that is, of God's existence, and of His being willing to communicate with us and to us, spiritual truth and grace through Christ; our being able to find Him through belief of the truth of God's word, and to live in a manner pleasing to Him, the realities of these things are found in us when we have true faith and when we exercise that faith.

But I want you to notice that both the substance and the evidence are not something which are inherently found in any person by nature. They are given to them as a gift by God Himself, and this is why we find verse 3 being worded in the way that it is worded – “the things which are seen were not made of the things which are visible”. God's creating the world is brought in here, so that we might begin to comprehend the fact that faith is something more than our believing by our own inherent strength of our natural will and intellect. We actually believe with a saving faith when we are given understanding by God's illumining our mind, and God's power turning our affections and our will to behold the glory of Christ, in connection with this light shining in our heart in relation to the Scriptures. And so we do consider Christ; who He is, and what He has done for sinners like us.

We are told in verse 2 of Hebrews 11, that this is how the elders, that is the saints who lived in Old Testament times, living in this way of faith, obtained a good report from God Himself; which report is written down for us there in the Scriptures. And the examples of Abel and Cain are given in verse 4 and Enoch in verse 5. By faith Abel offered to God in worship a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness, it says that he was righteous. He was not saved by his works, but He was saved by faith. He believed that what God was looking for from him in worship was his offering a living sacrifice which would point to the fact that he was not trusting in himself, but in the Christ who would come as the lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. And so he offered the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. He offered this sacrifice from something which God had first given to him; something which had life and which could typify the work of Christ as a Savior. And God was pleased with this sacrifice. He had respect to Abel and the sacrifice, it says in Genesis 4: 4.

Cain offered God something which was directly related to his own work and his own labors, and he thought that God should accept it and approve of it because he had done it this work and brought his offering to God. But being a sinner, God could not accept that, and Cain evidenced the fact that he did not have true and saving faith because and was trusting in his own works, rather than having faith in the promise, because he became angry and went and killed Abel. Cain's offering was not pleasing to the Lord, and that is why it says in verse 6 – “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Well, Enoch, who is mentioned in verse 5 understood this important truth because the way that he lived, by faith in God, was pleasing to God. And so the conclusion is evident to all who will read this Scripture, that “without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. And why do they diligently seek Him? It is because they realize that that this is His appointed way; not to see grace already sufficient in yourself to be able to become a Christian or live the Christian life, but rather that it must be sought from God Himself.

O the greatness of the power to those who believe; not only when they are coming to Christ, but also every day in living the Christian life by faith, in accordance with that power. One of the most important principles to be learned in living the Christian life, is to see that this power is not from ourselves but from God. Turn with me over to 2nd Corinthians 4: 5-7. “For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.” “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.” Notice the way that Paul says this – We do not preach ourselves. We are not those who believe that we need to preach up our own natural or inherent ability to believe or repent or think that we can live our Christian life in the power of our own strength or wisdom or ability, or free will. This is not the Biblically right perspective. We

live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. A true Christian ought to be able to look at themselves and to understand that the power to live the Christian life is not coming from them. It is not coming from their natural abilities, the strength of their intellect naturally, or any other thing that they might boast in, concerning themselves; or think themselves to be very good at, or strong in. A Christian who is mature looks at himself as seeing the power coming to him from God, and he affirms it at every point in his Christian experience. He doesn't say now – God has done this, so I am going to do this. He doesn't think that way, unless he is thinking unbiblically.

Yes, we do need to take initiative. Yes, we do need to be deliberate. And yes, we do have a will and we need to choose to do certain things. But that is not the point of what we are talking about here. The point is, that the Christian life is never lived by the power of your own self-determination. Never! Now you can make resolutions and you can be determined all you want to be, and you well should be, at many points. "I am determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." But why did Paul say that? He said it because he knew that it cost Christ going to the cross, to be able to purchase for him the power that he would receive from Christ, to be able to live the Christian life. Why did he glory in the cross so much? Why do we need to glory in it so much? Why do we need to see and understand the verse which says, "Without Me you can do nothing." And the verse which says – "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Why? It is because of the surpassing greatness of the power!

