

Our Power

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Eric. If you don't know me, I'm one of the guys here on staff at Watermark Church. I spend most of my time with the youth, but our pastor is on sabbatical, so I'm really doing a little bit of everything these days.

And I know we have a lot of guests here today, and I wanted to start out just telling a little bit about myself so that you can know who I am and I'm not some total random stranger up here talking with you today.

And I, when I was a kid, I was all about my grades. I sometimes think that I was born on the wrong continent because I would have fit in perfectly here, but I was sort of the odd one out in America, you know?

And I loved my straight A's. And the thing that I hated more than anything else in all of school was group projects.

Because I wanted my straight A, and I wanted to have power over what my grades were. And when I was in the middle of a group project with three or four people in a group, I only had control over about 25 to 33 percent of what my grade was going to be, and I hated that feeling because I love power to control my own grades.

[1 : 19] In fact, I loved the power to control my own grades so much that I would prefer to just do everyone's share of the work so that I could know I was going to get an A, rather than relax, sit back, and let my teammates do their stuff and maybe get a B.

I love having power in life. And I'm guessing that I'm not unique in that.

I'm guessing that on some level, every single one of us here loves having power. You know, the past few weeks, if you've been around, we've been going through a series about union with Christ. What that means is the Bible says that when we become Christians, God unites us with Jesus in such a way that we as Christians can say, Christ is my life.

And we've talked about how whose you are determines who you are. And who you are shapes what you do. And we've seen how this connection with Christ, how belonging to him, changes us fundamentally on some level of who we are and what we do.

[2 : 28] And how our lives should look as we live out the truth and reality of that relationship with Christ. And last week, we looked at, we called it Christ is my walk.

We said that the way that we live now, the way that we grow closer to God, is shaped by this relationship with Christ. It's not about achievements and milestones and marking out how far we can get.

But it's about a relationship and growing closer in a relationship to God. And today, as we look at this passage, what we're going to see is that Christ is my power.

That I am someone who loves power. But in reality, because of my connection with Christ and my relationship with him, Christ is my power.

Now going back to the concept of power, I think, like I said, I think all of us want power in our lives. And if you think that's not true about you, think about the things that you stress about.

[3 : 34] Because stress, what is stress? It's grasping for power that we know we don't have. I know that I don't have control in this situation. I know that I don't have power to change it.

So I'm going to rack my mind for hours or days, thinking through ways that I can grab that power back and get it for myself. I work with teens. I've been working with teens for about six years. During that time, I have had numerous conversations with parents that have gone something along the lines of, My kid has started to make some really bad decisions.

I, as a parent, love them and see these decisions going in a terrible direction. That's how the conversation starts. The conversation never, ever, ever ends with, And I'm totally fine and relaxed

right now.

No, the conversation is, my kid is making bad decisions. I love them and care about them. And I am freaking out. I'm lying awake in bed at night, thinking through how I can help my kid to make better choices in life.

[4 : 37] I am stressed, Eric. Please help me. Please give me advice, which I always find ironic. Because, you know, I'm closer to the kid's age than to the parent's age most of the time. Right?

The parents are like, please help me. But, what is this stress coming from? It's a feeling that I used to have power over my kid's life to help them move in the right direction and help them make sure that they were turning out right.

And now I feel powerless. And I want to get that power back. Because I know that if I could just have that power back, then my kid would turn out okay. And if you're a parent and you're going through that situation right now, let me guarantee you, you're not alone.

There are plenty of parents around you going through the exact same things. And it's not just parents that do that, obviously. We've got single friends. How many times in your life have you sat down in a conversation with a single friend?

Or been the single friend in this conversation? Who sits down and says, you know, the years just keep going by. And I thought by this age maybe I'd be married or at least be in a serious relationship of some type.

[5 : 54] And I'm not. And I'd like some stability for my future. I'd like to know, like, who I'm going to spend the rest of my life with so I can start to settle down and planning for the future with this person that I love.

And I don't know who that person is. And I don't think I'm anywhere closer to finding that person than I was when I was born, actually. I'm so stressed and worried.

I've signed up for every dating website there is. Most of my monthly income goes to dating website subscriptions. Because I need to find that person.

