The universal government of the risen Lord Jesus

Text: Ephesians 1:20-23

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Ephesians 1:15-23

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 241, 51, 391, 110, 262, 513

Series: Ephesians (Sermon #7)

Occasion: Ordination and installation of office-bearers

Theme: In his prayer for the Ephesian saints, the Apostle Paul petitions God for their growth in knowledge of the immeasurably great power of God in raising Christ from the dead and enthroning Him in universal authority over all creation including the church, His body which is filled by Him.

Proposition: Know the glorious reign of Christ Jesus in your life.

**Introduction**

Electric power is something that we are all very familiar with. We do not generally think about the hydro dams, generation plants, and transmission lines when we turn on the light switch at home. We do not see the sub-atomic electrons drifting along the wires. We just benefit from the power which is itself invisible to us. We experience its’ effects when we receive light and heat in our homes, workplaces, wider city and world. If you Google ‘earth from space at night’ you’ll see the myriads of lights from human settlements across the globe from the viewpoint of an orbiting satellite which evidence some of the electric power at work in this world.

We see the effects of great power at work in the naturally world with the damaging effect of the Christchurch earthquakes, the vast bushfires in Australia and the lethal destruction of the recent volcanic eruption at Whakaari/White Island.

We see the effect of power exercised by human governments, often when authority is used to violently subdue people. Names like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, Mao Zedong and Kim Jong-un come to mind. Power can be used for evil purposes or for good.

God is good and only ever does good (Ps 119:68). He is All-mighty. There are no limits to the extent of His divine power. Therefore, nothing is impossible for God (Gen 18:14; Jer 32:27; Mat 3:9; 26:53). With the eyes of faith we see the effect of power of God at work in the world and in the church.

In our text this morning from Ephesians 1.20-23, we see a continuation of the Apostle Paul’s description of his intercessory prayer for the Ephesians saints. This began in verse 15 as Paul writes of his petitions to God the Father that he would grant them continued growth in spiritual wisdom so that their knowledge of the hope, riches and power in Christ would deepen.

In verses 20-23 we see that the immeasurable greatness of God’s power towards those who believe is made evident in three great divine works:

* The raising of Jesus Christ from the dead.
* The enthronement of Jesus Christ far above all other authorities in all Creation.
* The rule of Jesus Christ over his body, the church.

These three works of God which evidence the immeasurable greatness of His power are the focus of our three points in this sermon:

1. Divine power to raise the dead
2. Divine power to rule the world
3. Divine power to rule the church
4. **Divine power to raise the dead**

Just as you cannot see the power itself which provides light and heat to your home, so the power within a small seed is not visible. If you hold up a dry grain, nut, or seed, it looks dead, but when you plant it in the ground, then you see marvellous power as a living plant grows up from what appeared to be without life. When Jesus said “*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit*” (John 12:24) He was referring to the need for Him to die, so that many would receive true life in Him.

When Jesus was crucified at Calvary He did die. John records in his gospel that the last words of Jesus before his life ended on the cross were: "*It is finished*" and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:30). The soldiers there confirmed this when they did not break his legs which they would have done had he been alive (John 19:33). A soldier thrust a spear into his side and separated blood and water came out (John 19:34). His dead body was bound in linen clothes, together with 35-40kg of embalming spices (John 19:39). Paul confirms the death of Jesus for the sins of others when he writes to the Corinthians: **“***For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Cor 15:3).

The bodily resurrection of Christ to life is evidenced by: The empty tomb (John 20:13); the appearances of Jesus before his ascension (1 Cor 15:5-8); the appearances of Jesus after his ascension (to Stephen – Acts 7:55-56, to Saul/Paul – Acts 9:1-6, to John in Rev 1). It is true that Jesus, who had been dead was raised to new life. He was clearly recognizable in his resurrection body as being the same person who had been dead, yet his physical body had undergone changes which enabled him to move through locked doors (John 20:19). The power to raise Jesus from death was divine, God the Father being the Effector of His Son’s resurrection (Acts 2:24).

