

Having Power Through God

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[0 : 00] Good to be with you again this morning and greetings from the Christians who meet in Fairview Chapel, not too far from here. One of the great dangers I think sometimes of being a Christian is you think you have all the answers to life and you can carry on virtually on your own and you don't give it a minute's thought until all of a sudden you kind of stuff up big time and you get something wrong in life and it's at times like that that you realize actually you can't make anything of the Christian life unless you really throw yourself on the mercy of God and the power of his Holy Spirit and I really enjoy this week reading again the passage you've given me. It's a great passage of scripture, one with a lot of depth to it but one that's really practical and helpful. I was saying to Graham earlier he was very jealous that I'd been given that passage but I said to him not to feel too bad because I'm through in Hamilton tonight speaking and they've given me

Genesis 20 to speak on. Now I know from your looks you're thinking what's happened in Genesis 20? Well what you'll find is a very intriguing story of Abraham meeting up with a king called Abimelech and the central theme of the story is he passes his wife off as his sister. I've got to talk for 40 minutes on that tonight so anybody who has any suggestions it's not too late there's still a gap in my in my sermon I'm going to phone the chairman up this afternoon and suggest he picks a couple of really long hymns to fill in the gaps but so our passage this morning very much more straightforward and powerful for us. I was really encouraged too when Peter was up earlier flying helicopter because he talked also about how did he say power like that there you go um and he referred to that period in uh the experience of the disciples when they'd seen the lord die they'd seen him buried they'd experienced him alive and then he began for 40 days to teach them and he taught them just two things in these 40 days isn't that incredible the last 40 days perhaps that he would be with his disciples on earth he spent two days teaching them firstly about the kingdom of god and that's really important because that kingdom has started we're living in it and it's stretching out in front of us and the second thing he taught them was about the holy spirit about god's power and i want as we go through our passage this morning to think about god's spirit's power and how it helps us to live as christians for him today so just to get the context before we turn to the passage we're going to read acts 1 verse 8 you don't need to turn to this you'll know this verse you will receive power when the holy spirit comes on you what a promise and you will be my witnesses in jerusalem and in all judea samaria tanzania the ends of the earth what a challenge so let's turn then to ephesians 3 i have no fancy power point for you so you just have to listen to me i'm afraid nothing for you to look at on the screen at least i hope not there you go nothing on the screen for you to look at just me and uh god's god's word let's read ephesians 3 um let me start at verse 13 um i did have a title actually give me a title the manifold wisdom of god i'm not sure if i'll bring that in or not other than to say here is the manifold wisdom of god okay so um there you have title dealt with verse 13 of ephesians 3 i ask you therefore paul writes not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you which are your glory for this reason i kneel before the father from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name i pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being so that christ may dwell in your hearts through faith and i pray that you being rooted and established in love may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide long high deep is the love of christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of god now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or

imagine according to his power that is at work within us to him be glory in the church and in christ throughout all generations forever and ever amen power well in a few weeks time there'll be a few people who have been hoping for power either happy they've got it or disappointed they've missed out on it i guess we too will be either happy they've got it or disappointed they've missed out on it i do hope by the way that you'll be voting the right way by which I mean praying there's no political comment in that at all but we need to pray for things like elections it's important to us my mother-in-law has been complaining lamentably for weeks now about power different kind of power she's been complaining about Scottish power anybody here from Scottish power oh there's one person no no she's denying it she just resigned my mother-in-law's had trouble with her boiler and every time she phones there's a new drama and it's all the fault of Scottish power well that's not the kind of power that the apostle Paul here is talking about power is a has been an important word for Paul he's been talking about power in this letter he's written he's talked about God's incomparably great power kind of hard to imagine and get your head round doesn't it God's incomparably great power that raised Jesus from the dead Paul's been talking about it he's just talked also earlier on in this chapter about how God's power is actually at work in our hearts in the hearts of these Ephesians in your heart and mind if we know the Lord Jesus isn't that incredible God's power right now today is at work in your heart and in mine we kind of forget that don't we Paul's prayer comes out of a sense i think that these

Christians he was writing to had got a bit discouraged with life particularly maybe about what was happening to Paul that they'd heard about his suffering maybe their own and it was getting them down that kind of happens to us as Christians doesn't it at times we get down we get discouraged living for Jesus today is sometimes quite hard to do especially when we know in our hearts we've let God down or perhaps actually we feel sometimes he's let us down now of course that's not the case but doesn't stop us feeling that way sometimes doesn't it so Paul's prayer here makes the point that actually discouragement ought not to be what we should feel as Christians because God has given us his power to live for him and that power as we heard earlier of course is the the presence of his Holy Spirit in our hearts and in our lives he enters our hearts of course when we we give our lives over to the Lord

Jesus Christ he's given to us his energy if you like his presence and that spirit's purpose is of course to continue day by day to help us understand more and more of God and to reveal more and more of the Lord Jesus both to us and also to help us to reveal it to others now our world of course has totally the wrong idea about power we often see it as something rather negative or overbearing we don't like to think of something or someone who has power over us but when the New Testament talks about power it's talking about the tremendous resources of God available to you and I to get things done for God the English language has great many origins and the word dynamite people say has come from this

[9 : 42] