

I need to download some images into your mind. They are images of power, but the power is of two kinds. Here are three images of the first kind. Number one: imagine yourself at Citizens' Bank Park on the Fourth of July, watching fireworks explode in ever new and dazzling ways. Number two: imagine the launching of a screaming jet fighter from the deck of an aircraft carrier. Finally, imagine yourself sitting in a taxicab in center city Shanghai talking quietly on your cell phone to loved ones in the Brandywine Valley.

Now, here are three images of the second kind of power. Number one: watch the Maple tree in your backyard grow. Number two: watch a nation grow from a handful of settlers at Plymouth Rock to a population of 315 million. Finally, watch God make the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God on earth.

The passage of time distinguishes the two kinds of power. The fireworks, the launching of the jet fighter, and the cell phone conversation happen right now, or there is a problem. The growing tree, the developing nation, and the coming kingdom exert their power over long, sometimes very long periods of time.

Last Sunday I said that the only thing that makes sense out of life for many people is their feelings. They are not sure anything is true unless they can feel it deeply. That makes them feel alive and authentic. But this need to feel things deeply has a downside. It can make people impatient with the second kind of power that exerts itself over long periods of time. It can make you impatient with today's passage in Ephesians 1:19-23.

A Quick Look Back

Let's take a quick look back at how Paul's train of thought gets us to this passage. God made the decision to create a community on earth He could call His people. He made that decision before the creation of the world, and love prompted Him to make it. Jesus Christ carried out His decision by emancipating His followers from guilt and lies and estrangement from God and constituting them as God's chosen people, the Church. As a result, God began to unveil **the mystery of his will**, which is **to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ**. Those are some of our spiritual blessings in Christ, and they make the Church more than a match for the spiritual forces of evil that make war against the Church and against all human flourishing.

That's heavy. It's heavy now; it was heavy then. Paul wrote to people who only a short time before had been pagans. They worshiped idols, and they behaved in ways that make spring break seem tame. Then, they heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ. It was different from all they had ever known. Paul knew his teaching baffled them.

He knew they needed help that only God could give. So, he prayed for them to know God better by knowing the hope God called them to, the riches of God's people, the Church, and the power of God at work in them.

The Supremacy of Christ

Paul did not put a period at the end of that prayer. Without fanfare, he segued right out of his prayer by extending his description of God's power. Start at verse 19: **That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all**

rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. That might be part of his prayer, but it sounds like he was explaining God's power.

Let's stop here and make sure we understand his language. He wrote at the beginning of verse 20: **when he (God) raised him (Jesus) from the dead.** Christ died on Good Friday by crucifixion. A competent medical examiner would have declared Him dead. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and three days later, He came back to life with an indestructible body. He appeared to individuals, small groups, and on one occasion to about 500 people. Jesus overcame the last enemy, which is death.

We find a second phrase in the words: **and seated him at his right hand.** In scripture the right hand of God is a figure of speech that means God's power to act in human affairs as He chooses. To say that Jesus is seated at God's right hand means that God has entrusted Him to exert that power on behalf of mankind.

We met the third phrase at the end of verse 20 when we read Ephesians 1:3: **in the heavenly realms.** It's easy to think Paul meant heaven, but he didn't. On the contrary, the heavenly realms are a dangerous place where evil forces make war on the Church. The names Paul gave them are: **rule and authority, power and dominion** among others. We will meet them again, ominously, in Ephesians 6.

Now, think about the meaning of these three phrases. Christ defeated death, He wields the power of God, and He is superior to the forces of evil that threaten the Church and all human life. Jesus Christ is supreme. That is why **at the name of Jesus every knee should 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.** (Philippians 2:10-11)

We here today together do so bow and do so confess, and in doing so we anticipate by faith the age to come when the supremacy of Christ will be eternally established. Thus do we give glory to God the Father even now in our time of exile.

The Body of Christ

Paul had more to say about the supremacy of Christ, and it brought him back to the theme of Ephesians – the Church. Verse 22 brings the supremacy of Christ into close connection with the Church. **And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.**

My friends, I cannot let that go by. I don't know how you stay in your seats. I could understand if you rose as one and marched out in protest that I am wasting your time by indulging in such an illusion. I could understand if you rose as one and fell on your faces in worship. Maybe you sit there in respectful silence only because we are sated with words. We are bombarded with words. We are buried beneath words.

God placed all things under his feet (Christ's feet). As we shall see in chapter 3, Paul wrote this letter while a Roman prisoner. At any moment they could squish him like a stinkbug on a windowsill. A few months or a few years later they did. If one of his guards heard the apostle make that statement, he could very easily say to him, "Nonsense! All things are under Caesar's feet from the borders of Scotland to the borders of India. That's real power. You can see it. You can feel it. You can fear it everywhere you go."

