



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Ephesians 1:15-23

“Possessing Possessions in Christ” -- TRANSCRIPT

We are looking at Ephesians chapter 1 verse 15 through verse 23 in which we have Paul’s prayer for divine illumination. It is called prayer for revelation, but as one reads and ponders this prayer that the Apostle prayed, it becomes evident that what he is thinking about is not so much revelation as illumination.

Someone has said there are three steps in the life with God. Step number one is the finding of the Savior. Step number two is learning the facts about our salvation. And then Step number 3 is the experiencing of the salvation with which we have come to possess in Christ and which we desire to learn through the study of the Scriptures.

Obadiah, in a verse that probably is the one verse by which people remember that one chapter prophecy of the Old Testament, speaks about possessing their possessions, referring to Israel and their possession of the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant. Well that, of course, is what we seek to do by the grace of God in our Christian life: to possess the possessions that we have.

These three steps of finding the Savior, learning our salvation, and experiencing that salvation have been set forth, some believe, right here in the opening fourteen verses of the Epistle to the Ephesians. For example, in chapter 1 verse 1 and verse 2, Paul addresses his letter to those who are the saints at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. He refers in those words to those who have found the Savior. Then beginning at verse 3, and really taking us through verse 14, he has spoken of what we have when we come to the Savior, of the salvation that we possess. And he has outlined it as the work of the Father in election, the work of the Son in redemption, and the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of that redemption which Jesus Christ has accomplished.

And now in verse 15 through verse 23, he prays that the things that we have come to know, our election, our redemption, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in application of that work, may be realized in our Christian experience. All the saved, and all of those

who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, do not know their salvation. And then there are, perhaps I think it’s fair to say, even fewer who have come to experience much of the salvation that is ours by the grace of God in Christ. What we really seek to do when we seek to study the Scriptures, after we come to know Christ, is to learn of our salvation. And then we desire to experience the things about which the apostles write.

Now, we have some great things set before us here: elected, redeemed, and then particularly, the Holy Spirit has come to dwell within us as the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession to the praise of the glory of God. And the Christian life, one aspect of it, one important aspect of it, is the possessing of the possessions that we have in Christ; to come to know what it is to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

Why is it that so few of us really get beyond – much beyond – the first stage of finding the Savior and then even fewer of us seem to get beyond the second stage to the experiencing of the things that have come to be ours in our salvation? Sometimes, one can trace it objectively to the indifference that we seem to manifest. Somehow or another many of us seem to feel that if we are saved, well that’s really all that is important, because we are sure to get to heaven, and therefore to be saved is the most important thing and really to get much beyond that, well, we don’t have to do that. But unfortunately the Bible has a great deal to say about life beyond salvation. In fact, when you put the whole Bible and its revelation together, really, the greater part of the Bible is not about how we come to know Christ, but about the life we have after we have come to know him.

Some have said, “Well, it’s just ignorance. They don’t understand the Scriptures.” Well that is true, too, but we will ask, “Well, why don’t they understand the Scriptures?” Others say, “Well, it’s because of the lives we live. We grieve the Holy Spirit whereby we are sealed unto the Day of Redemption.” And no doubt, there is some truth to that as well.

Well, certainly one of the things that we pray constantly is that we not be indifferent to the things of God, that we not be ignorant of the things found in Scripture, and that we not grieve the Holy Spirit. Jeremiah says in chapter 9 verse 22 and 23, in some words that I think are appropriate,

“Thus saith the Lord, ‘Let not the wise man glory in wisdom, neither let the wise man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth

me, that I am the Lord which exercises lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight.”

Now I think all of us would think that one of the greatest things that could happen to us is to understand and know the Lord, because it is in these things, that is our understanding these things about him, that he takes delight.

This wonderful petition that the Apostle prays here is a petition that we might be illuminated and come to understand and possess some of the blessings that he’s just been speaking about in the preceding context. Now, let’s look at it, and first of all we want to look at the thanksgiving prayer which the Apostle gives us in verses 15 and 16. Notice what he says:

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.”

Now remember, when you are reading the Bible and, particularly, in the epistolary literature, you see words like “wherefore,” “for this cause,” “therefore,” you want to ask yourself what is the connection between the context that I am reading and the preceding, or the following, context as the case may be. Now when you see an expression like this, “on account of this” – literally, it is – you want to ask yourself what’s meant by the “this”? And what’s meant by “on account of,” “on account *of this*,” “because *of this*”? Well, what is the “this”?

