

*God's Great Power*  
**Ephesians 1:15-23**  
John Breon

Can you imagine discovering that you've inherited a fortune that you didn't know about? The rich uncle or long-lost relative who leaves an inheritance to someone is a storyline that shows up from time to time in movies, books, TV shows. I recently read a fantasy series where three children discover that their mother and father were queen and king of a bright shining island. The parents had been betrayed, the king was captured and the queen was driven into exile by an evil power. Much of the story centers around how the children find out that they are children of the king and queen and what that means (Andrew Peterson, *The Wingfeather Saga*).

The apostle Paul prays for people to discover their inheritance in Christ. We are people of God. In Christ we receive tremendous blessing from God, we have great hope for the future, and we experience the power of God now.

Writing to believers in and around Ephesus, Paul says, "I have not stopped giving thanks for you." Who do you give thanks for when you pray? What lives have you seen transformed by God's grace?

One of the more exciting reports at Annual Conference was from the committee on New Faith Communities. That's the group that helps start new churches or new ministries in existing churches. Some of the pastors of these new faith communities talked about people who hadn't been in church for years, if ever, coming to worship and grow in faith. One told about a woman who came to their church and asked, "Am I welcome here?" Other churches had rejected her—mostly based on her appearance—but this new United Methodist church welcomed her. After some time she wanted to be baptized. As the pastor talked with her about that decision and the church prepared to baptize her, they discovered that she had recently attempted suicide. But now she's found life in Jesus through the church.

Another pastor of a new church told about when they were worshiping in a middle school. Every Sunday, the school's custodian would unlock for them so they could set up. He'd go to another part of the building and do some of his work while they worshiped. Then he'd lock up when they were through. Eventually, he started listening to the worship in a room where they showed the service on video. Then he started going to worship. When the church left that school building and moved into their own building, he went with them and kept worshiping with them. After some time, he put his faith in Jesus and asked to be baptized.

What stories can we tell about how we were introduced to faith in Jesus through the church? Who welcomed us that we give thanks for? Who may give thanks for us some day because we invited them, welcomed them, shared our faith with them? Maybe it'll be someone who gets one of the door hangers we'll put out today.

Paul goes on to tell the people what he's praying for them. "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." The Holy Spirit makes real in our lives all the blessings in Christ that God has for us. Paul mentions some of those blessings in the earlier part of this chapter (verses 3-14) and he talks about others following this passage.

The Holy Spirit reveals these things to us and helps us know what God gives us in Christ. The Holy Spirit reads the will that tells us about our inheritance. The Spirit helps us discover the secret about who we really are, what family we really belong to, and what we have because God is our Father. Above all, the Holy Spirit helps us know God better, more fully, in a closer way than we have before.

Tom Wright tells about looking out at the ocean through his binoculars. He could see a few boats that were out from shore a little ways. Then a friend invited him to look through his powerful telescope. When he did, he saw ships sailing and birds wheeling through the air that he'd had no idea were there (N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*). Paul prays, and let's pray for ourselves and each other, that God's light will fill our spiritual eyes so we can see.

There are three things here that Paul prays for the Holy Spirit to reveal, for us to see with eyes of faith, for us to know: *the hope to which God has called you, the riches of God's glorious inheritance, and God's incomparably great power for us who believe.*

This hope means that the future is certain. It's guaranteed by the Holy Spirit's presence now.

God's glorious inheritance for us is the renewed creation. It's what Paul describes earlier as God's purpose in Christ that will be "put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to sum up, to bring together all things in heaven and on earth under Christ" (v 10). The Holy Spirit points us to and leads us to that fulfillment.

God's great power at work in us who believe is the same power God used to raise Christ from the dead. The Holy Spirit makes that power available to us and puts it to work in us now. It's the power of resurrection, the power of ascension, the power of Jesus as Lord of all.

We've seen recently how Paul boasts about his weaknesses because they're an opportunity for God to display power. Paul talks about being a fragile vessel, a clay pot, but one that contains the power of God. What Paul says here doesn't contradict what he says about power in weakness elsewhere. The emphasis here on power helps us see better how great the power is that's at work in our weakness (see Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* 679).

The power that raised Jesus and that will someday transform the whole world is already available to us. That doesn't mean we can conjure spectacular tricks to impress people. "Many of the things which God's power achieves in us, such as putting secret sins to death and becoming people of prayer, remain hidden from the world and even, sometimes, from other Christians" (Wright). It's power to serve and it's often hidden power at work in us.

At the close of Annual Conference, Bishop Nunn sent us out with the words *fixin', loadin', and lookin'*. He's from west Texas, but those aren't just west Texas words. We know them too. He said his grandmother came to the Texas panhandle in a covered wagon. And the word *fixin'* was a short version of *affix*, what was done to prepare for the journey. You would affix

the wheels to the wagon, affix the cover, affix the water jug, affix the lantern that hung on the wagon and would swing all around. The bishop says that in Acts 1, Jesus was fixin' to send the disciples, he was getting them ready.

Then, there's loadin'. You pack the wagon with supplies, with what will be needed for the journey. In Acts 2, God is loadin' the church with the Holy Spirit and power.

Then, he said, there's lookin'. In a wagon train you'd be lookin' for water or for a place to camp or whatever. In Acts 3 there's an old boy at the temple gate who wasn't noticed until the Holy Spirit led Peter and John to look, to see him, to ask what God wanted to do. When they did, the man was healed. Who's at the door of our church? Who's around us and in need? Do we see them? Are we lookin'?

Where do we see evidence of God's great power in our lives and in the church? What're we doing with such power? Battleships are made to sail the high seas, not sit in mud puddles. Locomotives are meant to pull freight trains, not little red wagons. God gives us this great power for a purpose, for God's purpose—to bring life and hope and healing and deliverance to people.

At the opening worship of Conference, a young boy, maybe nine or ten years old, read the Scripture. He stumbled a little, but he did a pretty good job. Later we learned that until recently he'd been unable to read, but through Project Transformation he had learned to read and was able to get up and read the Bible in front of hundreds of people. Project Transformation is a ministry that sends mostly college students into communities in the summer to read with and to teach young children.

Restore Hope is a ministry in Tulsa that provides food and clothing and other assistance to needy people. A woman said she'd had surgery that left her in great pain and she was unable to work. Her family became homeless. Someone told her about Restore Hope. She went there. And through Restore Hope and other help she got to the place that her family is able to buy a house that they'll close on this month.

In a sermon on this Ephesians passage, Barbara Brown Taylor tells about a woman with recurrent cancer who was told she had six months to live. The church gathered around her and her husband—laid hands on

them, prayed for them, brought them casseroles, cleaned their house. Someone came up with the idea of giving the woman a foot massage and pedicure. That did more for her spirits than any visit from the pastor. The woman gave her jewelry away, let her driver's license expire, and started writing poetry again. She was preparing to die, but she started getting better.

On Christmas Eve she is back in church for the first time in months, with her oxygen tank slung over her shoulder and a clear plastic tube running under her nose. After the first hymn, she makes her way to the lectern to read the lesson from Isaiah. Her tank hisses every five seconds. Every candle in the place glitters in her eyes. "Strengthen the weak hands," she reads, bending her body toward the words, "and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.'" When she sits down, the congregation knows they have not just *heard* the word of the Lord. They have seen it in action. (*Home by Another Way* 140)

Church, what if we began to realize that we are the body of Christ, "the fullness of him who fills everything in every way"? What if we could see and experience the great power of God that's available to us in Christ through the present working of the Holy Spirit? What would we attempt, who would we help, where would we go, what would we do if we knew that power would sustain us?