Because I need to have power to know what my future holds and to have some control over the direction that my future is going. All of us long for power in our lives.

And our natural response is to grasp for it when we know that we don't have it. But ironically, that actually can make the problem worse. Because, like, who wants to date the person who's that desperate?

[7 : 02] Right? Or here's something very, very interesting that I learned this week. We were doing a parenting class at the church. And they said that a survey was done of parents and of teens.

Or kids. Kids and teens. And they asked both sets of people the same question. They asked the parents, What do you think your kids want from you more than anything else?

And the most popular answer among parents was, My kids want me to spend more time with them. It's a pretty standard response. They asked the exact same question to the kids.

The most popular answer among the kids was, I wish my parents would stress less and relax more. So parents, by stressing about wanting to spend more time with their kids, are actually pushing their kids away. Because the kids are like, Mom, Dad, relax. Like, if you could just enjoy the time that we get to spend together, it would make it so much better.

[8 : 09] And so this stress, this grasping for the power that we know we can't have, doesn't help the situation. It doesn't fix the situation. It actually sometimes can make the situation worse.

And what we see here in this passage today, is that the Apostle Paul, he's writing a letter to his friends at a church in a city called Ephesus, and he is praying for them to have power.

But the power that he wants them to have is fundamentally different from any power, any worldly power that we have ever seen.

You know, with worldly power, we grasp for it. He prays for them to have God's power that is given to them as a gift. If we think about the characteristics of power in our world, what people in power do, how we respond to power.

People in power grasp for it and hold on to it with all their might. They manipulate others to get the power and to hold on to it so that they can keep it as long as they want.

[9 : 17] They use that power to get other people to do what they want. When we have people around us who are in power, we generally don't respond positively to those people.

Or maybe that's just me. But I think that I'm semi-normal in that one, right? Hopefully. But when we see power being used to control us, we don't like that.

We respond negatively and we're like, I want to be free. I want to be out from under this other person's power over me. Maybe I need to get that power for myself so that I can use that over other people and it's not other people using it over me.

And yet what we see when Paul talks about God's power in this passage is that it's not something that we grasp for and hold on to so that other people can't have it.

But he's actually saying, no, I want you guys to have this power. I want it to be something that is a part of your life.

[10:23] And the reason for that is because it is a fundamentally different type of power than any worldly power that we ever come into contact with. Rather than being something that we use to puff ourselves up, to enhance our status, it's instead something that enables us to love others.

And this makes sense, this contrast, in light of the gospel. Alfie shared earlier a little bit about the gospel. The gospel is a word that just means good news. And basically what we believe this good news is is that there is a God who created the universe.

He created it good. He created it amazing. He created humanity in his image, in this universe, to live in a perfect relationship with him, this all-powerful God reaching out to us, wanting us to know him.

And the bad news is that each of us rebelled against him and his perfect rule in our lives. Each of us said, no, God, I don't trust you. I don't think that you know what's best for my life.

I don't think that you have my best interest in mind. I know how to live life better than you do. Let me take care of myself. You stay away. And in effect, we say that again and again and again.

[11:46] Every time that we lie, every time that we take something that's not ours, every time that we hate the people around us, every time that we as kids disobeyed our parents, that's us saying, God, stay away.

I know how to live life better than you do. And the Bible says that what we're doing in those moments is the equivalent of cosmic treason. And just like earthly treason, it deserves death.

And yet God, the all-powerful creator, the offended one in this situation, looks down at us and says, I still love you.

Although you've turned away from me, although you've rebelled against me, I still want a relationship with you. And I want you to know how much I love you.

And so he sends his son Jesus to earth as fully God and fully man. Jesus lives the perfect life that none of us was ever able to live.

[12:49] And then he gets murdered on a cross. But in that moment, God's divine justice against all of our rebellion is satisfied.

And we are now free to be forgiven for our rebellion. We're free to be seen by God not as enemies anymore, but as children, sons and daughters of the king of the universe.

And he invites us to now, although we have rebelled against him, to be in this new relationship with him. God, the all-powerful one, rather than using his power to crush us, uses his power to lovingly pursue us, to lovingly say, I still want a relationship with you.