Well, he’s been talking about the fact that in the immediately preceding context that we’ve believed and we’ve been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Let’s read those verses again, 13 and 14:

“In whom ye also trusted after ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, in whom also after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of purchased possession unto the praise of his glory.”

So, we heard the word of truth. We trusted in Christ, or we believed. And then we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The Holy Spirit came to indwell us as the sign that we belong to the Lord. Remember we’ve been stressing this recently because it came up

in Romans chapter 8, also: “He that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of his.” Or Galatians chapter 4: “Because ye are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into our hearts crying ‘Abba! Father!’” The one test, the ultimate test of are we Christians is, do you have the Holy Spirit. Is there evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?

Now there are many evidences of that: you love the Bible; you love the saints of God; you like the things of God; you’re interested in the progress of the Lord’s work. You’re interested in the lost: the lost members of your family, your lost friends, your lost relatives. These are evidences of the fact that the Holy Spirit has been working.

Now the Apostle says, “On account of this,” – that is, since you’ve heard, since you’ve believed, since you’re sealed – “On account of this, I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.” I apply myself, he said, to promoting your progress. So on account of this, because of these great things that happened to you, since I’ve heard of it, I don’t cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

Now that is, I think, a wonderful expression of the Apostle’s interest in those who have come to faith in Christ. Because he’s heard of their faith and their love unto all the saints, he prays. He prays in the light of the tremendous things that have happened to them, giving thanks to God and making mention of them in his prayers. Their faith led to love, and that is proper. Our faith in Christ ought to manifest itself in Christian love.

When you see people who say they have believed in Jesus Christ but do not really have any Christian love, well, you cannot say they are not Christians because our examination is not the same examination that God gives, and it’s not the authoritative examination, but we certainly can say there doesn’t seem to be, Scripturally, the evidence of faith. So, “after I heard of all your faith and love unto all the saints” – it’s faith that leads to love.

Now I want you to notice an important thing, though. The Apostle has said “you have faith, and your faith is seen in love unto all the saints” but still, “I pray for you,” and I have a specific prayer for you, verse 17, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” In other words, faith led to love; that’s fine, that’s proper. But faith is not enough. There are people who think that if we have love, that’s the epitome of the Christian life. But the Apostle says, you have faith, and you have shown love unto all the saints, but I’m praying that you may have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. For it isn’t enough to have love. Love must be “in the truth.” It’s not really true Christian love if it’s not in the truth. So let’s stop speaking about this rather general kind of love for

the saints. What we want to speak about is love, but love *in the truth*. You must be in harmony with the word of God.

Listen to what the Apostle prays in Philippians. “For God is my witness,” he says in chapter 1 verse 8, “how greatly I long after you all in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ. And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” So it’s important to have love, but love must be in the truth. Truth without love, of course, is not what we want, either. We want both. But we want our love to be bounded by the truth, and if it’s not bounded and governed by truth, it’s not real, true Christian love.

In fact, real, true Christian love can be very harsh. It’s the kind of love that the Holy Spirit has for us when he rebukes us for our sin. That’s not very sweet, to use the meaning that people often put on the term, sweet. But it’s the greatest thing that can happen to us when the Holy Spirit rebukes us, and as harsh as it may be and as much as it may hurt, it’s God’s love when love is in the truth.

There’s so much talk about love. And that’s not bad, but, oh, that men would talk about love in the truth. Vernon McGee is right when he says, “I’m tired of sloppy agape.” [laughter] That puts it pretty well. “Agape,” you know, is the New Testament word for love, the kind of sacrificial love, but “sloppy agape” is the kind of sentimentality that is so often taken for love. It’s the kind of love in which people can say, “God’s interested in love; he’s not interested in doctrine and theology.” But God is interested in doctrine and in theology, and he’s interested in love. But it’s love in the truth.

Now, coming to the basic petition that the Apostle offers in verse 17 and the first part of 18, the first thing that he prays is that God would give the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. Now, of course, revelation has to do with the unfolding of divine truth. But revelation may also be used in the sense of illumination. We look at the Bible and we say, theologically, this is the revelation of God. This revelation is closed. We don’t have any further revelation. We don’t have new prophets standing up and giving revelation any longer. This is what we need; it is the revelation of God.

