

## **Sermon: “Calling on God’s Power: A Prayer for the Church, Part 1”**

**Series:** “Prayer & The People of God” Pastor Dave Sattler NSAC October 31, 2021

**Biblical Texts:** Ephesians 1:15-23; Cf. Psalm 34:18, John 16:33, Acts 19:10, Revelation 21:5

**Sources:** Bible Gateway, NIV Life Application Bible, YouVersion. Commentaries: Foulkes, Klein, & Kuruvilla. Books: “*Ephesians for Individuals & Groups*” by N.T. Wright (2009) and “*The Way Up Is Down*” by Marlena Graves (2020). NSAC Sermons: Jeremy Kinniburgh (Oct 10/21), Mardi Dolfo Smith (Oct 17/21), & Paul Lee (Oct 24/21). Wikipedia: “*Votive Offerings*”

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### **I. *<Slide>* Review & Introduction**

- Hi, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at NSAC.
- Thank you so much for joining us today—in-person here, and online.
- I am blessed by your faithfulness to Jesus and His church.
- Today we continue our Series, “*Prayer and the People of God*.”
- We’ve looked at many examples in Scripture of how the people of God have communicated with God, survived precarious and painful real-life situations, and become more deeply connected to God, through prayer.
- Two weeks back, Pastor Mardi reminded us that we pray to a God Who is merciful. And we are encouraged to pray prayers “that throw ourselves on God’s mercy.” Prayers like the tax collector prays in the parable in Luke 18, Q: **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”**  
— *Cf. Luke 18:13, MDS, Oct 17/21*
- Hannah found herself bullied, childless, and discouraged. But she prayed to God, **“Look on your servant’s misery and remember me.”** Pastor Paul last week invited us to pray for God to release blessings in our lives in Jesus’ name, even when we’re in deep distress.  
— *Cf. 1 Samuel 1:11, PL, Oct 24/21*
- **<Slide> Have you heard the roar?! Have you felt it?!**
- Lately the heavens have been dumping massive amounts of precipitation all over the North Shore.
- September was the wettest ever. With our recent “atmospheric river” and “cyclone bomb” this week, October may set a record too.
- Long stretches of rain have filled our canyons and creeks a-flowing!
- This week the water’s dynamic flow caused such a rumble underfoot it could be felt standing on my street in Upper Lynn Valley.
- In our canyons, you can see, hear, feel deep in your chest the immense power of the water. The power of water penetrates deep.
- Reminds me of how the apostle Paul longs for believers to call upon, to experience the **incomparably great power** of God in their lives.

- <**Slide**> Within our big Prayer Series, today we launch a 4-part miniseries looking at various “Prayers for the Church” from Paul’s letters. We begin with a look at Paul’s bold prayer in Ephesians Ch1.
- One commentator calls this Q: “a prayer that God’s people may understand their place in the manifold scheme of the cosmos orchestrated by God.” — Kuruvilla, p.40
- Paul’s concerned that Christians in Ephesus, and we know, that, not only are we saved by Jesus, we are also invited to participate in a new and dynamic life here on earth together in Christ through His church.
- This gift of salvation is not merely a “one-shot-deal.” It has lasting impact on the day-to-day life and decisions of a Christ-follower.
- Ephesians 1:15-23 is another Pauline masterpiece.
- In the original Greek, it’s a 169-word, run-on sentence prayer.
- Classic Paul he’s use tons of hyperbole. He’s fired up—perhaps even gets a bit carried away. You can almost imagine him preaching this prayer!
- Gotta say, I love Paul’s passion.

## II. Biblical Text: Ephesians 1:15-23 (NIV, Bible Gateway)

<**Slide**> 15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 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.

<**Slide**> 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which [God] has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, 19 and [God’s] incomparably great power for us who believe.

<**Slide**> That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 [God] exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under His feet and appointed [Jesus] to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

<Prayer> “**Lord**, please move me out of the way.”

### **III. Bible Teaching:**

#### **1. <Slide> Prayer Begins with Thanksgiving (v.15-16)**

- One can sense a deep bond of friendship between Paul and his beloved Ephesians. Paul is inspired by their “faith in the Lord Jesus” and their “love for all God’s people.” (15)
- So much so he has “not stopped giving thanks” to God for them (16).
- While his prayers typically feature a wonderful mix of praise and petition, most often this is where Paul’s prayers begin: with **thanksgiving**.
- APP — How about you? Do your prayers open with gratitude? Or, do you launch right into petitioning God with your laundry list of requests?
- I am learning to take time first to thank God—and often to thank God for people. Paul’s prayer for his fellow believers reminds me of the many dear saints who have prayed regularly for me over the years.
- And I am grateful to God for their earnest, unwearying prayers—for me, for my family, and my ministry. Thank you, prayer warriors! Some of you are in the room today. You truly bless me. And I thank God for you.