Hanson Robotics, a Hong-Kong based engineering and robotics company has developed many new and complex technologies in the past 5 years. ‘Sophia’ is a human-like machine with advanced facial movement, speech recognition, and artificial intelligence features. ‘Sophia’ is a testimony to the power and intellect of mankind. Yet, ‘she’ or rather ‘it’ is not alive. In fact, there is no advanced human technology which we have to make what is dead become alive.

God alone has the power to give life (e.g. Ps 36:9). God alone has the power to raise the dead. The resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the powerful work of God in which He will raise all of His adopted children to new life. This is the *“immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph 1:19-20).* Christ is the ‘firstfruits’ of the coming resurrection of all who believe in Him (1 Cor 15:20) so that they will have new imperishable bodies fit for eternal life in the New Heavens and New Earth where ‘*the dwelling place of God is with man*’. This immeasurably great divine power is not yet visible in itself within those who believe, but who are not yet glorified, but the effects are already evident.

Paul writes to the Ephesians in the next chapter about this and presents the gospel, which is God’s good news of salvation; a message about His divine power to raise the dead. Just as Sophia the robot is animated, but without life, so those who are not alive in Christ are physically active, but spiritually ‘*dead in trespasses and sins*’ (Eph 2:1). **“***But God* (Paul writes in Eph 2:4-5)*, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved*”.

Let me ask you a personal question. Do you know the immeasurable greatness of God’s power toward you according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead? Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? I had a phone call last week from a person who said that she knew the Bible very well but was not saved. She asked me what she should do. What would you say in response?

Paul and Silas responded to this question from the Jailer in Philippi by saying“*Believe in the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 16:31). To ‘believe in the Lord Jesus’ is to turn away from what you know to be wrong and to trust that He died for your sins. To ‘believe in the Lord Jesus’ is also to willingly put yourself under His authority; which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **Divine power to rule the world**

The term ‘One world government’ refers to the idea of a central government whose authority extends across the whole earth. It’s a concept which (rightly) makes many people shudder. Why? Because in the well-known words of Lord Acton (1834-1902): "*Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men*”. Names like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, Mao Zedong and Kim Jong-un come to mind.

In contrast, the Bible speaks of a very good ‘one world government’ in these familiar words: “*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore*” (Isaiah 9:6-7). In fulfilment of this prophesy, the Risen Lord Jesus Christ has been enthroned by God the Father and given absolute authority to rule the entire universe.

Paul writes about his constant prayer that the Ephesians believers would know this reality about the immeasurable greatness of God’s power that “*raised him (Christ) from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion*” (Eph 1:20-21). Jesus is the ‘new Adam’, the representative of a new humanity in Whom the words of Psalm 8 are fulfilled: “*You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet*” (v6). The elevation of the Risen Christ to rule the world also fulfils the words of Psalm 110 (also ref. Acts 2:32-34). The immeasurably great power of God the Father has ‘*put all things under*’ the feet of Christ, His exalted Son (Eph 1:22). There is nothing left outside of the control of Christ (Heb 2:8).

However, we **do not yet** see the extent of his rule in the world. There is much evil, violence, injustice and rebellion today. We sadly know this well and it has been so both before and after Christ’s enthronement at God’s right hand. As the writer to the Hebrews says: “*At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him*” (Heb 6:8). We have not yet seen the day when Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 17:14) will return and when “*every knee {will} bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Phil 2:10-11).

What then does it mean to know the immeasurable greatness of the divine power which rules this entire world through Christ?