19 centuries later, the Soviet dictator, Joseph Stalin, did not like the suggestion that he defer to the Pope on some point, His arrogant question was, “How many divisions does the Pope have?” He had none, and half a century later another Pope in the shipyards of Gdansk, Poland played a decisive role in dismantling the Soviet Union, and his non-existent divisions never fired a shot. It’s enough to make you think the apostle was on to something when he wrote: **God placed all things under his feet.** But waiting for moments like that is more like watching a tree grow than watching fireworks. That is the humble, irresistible way Christ works in the world.

Let me give you another example of how Christ exercises His supremacy over all things that is much close to home and on a much smaller scale that is more typical of his humble, irresistible MO. Lee and Linda Holtzclaw are members of BVBC. They are retired. Lee is a deacon. Some of you know him as the face of Habitat for Humanity for BVBC. I’d like to tell you something about Lee you might not know.

He is authorized to work with a Christian Internet ministry called Global Media Outreach (GMO). GMO puts him in contact with people around the world, who are seeking God or have become Christians and want to grow as Christians, and who may have no Bible to read or church to go to. Some of them live in countries where it is illegal to go to church or to have a Bible.

Lee is in contact with 250 people like that in 16 countries. He is the Internet pastor for 250 people. His audience is bigger than at least 80% of all churches in the United States, and he does it in his home in bathrobe and slippers by computer. He is one of 18 people in this congregation, who have that kind of contact with people in 139 countries. In its short life GMO has reached 50 million people. Who knew that the Internet in the hands of people like Lee would be one of the ways Christ lets us know that He is more than a match for police states and secular ideologues?

And you would never know it. His way of doing it is unassuming, a little sleepy. It makes you sympathetic with the stranger, who got lost on some of the back roads of Arkansas and stopped to ask directions. “Sir, where does this road go?” The Arkansas native replied without blinking an eye, “I been here 30 years, and I ain’t never seen it go nowhere.” Christ’s methods are a little like watching that road go somewhere.

They are like watching your Maple tree grow until one day you look up, and the power of the tree has buckled your concrete sidewalk. And one day you look up, and the Soviet Union is gone, but the Church is still here. And one day you look up, and the Chinese Communists have become capitalists, and Christianity is making remarkable headway among the movers and shakers of Chinese society. The apostle was definitely on to something when he said: **God placed all things under his feet.**

Paul put one more touch on the supremacy of Christ in verse 23. He calls the Church **his body** (Christ’s body), **the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.** The apostle calls the Church **the fullness of Christ.** What does that mean?

I brought a mirror with me this morning. I want some of you to look into this mirror and tell me if you see BVBC. Can you see people behind you, at the end of the row from you, in the balcony, on the other side of the sanctuary? Well, you can see part of BVBC. To see the whole congregation we would need a very big mirror indeed. Can you see anyone in the mirror over at

Union Baptist Church or down at Evangelical Presbyterian Church? We would need a really big mirror for that.

So it is with Christ. If we want to see **the fullness of** Christ, one congregation or denomination is too small a mirror. We need to think on a much larger scale. If we want to see **the fullness of** Christ, the entire Church in North America is too small. Christ is too big to be represented by a mere 150 million Christians.

Did you know that there are more Christians today in Africa south of the Sahara Desert than there are people in the United States? But if we want to see **the fullness of** Christ, the entire Church in Africa is too small. In fact the Church in North America and Africa combined is too small to mirror the fullness of Christ. Maybe Christ's ways of doing things is the only way to build a mirror big enough to reflect all of Him.

Take-aways

God made the decision to create a community on earth He could call His people. He made that decision before the creation of the world, and love prompted Him to make it. And here we are, two out of every seven persons on the planet, and it's still not enough to mirror the fullness of Christ. But some day it will be enough (Romans 11:25-26), and then the supremacy of Christ will be clear for all to see, and then all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.

I love the Church. I don't just mean our church. You know how much I love Brandywine Valley Baptist Church. I mean the whole, beautiful, maddening, global Church that now claims two persons out of every seven on the planet. It is the flesh and blood evidence that the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is operating in our world, not with the ostentatious force of a jet fighter being launched from the deck of an aircraft carrier but with the quiet patience of God preparing the nations of the world to become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.

So, I ask you to take another step that will make your experience of Ephesians more personal. Between now and June 16, Father's Day, let's take the prayer of Ephesians 1:15-20, put it in your own words or use it like it is, and then pray it several times a week. Pray for yourself, your family, for BVBC, and the whole beautiful, maddening, Church that is spread throughout the whole wide world.

And let's take one more step. Would you begin to ask yourself, "How would I treat BVBC, if I loved it the way Christ loves the Church? What could I do to help BVBC mirror Christ better?"