#### **2. <Slide> Prayer to Know God Better (v.17)**

- Paul begins interceding for the Ephesians by asking God to give them “the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that they may **know God better**.”
- Interesting, why is this what Paul it says, “keeps asking” God for? (17)
- A few weeks back, our guest speaker Jeremy Kinniburgh said, Q: “God’s intent, God’s plan, God’s desire is for all of us to know Him better.  
—JK, Oct 10/21
- God is not merely a force to be reckoned with, or a distant impersonal object, or simply a dispenser of goods.
- No, the God of the Christian Story is wholly, profoundly relational—personal in every way. And, accessible to us!
- APP — God does not wish for us only to know things about Him or simply know what He does, God longs for us to actually know Him.
- Paul knows firsthand that when we experience God this way—in real-life relationship, it’s an absolute game-changer!

- Reality is: we become like the people we hang around with.
- Personal encounter with Jesus transforms us. The more we know Jesus, the more we become like Him. Why Paul prays this.
- Why I pray this for family, friends, and neighbours: ‘Jesus, reveal Yourself to them and grow their faith and trust in You.’
- And, with God there is always more. The treasures of God run deep.
- We mustn’t rely solely on past revelation of God in our lives.
- Let us hunger afresh for more and more of God’s presence.

### 3. <Slide> **Prayer for Hope (v.18)**

- V18: “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which [God] has called you.”
- ILL — Hope is such a powerful thing.
  - Why as a coach I urge my players to finish out games—to sink the other team as quickly as possible.
  - The longer an opponent keeps trying hard, believes they can still win, the more nervous I become on the sidelines.
  - Why I’ve been heard to say in halftime speeches when my team’s ahead, ‘Let’s score early in the half to crush their hope!’ Or, when we’re down, ‘Hey team, we can still do this!’
  - Even just a little bit of hope can carry a long ways.
- ‘O Jesus, may our lives be emboldened by the hope only You provide.’
- John’s vision in cf. Revelation 21:5 reads, “[Jesus] who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’” This is the nature of the Christian Story: all things, including us, are being made new by Jesus.
- More than mere wishful thinking, when **the hope only Jesus brings** works its way into our heart, it lifts our mental, emotional, spiritual, relational, and physical health.

### 4. <Slide> **Prayer for God’s Incomparable Power (v.19-23)**

- Paul spends the back half of his prayer calling on God’s power in the strongest terms the language can muster.
- Q: ‘Paul’s over-the-top descriptions of God’s power are meant,’ one Bible scholar says, “to magnify God’s potency. — Klein, p.19
- In addition to the hope God offers, Paul prays the Ephesians also “may know” God’s “**incomparably great power**” for us who believe. (19)

- To back his prayer, he offers two extraordinary proofs of God's power: the resurrection of Christ and, the ascension of Christ to "the heavenly realms." (20)
- God raising Jesus from the dead, conquering humanity's greatest obstacle, proves nothing is impossible for God.
- God exalting Jesus and "placing all things under his feet" (22) displays God's dominion over the universe. Because God is still in control, we need not fear any other person, leader, nation, or power.
- The church is the "body" of Christ and Christ is the "head" meaning Jesus is the Source of the church's life.
- Through Jesus, the infinite power of God is readily available to God's people. And Paul urges all Christ-followers to tap into that power!
- Seems Paul pulls out this bold prayer from his apostolic arsenal because he knows the people of God, and the Christian Story, by very nature, will always fly in the face of the powers that be.

#### **IV. Life Applications**

- Time to 'land the plane' now with a few more life applications. ***What can we learn from Paul's prayer for the church to further shape how we pray?***

##### **A. <Slide> *Knowing Who We're Praying To***

- The effectiveness of our prayers is not dependent on us.
- However, I believe there is a part we do play—cooperating with the Spirit, allowing God to humbly open our eyes to see ourselves for who we really are: sinners in need of Saviour. And, to see God for Who He truly is: loving, yes, but all-powerful too, and in authority over the universe.
- In her book, "*The Way Up Is Down*," author Marlena Graves says,
  - Q: "We have to be in a humble servant's position to experience [God's] power. Only in such a position will we have eyes to see even a bit of that power at work in the world." — MG, p.68
- Problem is: our heightened view of self and consequent reduced view of God, skews our perspective on life, and, becomes a 'recipe' for disordered and chaotic living.
- I believe this is the whole point of Paul's prayer: 'Ephesians, Christ-followers, people of NSAC, **know Who you're praying to.**'

- APP — You've heard of the power of prayer?
- Well, it's not the words we pray, or the earnest with which we pray, or even the faith we muster to back our prayers, but the Object of our prayers, Who we're praying to, that makes prayer truly powerful.
- The God of the Christian Story cares enough to invite you and me into personal relationship with Him—to truly know Him.
- And, it's from this deep place of knowing God that we learn to trust in, cling to, and rely above all else on His "great power"—and, build our lives on it! Know Who you're praying to.