And I want it so badly that I am going to lay down my life to make that relationship possible. And when we look at this passage in Ephesians that the guys just read, we see that that power is what Paul is praying for these Christians to have in their lives.

Right? This gospel, this good news, that's why we're celebrating baptism today, like Althea said, because we have, I think it's eight people here that have trusted in this good news and said, I want to live in this new relationship with Jesus.

[14:26] It's not some magical thing that happens when they go under the water, that, you know, that levitation moment that Dan was talking about. That's not what this is. But it's a celebration of the fact that they recognize, I was a rebel, and now I'm accepted as a child.

I was alienated, and now I am loved. God in his power reached down and rescued me. How wonderful and amazing is that. And it's not just that, that we get to experience that love, but God fills his, his power into our lives so that we can go out and show that love to others.

And if you're here today and you have never heard this gospel, or maybe you've heard it but not believed it, and you want to know more about it, please find someone after the service, me or one of the other people around you, and talk to us about it because we would love to share with you more about it and tell you about how you can have a relationship with the God of the universe and what that means in your life.

But if God's power enables us to love like him, it might be helpful to know what God's love is like, right?

Because if we're expected to have that kind of love for others, it's helpful to know the way that he loves us. So if you look at the passage in your bulletins or in your Bibles, starting in the second half of verse 17, he says that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[16:19] Now he starts out here saying rooted and grounded in love. That's mixed metaphors. He's mixing agriculture and architecture, right? And he's talking about foundations, rooting.

Like when you look outside, you see the trees. Each of them has a root system that holds them in place in the ground so that when the wind and the storms come, they don't get blown over. Or if you think about this building, there's a foundation in the building.

It's grounded so that when things happen and there's wind outside or there's storms or typhoon number 10s, the building doesn't collapse. And he's saying, what Paul is saying is that God's love is supposed to act as a foundation in our lives.

It's supposed to be the thing that anchors us. that when we understand God's love, it will hold us firm through the storms of life.

He goes on and he says that God's love surpasses knowledge. He wants us to know God's love that surpasses knowledge. Now think about that.

[17:22] How do you know something that surpasses knowledge? I'm going to throw something out here. You can let me know after the service if you disagree with it.

But I think the way that you know something that surpasses knowledge is through experiential knowledge. And here's what I mean. Think of marriage. Imagine that we got a single guy, maybe Alfie, wherever he is, and we brought him up here on stage and we had him stand right here and we said, here is your marriage.

Mission. You have 20 years. In those 20 years, you're going to read every marriage book that has ever been written. And not just books on how to be married, but also biographies of people and reading about their marriages, novels where people are married and seeing how it's portrayed in fictional accounts.

In those 20 years, you're going to take one full year where every day you spend eight hours talking to the top marriage counselors in the world, learning all the wisdom and knowledge that they have about marriage.

And over those 20 years, every night, you're going to have dinner with a different married couple and observe their marriage. And in 20 years, you're going to come back here and report to us what you've learned.

[18:40] Now, at the end of 20 years, we bring Alfie back up here on this stage. He's 20 years older, 20 years wiser. He could probably write some of the best marriage books that have ever been written with his comprehensive knowledge about marriage.

But does he truly know what it means to be married? No. Because marriage is an experiential knowledge. There are things that, if Alfie got married on that 20th anniversary of this task and came back one year later, he would report to us, guys, I've learned so many things in the past year that I didn't even know were possible in the previous 20 years.

Because there's an experiential knowledge that comes in being married that no amount of book knowledge, no amount of learning outside of the experience can tell you.

Or, if you aren't married and that analogy is sort of fuzzy in your mind, think about apple pie. Imagine that you love food, but you have never had apple pie.

And I come up to you and I say, hey, you need to experience apple pie. I'm going to give you a recipe so that you can make it. And you memorize the recipe. And you start reading articles online about what makes apple pie so amazing and great.

[20:06] And you research the different restaurants in the world that have the greatest apple pie available. And you talk with your friends about why they love apple pie.

you, in some sense, could be considered an apple pie expert. But, when you come into a conversation with me about apple pie and you start explaining to me all these wonderful things about apple pie, it's very easy, very quick, to tell that you don't truly know apple pie because you've never tried it.

