

“Praying for Power”

Ephesians 1:21-23; 3:18-19

July 23, 2017

If any of us wondered what kind of an enemy we are up against he needs to look no further than the news. Violence, injustice, cruelty, despair. Evil out there in the community and in the world. Evil in structural problems in society. And evil in my own soul—the roots of and expressions of that same violence, selfishness, despair, slander that I find in the world. Evil without and evil within.

Truth be told, on our own we have no power to meet evil as we see it. We have no power to meet the evil out there, or inside our own hearts. There is the seed of every kind of sin in my heart and in yours. Further, there is an attraction, a love, for sin in our hearts, too.

How do we battle it? How can we fight **evil without and evil within**? Where does the power come from?

Ephesians 1:20–23

As we began last week Paul prayed that the Spirit would open our eyes to the power...

²⁰ that 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 rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away, I had interactions with a few people over a period of time I truly considered evil. I don't mean bad guys. There was something worse than bad at work. In dealing with these two, the situation came clear I was dealing with more than just these people. There was a host of evil, of the work of the devil masquerading as an angel of light. The battle against these people was not merely with flesh and blood. It was with principalities and powers.

And I tell you it almost did me in. Both of them; it almost swamped me. Because these were bad dudes I thought I could handle. I know my Bible; I know my theology; I know a bit about psychology and psychological dysfunction.

It was the self-confidence that almost did me in. Because I underestimated the powers I was up against. Evil is real and out there.

But it is not only out there, but in our hearts, too. The seeds of the same sins are within my heart and yours: evil, slander, accusation, party spirit. Where does the power come from to battle evil within and evil without?

Paul has already said we have been given this kind of power by the Spirit, but so often we are blind to it. Thus, he calls us on us to pray that the Holy Spirit open the eyes of our hearts to what we've been given. That these powers would be put to work changing and transforming us. In short, we access this power in prayer!

But, a major issue in my prayer life and I believe in our church is that we view prayer as supplemental instead of foundational. We believe prayer to be a good idea versus necessary. We believe that we can think our way into change, or will our way into change, or exert our way into change. If not, we fall into despair, all the while thinking that prayer is a nice add on, like one pill of the many we can choose from to treat our malady. The reality, however, is that **prayer is foundational**; it must happen if we are to lay hold of what's been given to us. Prayer forms the foundation of a life being rebuilt by the Lord in his power and strength. **In reality, as Billy Graham once said, prayer is a declaration of dependence!**

If you or I want to know the power of God in us and through us in the world around us, the power to deal with the evils without and within, we simply **MUST** become a people devoted to prayer.

Pray for the Power of New Life.

As we saw a few weeks ago, the power that is alive and at work within us is the resurrection power of God. Look at Ephesians 1:20, which says [that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.](#)

Paul says that same power that raised Jesus from the dead is alive and at work within us. The power to reign over death is alive in us. The power that enthroned Jesus over everything is alive in us. Let's look at how that plays out a little more closely.

A. Power over dead hearts

Paul says a few verses later, in Ephesians 2:1 ff. that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. Further, we walked in this death, that is, we entertained it, we embodied it. Our lives were walking death when we lived in the grip of sin. In our flesh, we all are dead in our sins, that is, we are spiritually dead. We can do nothing to make ourselves alive.

These verses are some of the places where the Bible clearly teaches that if we believe, it is because God gave us the power to believe. If we are spiritually alive, it is because God made us alive. How so? How dead is dead? As Miracle Max from Princess Bride said, "It just so happens your friend here is only mostly dead. There is a big difference between mostly dead and all dead." Spiritually, what Paul tells us dead is all dead. If you or I yell at a dead body to get up, it isn't going to happen. If we warn a dead body of impending disaster, jump and flail about, still that body won't move. So also with our spiritual condition. We are dead in our trespasses and sins.

But thanks be to God, he did not leave us there. Ephesians 2:4 says that ["But God—some of the most hopeful words in the Bible—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.](#) We were dead in sin, but we have been given new life in Christ. As Jesus is alive, back from the dead where he paid the penalty for our sin, we also are now alive in him. It is by grace you have been saved, Paul says, the language of gift giving. He has given the gift of new life. We were dead, powerless, not mostly dead, completely dead in sin, and his great power made us alive in him. We have been given new hearts in regeneration.

So it follows, then, that if we desire revival in our city and our world, it begins with prayer! We pray to the only one who can make a dead heart alive! That includes our family members who don't know Jesus, our neighbors, co-workers, our city. Do you pray for them by name that Jesus would make their dead hearts alive by his power and grace?! He who seems beyond God's grace, or hard hearted to your telling the story of Jesus's grace toward sinners? Pray for them by name!

Now back to verse 20, where Paul prays we, too, those who already know Jesus would have our eyes opened to that very power in us—the power of life over dead hearts. What Paul is saying to us is two things:

- The penalty has been paid for your guilt. Our guilt is broken. It is done; cancelled in the blood of the cross.
- His resurrection life is now within you to have power to say no to sin and yes to righteousness. The bondage to sin has been broken!

That is the path of personal renewal! Think about some sin that has the best of you right now. Each of us have one or two or 19, whether they are irrational anger, lusts, covetousness, adulterous minds and lives, being a gossip—trafficker of information. Whatever it is, when you are tempted to that sin, PRAY in this way. "Lord, I'm tempted by something that has come over me again and again. You have freed me from the guilt of that sin, and I KNOW you have freed me from its power. May your life in me strengthen me to fight and stand. I'm no longer dead but alive. Let your life in me prevail over this temptation to walk in death."

