

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1

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

'Resurrection Power'

As the Apostle Paul finishes summarizing his prayer requests for the Saints here at Ephesus, we see him turn to the resurrection power of God! A major theme in the New Testament and something Paul wants these Saints to know works in their individual lives, in the Church and in the World.

- Last week we focused on the power of God in our lives seeing ourselves as the means through which He does His work!

In two weeks, Lord willing, I will conclude chapter one of Ephesians by looking at the impact of this resurrection power on the world, and the following week we have the blessing of a joint service with the Saints from Redeemer Presbyterian Church & Pastor George VanderDussen will bring us God's Word.

After that my plan is to again bring a short series of sermons on our covenantal renewal worship which I try to do every few years [and it has been 3 years since the last series!] That will bring us to the Advent & Christmas seasons, so we will launch into chapter two of Ephesians sometime after the New Year.

- So, this morning we turn to how the resurrection power of God works in the Church, the Body of Christ:

Again, in his prayers the Apostle Paul wants these Saints, and all of us, to know “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory... gave [our ascended Lord Jesus] to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Now I could spend the whole sermon, or even give an entire series of sermons on the power of the resurrection, but let me just give some highlights and then focus this morning on the picture of the Church as the Body of Christ...

- I think it is very appropriate that we do this on the last Lord's Day that we will worship here which I will address in a moment.

Now we know there are several resurrection accounts in both the Old and New Testaments...

- But it is important to remember that they are all dependent on the resurrection of Jesus!

Only Jesus had the power to lay down His own life & the power to take it up again!

- Only the resurrection of Jesus ended the power of death and only the resurrection of Jesus insures our resurrection in the future!

This is why the Apostle points out that Jesus was raised and seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places where He reigns today:

- **ALL of the other Saints who were raised in the Old or New Testament accounts died again and now must await that great day of resurrection just as we do!**

This resurrection power is something we should be very familiar with and we should often review and meditate on the major portions of the Scriptures where it is addressed. For example, we should know well the account of Jesus raising Lazarus in John chapter eleven: There we see Jesus coming after His friend had died to demonstrate His power and even after He explained this to Martha she still struggled to believe:

25 “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” 27 She said to Him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Even with this strong statement of faith, Martha still did not realize what Jesus was about to do because when they come to the tomb and Jesus tells them to “Take away the stone”

Martha objects... “Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days.”

40 “Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” 41 Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me.” 43 Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth!”

44 And he who had died came out bound hand & foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Loose him, and let him go.”

- **What a glorious picture of how the Lord gives us life in the new birth... Calling us out of the tomb of sin and death, into the light and removing our graveclothes.**

Many reject this analogy because it paints a dark picture of the fallen state of man, but that is a sermon for another day... For this morning as we think about the resurrection power in our lives, we should have this powerful demonstration at the tomb of Lazarus in mind as we hear Paul teach us about resurrection living in Romans:

6:6 “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?”

[sticking with our Lazarus theme, should we put on more graveclothes, so Jesus can take them off?]

2 “Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

[again, would it have made sense for Lazarus to have thanked Jesus for new life and then gone back into the tomb to live?]

3 “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death.? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin... 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

- **In other words; DO NOT go around looking for new graveclothes and stop trying to go back to living in the tomb!**

Come out into the light and celebrate with Jesus as we see Lazarus doing in chapter 12 where we read that, “Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. 2 There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with [Jesus].”

- **As we move on in Ephesians we will see how all of this is worked out in the Church, in our marriages, our families, our jobs or businesses, our homes and even with doing battle with the world the flesh and the devil.**
- **The power of the resurrection is part of our Christian lives & walk from the beginning to the end.**

As many of you know, it was the address by the Apostle Paul to those pagans in Athens that God used to bring me out of my tomb and his challenge continues to give us great hope for the lost today:

Speaking to those proud philosophers who worshiped an unknown god, the Apostle gave them this challenge: Acts 17:30 “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 31 because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter.”