And all I have to do is ask, so how do you like apple pie? And all of your learning, all of your knowledge falls flat because until you've experienced it, you don't truly know what it's like. And it's the same way with God's love. That's what Paul is saying right here. We can read the Bible every single day. In fact, we can memorize the Bible. We can talk with people about their experiences of God's love.

But until we experience this love in our own lives, until we experience this forgiveness, this transformation, this new relationship with God that is offered to us through the gospel, we can't truly know God's love.

[21 : 22] The good news is that that knowledge is available to us, that God wants to give us that experiential knowledge of his love. He wants to come into our lives and transform us.

In talking about God's love here, Paul, he almost seems at a loss for words. He's like, this love is so overwhelming, so amazing, I can't quite describe it.

I can't quite fit it into my words. He says that he wants them to have strength to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of God's love.

It's four-dimensional. It's huge. We can't, like, fit its scope into our descriptions. I think, you know, even thinking back in my life, I find it so easy to condense God's love.

I think, oh, you know, God probably started loving me around the time that I trusted in him and his love for me is bigger on the days where I'm more aware of his presence in my life and lower on the days where I'm not as aware of that or maybe where I'm less obedient of him.

[22 : 30] But that's not true. Think about it. How was God able to forgive me? How was I able to trust in him in the first place?

Because 2,000 years before I was born, God, in an amazing act of love for me, sent Jesus to the earth to die for me.

So God's love for me did not begin the day that I trusted in him. No, it's at least 2,000 years before that. But it actually didn't start then either. Because if you look back in the Old Testament, the early part of the Bible, you see as soon as humanity rebels against God, promises that he would send a savior.

So we have to rewind thousands of years more if we want a glimpse of where God's love for us began. But even that doesn't quite get the full scope of the story.

No. If we look in the book of Revelation, it tells us that God's plan from before he created the universe involved sending Jesus to rescue me.

[23 : 46] And not just me, but all of us. You can insert your name there. that God's love for you spans not from the day that you were born or the day that you trust in him or the day that you get baptized, but from before the foundation of the world.

God's love for us has a scope and a breadth that is beyond our ability to comprehend. And it's not just a love that starts then and goes up until the day that we die, but it's a love that continues for us into eternity because the Bible says that in eternity God and his people will live together forever. God's love is beyond our ability to comprehend and it's not just that he gives to us, but he gives to us his love and himself.

Paul prays at the end of this passage that they would be filled, or at the end of verse 19, that they would be filled with all the fullness of God. saying, I want you to have God's power.

I want you to understand what this new life looks like, what this life in union with Christ is. I want you to be able to say that Christ truly is my power.

[25 : 07] As God fills you with himself, not with some leftovers, not with some secondhand goods, but with himself. himself. So what does that look like in our lives as we go from here and try and live that out this week?

Well, verse 20 and 21 says, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. He says that God is able to do far more abundantly than anything we ask or think. Now take a second. Think of the most amazing thing that you can think of God doing or that you could imagine yourself asking God to do.

You got it? No? Not yet? How about now? Yeah? Okay. So what Paul is saying is that God is able to do far more abundantly more than whatever that thing you just thought of.

And I think for a lot of people they read this verse and they're like oh yes God's going to do amazing things miracles healings and yes God can do those things but when you take this passage and you just look at it that way you're missing a very important part of the verse it says able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work in us what Paul is saying is that God wants to use us powerfully in the world to reach people for him he puts his power in us so we can pour that power back out into others and it's not again it's not that worldly power that grasps and holds on to control but it's his power that enables us to sacrificially love others because because we have been sacrificially loved first I think we have some flawed ideas when it comes to power

[27:17] I have a couple pictures up here on screen we've got a Ferrari 488 GTB nice powerful car and a Tesla Model S which we see all over on the streets of Hong Kong I want you to take a second we're going to listen to the sounds that each of these cars make on the road and then I'm going to have us guess which one is more powerful so first up is the Ferrari 488 GTB mmm and then next up is the Tesla Model S alright now who thinks that the Ferrari is the more powerful car of these two we got a few votes yeah who thinks that the