What we need is not new revelation, and we don’t need any prophets. But we do need a great deal of illumination in the reading and study of the revelation. So when Paul speaks about a spirit of wisdom and revelation, he’s talking about a spirit of wisdom, a wise unfolding of truth to us by the Holy Spirit; he’s just talked about how the Holy Spirit has come to indwell us permanently. So he prays that God may give unto the Ephesians illuminating ministry from the Holy Spirit. Not his indwelling ministry – we have that,

permanently. But he wants, he prays now, that the Spirit may illumine us in the truth of God.

Now if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do have, turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and let’s read a few verses, beginning at verse 9. 1 Corinthians 2 verse 9. The Apostle writes here:

“But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of man, except the spirit of man which is in him. Even so, the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God.”

Paul says all of us who are believers have received the Holy Spirit that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. So, he prays here after he has said that the Ephesians have been sealed with the presence of the Holy Spirit, that God would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. It’s the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Now I’d like for you to look at that expression: “in the knowledge of him.” He doesn’t pray that the Ephesians be given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of philosophy. I’m sure that to know true philosophy, well, we would have to know the Scriptures for there is the true philosophy. But he’s not interested so much in philosophy as he is in the personal reference here.

He doesn’t say “may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of history.” History is a very useful thing, and it’s a very useful thing for Christians to know. It’s very illuminating to see the evidences of the working of God, but only of course as we see from the light of the word of God – no one can see the hand of God in history. We see the hand of God in history because we look at it from a different viewpoint, from a different presupposition. We can see things happen and say that was the finger of God, but we cannot prove it. We move on the presupposition of the Christian faith. So history is useful, but Paul is not at this point so much interested in history as he is in Christ.

He says that he may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. He does not say in the knowledge of science. Science is very useful, very useful for Christians. My, what evidences of human science have we seen in the last few days. And this afternoon, what a magnificent achievement in science, and certainly every Christian ought to be interested in God’s world.

That’s God’s world: science, history, philosophy, but the most significant thing is the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. How shallow a man is when he only knows science. Or when he only knows history. Or when he only knows philosophy, and does not know Christ. He’s not able, really, to put it all together. That’s why the world is seeking, constantly seeking, in constant ferment because they don’t know him.

Now I believe that the answer to a great many of our neuroses is found right here: “may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” And we certainly have been afflicted with neuroses in these last days, and it almost seems as if, as the years go by, we are afflicted with even more of them. But here is, it seems to me, the divine answer, that God may give you the spirit of wisdom and divine revelation in the knowledge of him. Our neuroses, our other kinds of troubles, our problems, our crises, the problems of the young, the problems of the middle age, the problems of the old people, really find their solution in wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. That doesn’t mean that we don’t have these problems and that doesn’t mean that we don’t have these difficulties and troubles and crises, but we know where the solution lies.

Now the Apostle also says, “The eyes of your understanding also being enlightened”—literally, the eyes of your heart being enlightened. This is the result of the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. He gives enlightenment.

And he does not give enlightenment willy-nilly. The Lord Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The Apostle Paul, giving his own understanding of things, says to the Corinthians “because you are carnal, you can only understand the milk of the word; the meat of the word is beyond you.” How often, when I used to teach 1 Corinthians in the Greek text, [at] Theological Seminary, [I would] ask the students, “What is the milk and what is the meat?” Well, it was interesting to hear the different definitions of milk and meat with reference to spiritual truth. But I would sometimes, would ask them, “Well what do you think about 1 Corinthians? What is it?” And we usually would have an argument over that. Some would say, “Well, the Apostle in 1 Corinthians is giving us milk.” And some would say meat. Most would say either it contained meat or was a combination of meat and milk.

But the Apostle calls 1 Corinthians milk. He said, “You’re not able to have meat, even yet.” So 1 Corinthians is not the meat of the word it’s the milk of the word. And all that teaching concerning discipline, going to law before unbelievers, Christians going to law with Christians, matters of marriage and divorce, matters of unclean meats, the doctrine of spiritual gifts, the doctrine of Christian love (1 Corinthians 13), and all of the truths of 1 Corinthians 15, inclusive of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the church, the age of the bringing of all the enemies of God in subjection of Jesus Christ, the rapture of the church, the last part of 1 Corinthians – that’s all milk. Those are the beginnings of Christian truth. So, the Apostle says, you cannot know the meat of the word unless you are spiritual; “because you are carnal, you are limited to these things.” So, there is an unfolding of the truth in illumination this is related to our spiritual condition.