We have this treasure in earthen vessels. In verse 6 it says that God has commanded light to shine out of darkness... Do you see how sovereignly this light comes to the sinner? God who has commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? Whoa, that is powerful stuff! It shows us that we have to have our mind illumined first, and then we have to be turned to behold the glory of Jesus Christ. Our will has to be turned to behold the glory of the Lord Jesus in His Person and His work. That is why these things are so important that we are talking about here tonight. It is not only in conversion that we need to understand these things but also in order to live the whole Christian life.

Galatians 2: 20 and 21 – "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law; then Christ died in vain." You can see this very clearly, can't you? I do not set aside the grace of God. He is talking about this in the context of Justification, but he is also talking about it in the context of living the Christian life; the life that he now lives in the flesh. He is not talking about his indwelling remaining corruption – the flesh. He is talking about his body and living while he has his physical life. The life that I now live in the body, the remainder of my life, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. And I don't set aside the grace of God; in other words, somehow to think that somehow I am strong enough to do this on my own, or that my relationship with Christ is not important to cultivate in terms of power being given to me.

I think one of the grave errors of Christians nowadays is that they assume that since they have already received the Spirit that they are automatically going to grow up into Christ without seeking Him or without realizing greater measures of power in their life to live the Christian life. I think that it is a great error to think that you are going to automatically grow in living your Christian life. Look at what it says in Chapter 3, verses 1-7 – "O foolish Galatians!" "Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" "This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" "Are you so foolish?" "Having begun in the Spirit are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" "Have you suffered so many things in vain – if indeed it was in vain?" "Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and work miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith!" – just as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." "Therefore know that only those who are faith are sons of Abraham." "And

the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ “So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

Paul begins here by saying that they were foolish Galatians. And he says – Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? Now notice how he turns them right back to Christ and Him crucified? Because what they were trying to do was that they were trying to add something to Christ; either circumcision or the works of the Law. And whenever the works of the law are mentioned they are mentioned in the context of a person’s being able to do and keep the law on their own, and by their own strength supposedly. They are able to do that supposedly. But in Romans chapter 4 it says that by the works of the law, no man shall be justified. But here, he is talking about why they are foolish. And he begins by saying – How did you receive the Spirit? Was it by the works of the Law? Or by the hearing of faith.

Well, this is the importance of faith. It is by the hearing with faith. That’s what he is saying, and so he is saying to them – Have you suffered so many things in vain? If indeed it was in vain. In other words, probably persecution which was coming to them, or people looking down on them because they wouldn’t hold to the law, thinking that they could be Jews who knew God by the works of law; that they had to believe in somebody outside of themselves, even the Lord Jesus Christ? So, you see, they were very confused people. And so he goes on to tell them – Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you, and notice the terminology there – He who supplies the Spirit to you, which involves a regular on-going supply, and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or the hearing by faith? And of course it is by the hearing of faith.

Just as Abraham believed God, and he was justified; it was accounted to him for righteousness. Only those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham and are blessed with believing Abraham when they believe the gospel. And that is being blessed not only in the initial sense of Justification but also the on-going sense of Sanctification, and the supply of the Spirit to them. Indeed, it is God’s exceeding great power which upholds your life of faith in God and in Christ. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Let us not simply think that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but we are also blessed to be able to live the whole Christian life by faith in the Son of God. It is God’s exceeding great power which upholds your life of faith in Him and in Christ. The life you now live in the flesh, you live by faith in the Son of God.

2nd – The Exalted Person who God the Father exercises all this great power for.

Verses 19-21 – “And what is the exceeding greatness of the power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is name, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” So the exalted Person who God the Father exercises all of this great power for, is our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, it is because of Christ’s having accomplished redemption, having satisfied the Father’s justice concerning all of His elect people, that He exercises this exceeding great power towards us who believe. It was the Father’s mighty power which was there to confirm the fact that since redemption was accomplished, it would now all be applied in all of the blessings and benefits of our salvation. This working in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him in the heavenly places at His right hand was the display of His purpose and full satisfaction with Christ’s finished work.

His express purpose then became to greatly honor and exalt His Son; to raise Him from the dead and to have Him seated in the very highest of positions, at His right hand, and exercise authority in ruling over all men and all angels and all nations of the world; to place Him at His right hand, to sit Him in session there, until He sends Him back again in His Second Coming, to judge the world, to punish the wicked and to reward the righteous. It is good for us to think about Christ’s exaltation by the Father to this highest of positions. For it allows us see that everything related to our salvation will most certainly come to pass in due time. Turn with me over to Psalm 110, verses 1-3. “The Lord said

to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool' "The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion." "Rule in the midst of Your enemies!"

