



The Fullness of Him – a Giant Jesus

Ephesians 1:15-23

Near the beginning of many of Paul's letters, we find an assurance of his prayers for the community of believers he is writing to (Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4-7; Phil 1:3-6; Col 1:3-6; 1 Thess 1:2-3; 2 Thess 1:3-4). In each of these cases, he affirms his thankfulness for the work God is doing in his church, providing concrete examples of his reasons to be encouraged. Ephesians is no exception to this rule: in 1:15, 16, Paul writes that, 'I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.'

As Paul goes on to pray for the Ephesian believers, he asks that God would give them a greater discernment about and understanding of the extent of his power, and the radical difference it has made in the world. To fully understand the significance of this prayer, we need to bear in mind the circumstances in which the Ephesian Christians lived. Clinton Arnold comments: 'These believers lived in an environment with many competing claims of spiritual power: the Artemis cult and fifty other gods and goddesses, magical curses and incantations, and other claims of spiritual power. They had every reason to fear, but Paul wants them to have an accurate understanding of the omnipotence of the God they now serve.'¹

Paul goes on to provide further detail on this understanding he longs God to give to the Ephesian Christians:

- **'... the hope to which he has called you'**: the word used here by Paul suggests the idea of expectation and confidence. This is a confidence based on the call of God Paul has written of in Ephesians 1:4, a plan he has lovingly worked on since before the creation of the world.
- **'... the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people...'**: The exact meaning of this phrase has been debated by experts. It could refer to the riches of heaven which God will give to believers, but it's also been suggested that the phrase refers to the way God cherishes the church. There are a number of verses in the Old Testament which refer to the people of Israel as God's inheritance (Deut 9:29; 2 Sam 21:3; 1 Kings 8:51, 53; 2 Kings 21:14; Isa 47:6). Now, Jesus has redeemed (Eph 1:7) a group who are regarded as 'God's own people, to the praise of his glory' (Eph 1:14).
- **'... his incomparably great power for us who believe.'**: This is another moment where Paul uses the most extravagant language to describe the power of God. The word translated as 'incomparably' by the NIV could

¹ Clinton Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 2010, 121

alternatively be translated as 'surpassing,' 'outstanding,' or 'extraordinary.'
This power is available to the "believers" in the church in Ephesus.

The ultimate outworking of this remarkable power of God can be found in the resurrection. Tom Wright notes that, 'For Paul, the greatest display of power the world had ever seen took place when God raised Jesus from the dead.'² The resurrected Jesus is now described as being seated at the right hand of God. This is almost certainly a reference to Psalm 110:1, a verse which was understood by Jews to refer to the Messiah.

Jesus now has an authority over all things, including the church, which is described as 'his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph 1:23). God's reign in heaven and on earth is somehow worked out through the church. As Arnold notes, 'The church accomplishes this through dependence on the one who fills her and by proclaiming the gospel and manifesting the kingdom of God to all in an extensive way.'³

He goes on to comment: '...the church not only receives God's power, but it represents the ongoing presence and ministry of Christ on the earth. God is fulfilling his plan through the church, which takes its direction and receives its nourishment and resources from the exalted Christ. The mission of the church is to fill the world – in every place – with the redemptive message of Jesus Christ. This is in direct continuity with the teaching of the risen Christ when he told his followers to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19).'

1. It's notable that when Paul prays for an increased understanding on the part of the Ephesians he emphasises the need for a revelation and enlightenment which can only come from God. Why do you think some people seem to gain a greater understanding of what God is like over time but other people don't seem to be enlightened in the same way?
2. In Ephesians 1:18 Paul describes the church as God's 'glorious inheritance.' How does that image make you think differently about the church?
3. Clinton Arnold says that the Ephesians lived in, 'an environment with many competing claims of spiritual power.' How would you compare Selsdon to Ephesus? Who do you think is making a claim for spiritual power in our neighbourhood?
4. What difference does it make to you to that Jesus rules over all the powers in our community?
5. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson translates Ephesians 1:23 as follows: 'The church is Christ's body, in which he speaks and acts, by which he fills everything with his presence.' How does this description of the church impact your understanding of the mission of SBC?

² Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, 2002, 15

³ Clinton Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 2010, 120

⁴ Clinton Arnold, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Ephesians*, 2010, 120