And it may be that one of the reasons we have such a difficult time with the Bible is that our spiritual condition is not that good. That when we read these things we don’t get them because we’re not really interested in them to the extent of becoming subservient to the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us – submitting to his ministry in our hearts and lives.

We like to make excuses, we like to say, I hear people say, “Well I’m just not a student.” Isn’t that strange that a person would say that: “I’m just not a student”? They don’t realize that that’s as if – they’re making a statement as if to say, really, the Lord doesn’t know how to feed a person like me. He gave me a Bible, but that’s not really for me. I’m not a student. Or, “It’s just beyond me. Those doctrines are beyond me.” All of those are excuses. The Scripture is adjusted of the needs of all who – first of all [who have been] enlightened by the Holy Spirit into the Christian faith – and then who are submissive to the Spirit’s teaching he will instruct. He will teach us not only the milk of the word, the meat of the word, too. Paul says I’m praying for you Ephesians who now have the Holy Spirit that you may have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, and I’m praying that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.

Why? Well now he tells us why. This is the ultimate purpose of his prayer. What would you think Paul would pray for Ephesians? Well, he’s praying the illumination would lead to certain knowledge, and the certain knowledge, we can say, is very simple. There are three things that he would like for the Ephesians particularly to know.

The first is mentioned in verse 18: “That ye may know what is the hope of your calling.” What is the hope of their calling? It’s not just salvation, not just heaven. He doesn’t pray, simply, I’d like for you to know that you’re saved. It’s good to know that

isn’t it? [Or] That I’d like for you to know about heaven. In this case, I want you know what is the hope of your calling.

What is the hope of their calling? Well, I think that when the Apostle speaks like this he is talking about the context of the Epistle to the Ephesians, just what he’s writing to them. What has he written to them? Well, he’s said “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he hath chosen us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will to the praise and glory of his grace through which he hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

What a calling that is. We’ve been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, he’s chosen us before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, he’s predestinated us to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, and all of this has made us accepted in the beloved – what a magnificent calling we have as Christians! And this is by the sovereign initiative of God. He’s chosen us, redeemed us, he’s predestinated us, he’s adopted us into the family of God as sons, he’s made us accepted in Christ so that all of the acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ is our acceptance, and now he says, I want you to know what is the hope of your calling, I want you to rejoice in the things that you have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is a magnificent statement. That’s what Paul is interested in. That’s what God is interested in. And I do believe that if we come to the place that we are interested in the things that the Apostles and the Father is interested in, we’ll find that the difficulties of life are much smoother and easier to face.

Well, that’s the first thing. The second thing is stated in verse 18 also, and “what is the riches in his glory of his inheritance in the saints.” What is the riches in his glory of his inheritance in the saints. Now, we have an inheritance in Jesus Christ, but he’s not speaking about that here. Look at it carefully: “what is the riches in his glory of his inheritance in the saints.” So he’s not speaking so much about what *we* have in Christ, but about what *he* has in us. So he wants us to know that. He wants us to know what he has in us.

Look back at chapter 1 verse 11: “in whom also we have obtained an inheritance.” And if you were here when we looked at that text briefly, I suggested to you that the word there translated “obtained an inheritance” might also be rendered, and many of the commentators render it this way, “chosen as God’s inheritance.” We are chosen as God’s inheritance. And so here, what is the riches of the glory of his

inheritance in the saints, so he thinks of us as *his* inheritance. In the Old Testament, that’s what Israel was called; she was called “The Lord’s Portion,” the Lord’s inheritance. And that’s what we are. We are the Lord’s Portion, the Lord’s Inheritance. We have an inheritance in him, and he has an inheritance in us. God glories in his saints. Isn’t that something? That’s amazing.