Living this way is not easy. Sin in you and in me is a fight to the death. Or as John Owen, the great Puritan theologian wrote, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you!" Those theologians knew that between our lives and the life of glory stands a lot of death, that is death to self, death to our sin, which they called mortification. But that doesn't happen by gritting it out. Sin isn't killed in our lives by simply focusing on it. Our love for sin must be driven out by another powerful love.

It is that love seen so clearly in the atoning work of Jesus upon the cross that can lead to the putting to death of our sin. When we know that we are loved, cherished, pursued, valued, the apple of God's eye, even while He knows all the things of our hearts that we desperately try to hide from others.

But it is not enough to merely say, “You are accepted in Christ.” We must also realize that we are delivered from the bondage of sin by the power of Christ within us! There is a new live-giving power in you. It is the love of Jesus for you, magnified upon the cross, and made alive in you with resurrection power. The way we appropriate that life is through the Holy Spirit wrestling to life our dead hearts is through prayer.

B. Power over the opposition

We pray not only for power to renew dead hearts, but also for power over opposition. The next part of Ephesians 1:21 is where we Presbyterian types can begin to squirm a little, ²¹ *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* It is an easy application of this verse to be so glad that no power can stand against Jesus.

No kingdom, no nation, no empire that sets itself up against him will stand. Nations come and nations go. And this verse says not only is their power inferior to his, but they are subject to him. Calvin once wrote in commentary on Hebrews 1:13, “Certainly if we are to believe what our eyes see, then the kingdom of Christ seems to be on the verge of ruin. But this promise that Christ will never be dragged from His throne but that rather He will lay low all His enemies, banishes all fear from us.” Yes, that brings great hope to us when we see the world seemingly spinning out of control, to know actually the powers of this world are on a tether, and Jesus holds power over them.

But what we have to see is that the words, *rule, authority, power and dominion* used together this way is a bit more technical. In the Jewish literature of the time and a bit before, these reflected the rankings of demons. So when Paul says that Jesus is enthroned over every rule and authority and power and dominion he is saying that he is enthroned, ruling over the powers of the devil and his agents working evil in this world! From the least to the greatest, Satan’s mafia must submit.

The power of evil, the powers of the demons—I hope you know that they exist and seek to destroy our lives—are again, not only inferior to Jesus’s power, but subject to his power! He is King over all. They must flee when he commands in Resurrection power.

Part of living in that resurrection power is to recognize Satan’s strategies, and call out to God for help when we encounter them. He **accuses**, as Rev. 12 calls him the accuser of the brethren. He works to destroy our confidence in the love of Christ by reminding us, accusing us, of the patterns of sin in our lives. He brings to mind old accusations, old wounds to seek to harm us. But again as Revelation says, we cast him down in the blood of the Lamb! Lay hold of Jesus when accused.

He also is named the devil, which means slanderer. He slanders us before God, and he also slanders others to us and us to others in our minds and hearts. One of his go-to strategies is to divide Christians from one another by whispering accusations in our hearts and ears. Often he lies to twist facts or revise memories of past actions toward malicious misinterpretation of events. His victories look like when we begin to attack one another, especially in secret, or in anonymous accusation under the cover of darkness. Let us not play at his games.

He also brings to mind old wounds that were never resolved well, and uses that to sow seeds of despair. He twists the truth of Scripture to manipulate us to believe things that aren’t true, as he did in the Garden, asking, “Did God *really* say...?”

There are other tools he uses to harass God’s people, and he especially does it in an orchestrated fashion to dull the work of God’s kingdom. His plan has worked devilishly! When he is successful in having us focus on twisted memories and old wounds, on accusations in secret, on what this or that person did back then, then we become blind to Jesus’s power over our dead hearts and over the opposition! When he is successful, we almost forget that he is the defeated one.

Yet he is bound. His ability is limited, like a dog on a chain for Christ has conquered. **So WE Pray.** Are you weak and feel under assault? Pray. Pray and resist the powers of these evil ones because greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world! Note v. 22, how does he put all this power to work? The **Father put ALL things under his feet and gave him as head over all things...to the church.** He rules, the same Lamb slain for you rules! It is for you and in you that all this power is unleashed in the world! We--the weak, despised, helpless, lonely, attacked, beaten down, battered, shoved around by our old sins AND assaulted by the devil’s messengers that won’t let go--have within us the very power above every power alive and at work for his glory and for our good!

That's almost enough to make me want to become a charismatic! Almost.

Andrew Murray in his great little book *With Christ in the School of Prayer* wrote, "Who can say what power a church could develop and exercise, if it gave itself to the work of prayer day and night for the coming of the kingdom... Most churches think their members are gathered into one simply to take care of and build up each other. They know not that God rules the world by the prayers of the Saints; that prayer is the power by which Satan is conquered; that by prayer of the church on earth has disposal of the powers of the heavenly world."

Do we want to see Jesus exalted over our lives? Do we want to see Jesus's mission give us an experience of new life? Do you want to see your places of secret fear turned to confidence? Do we want to see St Louis turned upside down for Jesus? Do we want transformation outside us and inside us? PRAY! Pray that He does what only he can do and what He says he already wants to do! PRAY!