1. It means, brother and sister in Christ, to know that God has the power to work all things together for your good (Rom 8:28).
2. It means, fellow believer, that nothing and nobody can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35).
3. It means that we can willingly obey human authorities (when doing so does not disobey the higher authority of God) because we know that “*there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God*” (Rom 13:1). This knowledge should affect how you observe speed limits when driving, apply for building permits for qualifying projects on your home as well as how you fill in tax returns – to mention just a few practical applications.
4. It means that we willingly obey those in authority over us in the workplace “*not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man*” (Eph 6:6-7).
5. In fact, knowing that Jesus Christ is the supreme Ruler of this world changes the motivation for everything we do, so that we aim to do the very best we can with the gifts and resources with which we have been blessed. “*Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Col 3:17a).

Whilst we do not yet see the universal government of the Risen Lord Jesus everywhere in the world, we do know the immeasurable greatness of the power of God in the church; which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **Divine power to rule the church**

We sang the hymn “The church’s one foundation’ earlier, including the third verse “*with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed*”. Many people today, if they think of the church at all, would say that it is a dying institution, increasingly irrelevant in a post-Christian world. They would see the church as being weak and outdated; an aging relic in the West. A testimony to mankind’s religious, non-scientific, non-rational past. Perhaps some might see some value in the church as being a community centre; perhaps even a teacher of moral principles in an immoral world. Few, if any, non-Christians would view the church as being powerful – ruled by the same supreme authority who governs the whole universe.

Paul prays that the Ephesian believers would increasingly know the truth about the immeasurably great power of God which rules the church. He writes about Jesus Christ: “*And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all*” (Eph 1:22-23). Christ is the authority over His church. This is expressed in the use of the words ‘head’ and ‘body’. There is a living connection between Christ and His disciples.

The description of the church as being ‘*the fulness of him who fills all in all*’ is difficult to precisely interpret and Bible scholars differ on their viewpoints which include:

* The church is filled by Christ who fills all things with His power.
* The full authority and power of Christ is at work in His church.
* Christ, with His full authority is fully present within His church.

The true church, represented both universally and in local congregations is governed by her Head, Jesus Christ (Eph 5:23). The divine rule of Christ is exercised through appointed human rulers, elders who ‘shepherd the flock of God’, ‘exercising oversight’, not domineering over those in their charge but being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

The rule of the church by male elders is the Biblical pattern of church government as practiced in faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Reformed churches recognize that deacons also have authority in the church, which is exercised, for example, when decisions are made to distribute funds to those in financial need. It can be a bit confusing in our Reformed churches because we refer to the governing body of the church as the ‘Session’ which means the elders (Church order article 36), but also can mean the meeting when both elders and deacons gather to make decisions about the life of the church. The elders and deacons together are often referred to as the ‘Full Session’ in order to avoid confusion.

Today we witnessed the ordination of brother Gerald to the office of elder and of brothers Erik and Aaron to the office of deacon. All these men have promised to “*carry out the work of {their} office faithfully, to love the church and all its members, to live a life worthy of {their} calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church*” (4th vow of form). Notice that no office-bearer is above the authority of the church, all submit to the divine power of Christ who rules His church.

How is the church ruled by Christ her Lord? Through the ministry of His Word. When we willingly submit to the commands of the Lord in Scripture, we demonstrate that we truly love Him (John 14:15). We bear the ‘yoke’ of our Lord and we learn from Him, for He is gentle and lowly in heart and provides rest for our souls (Matt 11:29).

When we know the immeasurable greatness of God’s power we willingly come under the authority of office-bearers in the church in so far as that authority is exercised in accordance with Scripture which call us all to “*respect those who labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work*” (1 Thess 5:12-13).

In summary, the power of God is only used for good. We experience that power when we are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:30). May you know the immeasurable greatness of God’s power at work in your own life, in the world and in the church.

As we pray for one another, perhaps with the aid of the ‘prayer calendar’ in our church bulletin, or the ‘photo directory’, remember to petition the God of our Lord Jesus Christ for those you give thanks for and remember in your prayers, that they may know what is the immeasurably great power of God towards us who believe.

1. Power which raises the dead
2. Power which rules all the world
3. Power which rule the church.

AMEN.