It’s hard for us to realize that, that God glories in the saints. Let me give you just a simple illustration of this. You’ll remember in the Old Testament, in the Book of Job, there is something very much like this. This book begins with a statement concerning Job: “The man was perfect and upright; the man feared God and shunned evil, and he had seven sons and three daughters; his substance was 7,000 sheep and 3,000 camels.” That’s interesting: seven sons, 7,000 sheep; three daughters, 3,000 camels. A thousand sheep for each son and a 1,000 camels for each girls. This afternoon I was trying to think, now which is the more valuable: a camel or a sheep? That may give us some indication about what God thinks about males and females in the family [laughter], but I didn’t have time to figure it out, and I left it up in the air and furthermore, I began to get the idea that camels were more than sheep and that obviously was the wrong interpretation. [Laughter] And he [Book of Job] goes on and he says 500 yoke of oxen and 500 she-asses and a very great household so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the East. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day, and sent and called for their three sisters to sit and to eat and to drink with them.

And it was when the days of their feasting had finished that Job sanctified them and went and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings, according to the number of them all, for Job said, “It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus did Job continually.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. This is a reference to the angels, of course. And the Lord said unto Satan, “From where comest thou?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down.” And the Lord said to Satan, “Hast thou considered my servant Job?”

Wouldn’t it be nice for the Lord to say that of us: have you considered my servant? Have you considered my servant Richard, or my servant John, or my servant Lewis? He regards us as our inheritance, and Paul would like for the Ephesians to know the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. That’s what we are. What a wonderful position we have.

And now, finally, the third thing, the ultimate purpose of Paul’s prayer is the greatest thing in this third chapter, almost. And “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us what who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.” The exceeding greatness of his power to us what who believe. Now that statement, I wish it were possible for us to analyze it in great detail, but just notice the words for power that are found in it: “what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us what who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”

Now he’s already talked about these “whats”: “what is the hope of his calling,” “the riches of his glory in the inheritance of the saints,” “the exceeding greatness of his power,” but here he talked about the power that was wrought in Jesus Christ when he was raised up from the dead, and he said this is the standard and the measure of the power of God that was directed to us. Look again at verse 19: “And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us what who believe.” What is the greatness of the power to us what who believe? Well, look, it’s the power that he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead. The resurrection power that raised up the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead is the power that works in every single believer. Isn’t that magnificent? The power of God that was wrought, by God in Christ works in me.

Look at our Lord’s body in the tomb. Cold, with the coldness of death. Still, with the stillness of death. Slain because of our sins. And then look at our Lord now at the right hand of the Father on high. Glorified in the life that is life indeed. And the measure of the power that is to us what who believe is that mighty power which entered into Jesus Christ and resurrected him from the dead. That power works in every one of us, as I stand before you.

The Apostles no doubt understood something about this, because they knew our Lord as the living Lord, but then on the Friday and Saturday in which our Lord had been crucified and was lying in the grave, they went from the hilltops down to the lowest part of the valley: disappointed, discouraged, defeated, thinking that the whole program of God had collapsed. That discouraged walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus. So discouraged that they didn’t bother to pay any attention to the reports that the Lord Jesus Christ had been resurrected, that the body was not there in the tomb, and then when the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them, the heights of joy, and heights of illumination came to them so great that they couldn’t wait to get back to Jerusalem, and even went that night to tell the people there what had happened to them.

This power is to us what who believe. You know this is the crowning miracle of the Bible. It’s why it’s singled out for a great deal of mention and discussion. What did the Lord do in his earthly ministry? Well, he gave sight to the blind. He gave hearing to the deaf. He gave the power of speech to the dumb. He gave power to paralyzed limbs and withered members. But have you ever thought that, and pondered the fact that, in the resurrection of Jesus Christ there is the compounding of all of these miracles? There is the miracle of sight, the miracle of hearing, the miracle of speech, the miracle of the healing of the palsied limbs, and our Lord’s body was by the power of God raised and sight was given and hearing was given and speech was given and life was given to the limbs all in one gigantic miracle. Magnificent.

And if you can look at it in other ways, you can see how dead our Lord was. He was dead by virtue of the crucifixion. He was dead by the pierced hands and feet. He was dead by the spear’s thrust. He was dead by the temporary enswathment of the grave clothes, but in spite of that he came forth on the first day of the week as the resurrected Savior. That’s the measure of the power of God that works in us.