These words were first spoken by the Father to Son in the counsel of Redemption, as a part of the decrees of God in eternity past. They were subsequently placed here in the Scriptures, having been written by king David as a prophecy of Christ's Mediatorial reign, and His kingdom coming to rule over all earthly kingdoms and dominions in a progressive fashion during this Church age. What is it to be a Mediator? It is one who comes between two parties at odds and enmity with each other. A Mediator is called, "a Daysman" in Job 9: 33 in the King James Version. "Neither is there any Daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both." It is important for us to understand that Christ is ruling presently over all the kingdoms of this world in His Mediatorial kingdom, and that the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever, as it says in Revelation 11: 15.

Presently He rules in the midst of His enemies. The Lord has stretched for His strong scepter in sending forth the gospel, the rod of His strength, from Zion, from Jerusalem, His apostles and disciples having commission to take it to all the nations. All those whom God calls through the gospel effectually, are "made willing" in the day of His power; both to trust in Christ and receive Him as their King, and also to preach and to share the gospel to the ends of the earth in their generation and in all generations. Christ will remain there, in session at the Father's right hand, until all of His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. He has had "all power and authority given to Him in heaven and earth." Matthew 28: 18. Here in verse 3, it says – Your people shall be willing in the day of your power. It is first of all referring to all those who will be converted to Christ, all those whom God calls. They shall be made willing in the day of God's power by being given the gift of the New Birth, and they shall come to know God through the working of God's power. They receive Him as their King and their Lord and they want to preach and share the gospel to the ends of the earth; that is their desire.

It also says in some of the translations that Your people shall volunteer freely in the day of Your power. In the day of God's power there will be people who will be willing to share and preach the gospel. Do you see the importance of revival? Do you see the importance of believing that not every day is the same as the last? Because there are days of the Lord's power. In the day of Your power they shall volunteer freely, or they shall be volunteers. "In the beauties of holiness"; do you see the outcome of this? From the womb of the morning You have the dew of Your youth, which is the anointing, the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit upon God's people. So, we need to couple this together with what we are studying in Ephesians. Christ is going to remain there in session, at the Father's right hand, until He makes all of the Son's enemies His footstool. Christ will sit at the right hand of the Father until all His enemies are made a footstool for His feet. And the last enemy which will be destroyed will be death. So, Christ will not come back until death is destroyed. And it will be destroyed when He comes back. It will be destroyed forevermore, in terms of all of the believing saints; all of His believing people.

There is nothing and no one who is greater than Christ in His rule. He is described as being in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also that which is to come. All of this has come to pass as a result of the Father's rewarding Him for His perfect obedience to His law, and His willing going to the cross to die for our sins. Philippians chapter 2, verses 8-11. "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

My brethren, we ought to seek to obey our Triune God in everything as it says in Philippians 2: 12 and 13 – "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who

works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” Where do you think that this fear and trembling comes from? Is it simply an intellectual thing? Is it because you know certain things, and then that sets you to fear and trembling? Oh no! No! No, the reason that He works it is this way is because of the exceeding greatness of the power which being exercised toward us who believe. We ought to think this way, because it is God who works in you, both to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Notice how the word good pleasure is often used in relation to faith. We were looking at that earlier. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. But since God is pleased with Christ and has exalted Him, He gives you all of these rich blessings.

And along with all these rich blessings, they are not just objectively perceived, but they are subjectively understood, felt, known, and thought upon. I guess that is the best way that I can put it. In other words there is a real experience of Christ that a believer has, without being charismatic, thinking that you have to have all the gifts restored to you. That is not what’s being talked about here. What’s being talked about is obedience. And God is at work in you, both to will and to do. Does that mean that your free will of choice is overridden by God? Absolutely not! But does it mean that God is working in you to will and to do? Absolutely it does! And how is He working? By the exceeding greatness of His power! By the Holy Spirit in your life. It is marvelous brethren, it is simply marvelous; that if God the Father has exalted Christ to the highest place, to His right hand, then He will also exalt us to reign with Him forever as well. But we will most certainly also have to endure certain trials of our faith before our being exalted to be with Christ forever. 2nd Timothy 2: 8-13. “Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.” “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” “This is faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.” “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.” “If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