### **B. <Slide> *Calling on God's Power to Fight the Powers***

- Paul, and his Ephesian friends were keenly aware of the battle.
- Located on the Aegean Coast, in what is modern-day Turkey, Ephesus was a powerful commercial port city.
- Because of its geographical location in the middle of the Mediterranean, ancient Ephesus was a hub of human thought and movement.
- Why Paul cf. Acts 19:10 records, Q: Paul taught daily in Ephesus "for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."
- A spiritual melting pot, Ephesus was famous for its well-developed magical practices designed to assist people in manipulating the deities for personal gain. These secret incantations were made available to the general public—for a price.
- Ephesus was also centre of the renowned cult of Artemis, or Diana, who promised fertility to all who worshiped at her massive marble temple.
- People flooded into Ephesus to participate in spiritual practices.
- The economy depended on it. Local artisans crafted votive offerings to sell to worshippers who, in turn, offered them to the gods seeking to gain favour in times of personal anxiety, transition, or need.
- In stark contrast, the God of the Christian Story is not merely a power to be manipulated, appeased, or bought.
- God the Son Jesus is a real person. One can even know Jesus personally—and come to fully rely on His power.
- Paul's teaching incited a riot in Ephesus. You can read about it in Acts 19. For the Christian Story threatened the local economy and challenged the practices and powers of the day.

- <**Slide**> APP — Same's true today. The powers in our culture are far more humanistic than spiritual, however.
- The dominant narratives of our day suggest we are all masters of our own destinies. We can, by our own brilliance, by our successes, by our own achievements make something great of ourselves—all on our own strength. Listen to these deeply-ingrained thoughts of our day:
  - ‘You control your own destiny. Make it happen.’
  - ‘Work hard. Play hard. You deserve it. It’s all yours.’
  - ‘Success will satisfy. Stuff will make you happy.’
  - ‘Do good and you’ll do well.’
- Yet, if we pause and truly take stock of it, life is not nearly as straightforward as we’d like it to be and rarely as smooth as these commonly-accepted ideologies suggest.
- Truth is: none of us, even the most expert among us, can manipulate or control life perfectly—to our desired specifications.
- A profound life-question with which we all must wrestle is this: what will we rely on for strength? Hard work, our expertise, our skills or charisma, our health, money, success, other people?
- On what, or Who, will we pin our hopes, depend on, especially when life gets difficult and messy? Where does our real power come from?
- The Christian Story encourages us to invite Jesus into the command centre—our hearts, to **power our lives**, to impact every decision.
- Jesus is not simply an add-on to a life we still want to fully control.
- That doesn’t work.
- <**Slide**> In our world many powers push against us. And our own strength does not suffice. And I wonder today, is there a situation in your life that God wants you to humbly call upon His power to move in?
- Perhaps you face an antagonistic person or a hostile power ... in your family, your neighbourhood, your school, or workplace that’s challenging you and making your life miserable. And, you’re having a tough time believing God is still in control—or even with you at all.
- Friends of NSAC, I want to remind you today that you are God’s kid!
- And, together, we are God’s people. And this is God’s church. And these truths supersede every thing that unsettles us today: a global pandemic, and any power we are up against!

- ILL — This week a congregant shared a powerful vision with me:
- In her vision, Jesus was before us leading the way. While we, all of us—NSAC, were behind Jesus, on bended knee, linked together ... shepherded, protected, led in the fight by Jesus, and His power.
- Jesus is with us. And He has our back(s).

### C. <*Slide*> ***Holding Onto Jesus, Our Living Hope***

- ILL — I've told this story before. In the winter of 1990, my close friend and teammate was killed in a car crash when he was returning to Bible College for second semester. It was my first brush with tragedy and loss.
- During those dark days, a sign hung at the end of the hallway in our dormitory. It read, "Hope is not a way out, it's a way through."
- I learned that God does not always lift us out of our difficult circumstances—at least in the way or timing we want Him to, but God does promise to walk with us and helps us find a way through them.
- Why, in seasons of recent loss, I've been holding onto cf. Psalm 34:18:
  - Q: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."
- <*Slide*> APP — Under what present darkness do you find yourself today? Perhaps your sense of hope has taken a hit, felt rather scant amidst these long CoVID days. Or maybe you've been going through something really difficult and lost hope ... in people, in humanity, in life in general. Where have you been feeling hopeless—felt like giving up?
- Thankfully the Christian Story offers the antidote to despair.
- Genuine **Christian hope** is two-fold. It assures:
  - 1) You are never alone. Jesus is always in the picture with you!
  - And, it declares, 2) Things will get better. Sure we still live in the broken in-between, but in Christ there is a promise: God is still in charge. And in eternity, God will eradicate sin, darkness, and pain!
  - In cf. John 16:33b, Jesus says, Q: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
  - Not always, but often, in the midst of my pain, I sense the closeness and presence of Jesus right there with me.
  - And the tangible presence of Jesus gives me **hope**—no matter my circumstance. And the power of Jesus gives me hope that this hard thing I'm going through right now is not the end of the story! Amen.