You know that in the Old Testament, the measure of the power of God was a different measurement. Listen to the Prophet Micah; I’m sure you’ll recognize immediately that this is the way Israel in the Old Testament was encouraged by the Prophets. He says, “According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt, will I show unto them marvelous things.” So when God wanted to encourage Israel in the Old Testament, he said, “Remember what I did when you came out of Egypt.” And they would remember that what he did was enable them to walk through the Red Sea. The waters were piled up and they were able to escape Pharaoh. The same kinds of things happened: they were saved from death, they were saved through divine intervention, they received liberty and freedom. And the same thing transpires for those whose trust is in the God of the resurrection.

So, Paul says, I want you to know the exceeding riches of his inheritance in the saints, and I want you to know the greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead. That’s the measure of the power that works in a Christian today.

Now wait a minute, that isn’t all Paul says. It’s not simply resurrection. But listen. He says in the 20th verse,

“Which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand 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 in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.”

So in verse 20, he raised him, but he also says he set him at his right hand. If the one is the power of the resurrection, this is the power of the ascension. “And he has put all things under his feet”—that’s the power of dominion over first creation—“And he’s made him head over all things to the church”—that’s the power of dominion over new creation, “of the church.”

So Paul says the measure of the power of God that works in me, a Christian, is the measure of the power that raised up Christ from the dead, which caused him to ascend to the right hand of the father, which there gave him dominion over all of the earth and over all of the church. That power works in every one of us.

[Pause] “And he gave him to be head over the church.” You notice he says church not “churches,” because he’s stressing the organism, the body of believers, that church. And he’s put all things under his feet, and he says of the church that its “his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.”

I wish I understood completely and certainly what that 23rd verse means. It can be taken in two ways. Which is his body, that is the church, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. The Authorized Version text reads as if it is Jesus Christ who fills all things in all, and that makes very good sense. Many commentators feel that’s the sense that we are to give this particular part of the text.

Others have pointed out that this word that is translated, “fill” or “filleth” is a word that’s never used in the active voice in the New Testament. And so that really what we should say this text means is, “which is his body the fullness of him who *is* filled full as to all things in all.” Now if that is so, what it means is not that Jesus Christ fills the church, but rather that the church is the fulfillment of Jesus Christ. That is, that he is not full, himself, apart from us, that we really do serve a distinct purpose in the fulfillment of the Son of God. Now if that is true, of course, we’re not talking about his divine nature, because there is no way in which human being could fill full the divine nature. We are talking about his Messianic status, or the human side of his personality; his divine personality but the human side of his nature. If that is true, then we have a glorious paradox here. We have the impotent church in the fullness of the omnipotent Christ.

But at the same time we have the impotent church which becomes the fullness of the omnipotent Christ. He is incomplete without us.

No wonder God wants me to have the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. I close my Bible with a deep solemn sense of the exceeding riches of his grace, his kindness toward me in Jesus Christ. That’s a magnificent prayer. What greater prayer could we have, as a Christian, than that having come to be Christians, we come to understand the salvation in Christ, and then that we begin to possess our possessions. To me, that’s the most exciting thing in the Christian life that there is: possessing the possessions that I have in Christ. That’s what lends excitement to the Christian life, and the experiences of life are just the occasions for the learning how to possess our possessions. Instead of being defeated by them, we look forward to them, because they are the occasions by which we come to possess our possessions.

That puts an entirely different light on all of our difficulties, doesn’t it? The problems we have in our business, problems that we have in our families, the problems that we have with our kids, and the problems that we have with our parents. These are the occasions for the possessing of the possessions that we have in Christ. That’s a magnificent prayer. Paul has a great prayer in the third chapter, too. But I like this one – I don’t like it better than the other one – but I like this one. I think it’s important. May God help us to realize it in our life and learn to possess our possessions. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent prayers that the Apostles prayed, and we are thank Thee for the lessons that are found in them.

And O God, we pray that the Apostle’s prayer may be answered with respect to us, that we may be given a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of our hearts being enlightened that we might know the hope of our calling, the riches of the glory of the inheritance that Thou dost have in the saints, and the exceeding riches, exceeding abundance of the power that works in us, the same power that Thou didst exercise in the raising of Jesus from the dead – all enablement is ours.

O God, help us to grow in the possession of our possessions in Christ.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.