Now when it starts out and says – Remember that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, according to my gospel, why is that important that we remember that? David Turner said – That is one of the things that God requires; that you have to believe on the name of Jesus Christ, you have to understand and believe that He was risen from the dead, and that all of these things were done according to what the Scripture said that He was the descendant of David. Marja Leena Turner said – I don’t know if this is what it means, but it was the power that raised Christ from the dead that is the same power which is working in us. I said – Both of what you are saying is true; we need to remember it in terms of our salvation as David was saying, but we also need to know it in terms of our labors for Christ.

Notice what Paul is saying in these verses? He says – “He was raised from the dead according to my gospel, for which I suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.” Why isn’t the word of God chained? It can’t be. Because it is God’s word. It can’t be changed, Brian Squiers said. I continued – It is the exceeding greatness of the power of God to do these mighty works, in and through his people, yes, but also in order to advance Christ’s kingdom by this mighty power. Notice how He does this. Paul says in verse 10 – “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” You remember how it was when the apostle Paul first came to Corinth, for instance, and he said that when he came to them that “he did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.” “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power.” The power of God was evident to them.

But notice what it says in 2nd Timothy 11-13. “This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.” “If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.” “If we deny Him, He also will deny us.” “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.” So if you are

faithless as a believer, how is it that you are brought back and shown what is the truth of any given situation, or any particular portion of the word of God, or any particular thing that is a concern to you that has caused you to waver, who is it that brings you back from that? Well, it is God with His exceedingly great power remains faithful to Himself to uphold your faith even when you are faithless. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter on the night in which He was betrayed? He said – Simon, Simon, Satan is demanding to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail. And see, that is the truth of the matter. And all I am saying is that there will be times when we as Christians will be very, very, strong, and times when we are faithless. But He remains faithful. He can't deny Himself. He can't deny His own wisdom or grace or power or purpose or anything relating to what He is intending to do, in terms of our salvation.

In closing I would like us to turn over to 2nd Corinthians 12, verses 7-10, where Paul teaches us a very important principle of truth in relation to God's exceedingly great power toward all of His elect people in Christ. It says – "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure." "Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me." "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake." "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

Who gave Paul the thorn in the flesh? It was his Master, the Lord. Now it is pictured for us here as a messenger of Satan. So notice the sovereignty of God over Satan? Satan cannot bring to you unless God gives him permission, unless He ordains it. It is not going to happen unless God says so. But Paul was given a thorn to buffet him, lest he be exalted. And notice how he pleads with the Lord over it. 3 times he asked that it might be removed. But the Lord said – My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Whose weakness? Your weakness in a fleshly sense. You realize that you can't change this thing in your life, you can't take it away. You can't do what you would want to do in that given situation. You absolutely must have Christ's help. And by the way, you are going to get help, because He is so faithful, and because He is exalted, and all power and authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him.

And yet, we see here, that while we are here upon the earth, He would have us to come to understand many things about His exceeding great power, towards us in relation to; look at this list: Infirmities, weaknesses, reproaches, needs, persecutions, distresses, for Christ's sake. Well, this is really good isn't it. Because this ties in our labors to it as well. Because Paul obviously thought, whatever this messenger of Satan was, he thought that he would be able to better minister for the Lord without it. So he pleaded with the Lord three times that the Lord would take it away, and the Lord said – No, my grace is sufficient for you, My power is perfected in your weakness. And so, what does Paul do? Does he say – Lord I won't serve you anymore? No, he said, most gladly I will boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ will rest upon me. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

It is important that each of us understands that even though Christ is exalted, and that we are positionally exalted and seated with Christ in the heavenly places; that yet, while we are here upon the earth He would have us come to understand many things about His exceedingly great power toward us in relation to our infirmities, our weaknesses, and the many difficult and distressing providences that He will permit or bring us into. It is in those situations that you will prove how exalted a personage He really is, when you come to understand that His grace is sufficient for you, and His power is being perfected in your weakness; so much so, that you will eventually be content with these things, and you will even take pleasure in those things, for His sake. And truly, you will learn to prove the greatness of His power toward you, the one believing in Him.