Tesla is the more powerful car of these two now obviously I set that up as a trick question so you're anticipating it but who would have guessed the Ferrari if you didn't know that this was a trick question we can be honest here yeah alright so the Ferrari what was the horsepower on the Ferrari it was Jackie can you pull up the Ferrari again sorry the Ferrari had 660 horsepower the Tesla Model S comes in at 762 horsepower a full hundred horsepower more than the Ferrari 488 GTB but if we looked at it and listened to it according to our standard expectations of power we would clearly say the Ferrari is the more powerful vehicle of these two but when we look underneath the hood and we see what the true power is the Tesla Model S blows the Ferrari out of the water with a hundred extra horsepower and what I want us to see from this is a lot of times in life what we think of as power what we think of maybe what comes to our minds when I say that God wants us to live with his power is actually just a lot of noise and show that true power isn't about having the loudest noise about looking the coolest and sleekest and sportiest but it's actually about what's under the hood think about this each of us has been to school each of us has been in that situation where we've seen a kid bullying another kid maybe we were that bully maybe we were that other kid maybe we were just innocent bystanders but who has more power the bully who picks on other kids in the class or the kid in the class who's willing to go up and befriend the kid that the bully picks on the bully's got the show the bully controls what other people do through his strength and his power but I think in reality what's happening right there is the bully is trying to use power over others to mask the fact that he doesn't have power over himself and the kid who befriends the bullied kid understands something fundamentally about his worth and his strength that he doesn't need to be defined by others and he's able to love sacrificially even if it means that he's going to start getting picked on because of that choice our world has pictures of what it looks like for us to be powerful and that God's picture of true power is radically different than the world's picture of power and it's only possible for us to live with this type of power when we are able to say

Christ is my power as we go out of here today each of us is going to have situations that we find ourselves in in this next week I think most of us will either go to school or to work at some point this week I want to ask you what does it look like for you to live with this type of power of power this week at your school or workplace I want to give you one quick example of what that could look like there's a pastor in New York named Tim Keller he tells the story of a girl who got a job I think it was for a TV company she was a pretty entry-level employee and she made a huge mistake one day that should have cost her her job her boss came up to her and he said don't worry your job is safe I've talked to my superiors I've told them that your mistake was my fault I told them that you made the mistake because I failed to train you properly and asked them to give you another chance he said I know that this mistake would cost you your job because you're new here and you're entry-level but with my years of service at the company and my higher level of seniority I can take the hit for this without it costing either of us our jobs they'll just put me on thin ice with my superiors for a little bit but your job is safe she was sort of confused about this whole interaction because nobody does that ever, right?

and so she came back to her boss and she said why? I don't get it this is an every man for himself world why would you take the hit for my mistake and give me another chance?

[33 : 14] what if I just mess up again? won't that make you look twice as bad? and the boss told her I worship a God who took the fall for me when I was a rebel when I was a sinner he laid down his life to rescue me and I made a commitment early on that when I was able to use my power to help others that I wanted to be intentional about doing that and so your job is safe today because God loved me so now I am free to use my power to love you needless to say that girl was like okay where do you go to church?

because I'm coming with you on Sunday right? but that's the effect that this power has you know worldly power pushes people away and with godly power when we use God's power to love others it's attractive it draws them in it makes them see I want something like that that I want to know and understand how I can live with that power in my life because it's a transformative power and it's attractive rather than the grasping for power that pushes people away God's power is one that draws people in that's beautiful to people around us and that helps them to see how amazing and wonderful our God's love is and guys I'm not saying this so that you can go out and be like okay what do I need to do?

how can I improve myself this week? that's not what this is about it's about a transformation in our lives that only happens through God but one that when it happens allows us to say Christ is my power and to live with Christ as our true power I hope that that's something that each of us is able to do and experience this week let's pray Father we thank you for your love for us we thank you for your use of power and how you used it not to strengthen your stronghold over us when we were rebels and to crush us but rather you used it to rescue us God I thank you that you are a God who gives us your power and calls us into that story and lets us be people who who are part of that process of pointing others towards you I pray that each of us would be faithful this week at doing that that we would show the world around us how wonderful and amazing of a God you are and that lives would be transformed through that process and in Jesus name
Amen