Now my desire this morning is to focus on where the Apostle states “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory... gave [our ascended Lord Jesus] to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

- **I want us to ponder what that means and then look at a very familiar passage from the Old Testament in a slightly different light.**

We find the most comprehensive statement on the Church as the Body of Christ in I Corinthians 12:

“12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? 18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”

The Apostle also speaks about the Body in Ephesians three and here adds the important quality of maturity.

- **Ponder what our bodies would be like without growth & maturity?**

Here in Ephesians 3, the Apostle is specific about some of the parts God has given to the Body of Christ:

“11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

Now when we think about the Church, whether a local congregation or the world wide visible Church we need to have both of those concepts in mind: The parts that make up the Body AND their working together and growing to maturity.

- But as Paul prays, we are to remember that ALL life and maturity is the result of resurrection power!

With that said, I believe the Bible uses this illustration because our own bodies do help us to better understand some of these very important lessons.

- Think about the importance of each part and the unity of the body?

As Pastor Wilkins rightly pointed out years ago, IF I cut off my little finger and put it in a drawer for a few weeks, what I find later will not be pretty. NO part can live without the body!

- And yet far too often today we think that we must seek isolation or self-reflection to gain spiritual insights.

It is also important to remember that the body only functions properly when all of the parts are doing their appointed work. The other insights come from observing how the human body grows & matures.

[discuss development in the womb and then growth of the body.]

- IF such development and growth do not take place it creates serious problems that can often be fatal.
- As we think about this we should see more clearly how the resurrection power of God is vital to both the growth & function of the Body of Christ.

[reflect on the story of just our small part of Christendom]

- When it comes to the world-wide church growing up into the perfect man Jesus, it seems impossible for us to even imagine.

And yet we must remember that this is God's story and He will see it through to completion. This is why all of those grand truths the Apostle has already presented in the introduction are so important. And again, we can learn some insights here as well from our own bodies. Pastor Wilson years ago made this important point by having us imagine God giving us a special tour of the womb. [explain the tour]

Now with that in mind I want us to turn to Psalm 139 which is a passage that many of us have often used for comfort or in defense of the unborn... But I want us to see if we can observe this diamond from a slightly different angle... [why we call it the living Word of God!]

This morning we should think not just about the human body, but the Church as the Body of Christ which the Apostle Paul has taught us to see in such a way... To think about how the truths given here can also apply to another Body which God dearly loves: The Body of Christ.

- I am going to hit just a few highlights and you can continue these meditations in your morning devotions or at some dinner table discussions.

Psalm 139: "O Jehovah, You have searched me and known me. 2 You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off."

- There are no secrets in the Body of Christ & God knows all that happens!

3 "You comprehend my path and my lying down, And are acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O Jehovah, You know it altogether. 5 You have hedged me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is high, I cannot attain it."

- Just as God cares for us as individuals, He certainly cares for the Body of Christ, knowing all there is to know!

The Psalmist goes on to speak of the omnipresence of God and then we come to this at verse 13:

“For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb.

**14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well.”**

- **Again whether we think of the history of our small church or the history of the entire Church down through history, God is in control!**

15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.”

- **As we have often said, God knows where His story is going and we know He will take it there by the resurrection power of Jesus!**

The Psalmist continues to meditate on God’s intimate knowledge of him and then takes what might seem like a strange turn at verse 19: “Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. 20 For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. 21 Do I not hate them, O Jehovah, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? 22 I hate them with perfect hatred;I count them my enemies.”

If we remember the torture of the martyrs we discussed last week or the mockery of God & wickedness that surrounds us today we can find ourselves wanting to make such imprecations.

And yes, we are called upon to rightly proclaim God’s standards and justice, but always knowing that we must first clear the log from our own eye before we can help someone remove a splinter...

- **Thus the Psalmist quickly returns to God’s perfect knowledge of his own heart, just as we must today as we confront the evil of our day:**

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;

24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

- **The Apostle Paul has brought bold requests for the Saints before the throne of Grace and I trust that we have been encouraged to do the same knowing “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory... gave [our ascended Lord Jesus] to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”**

Communion Meditation: John 13

“13 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. 5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.”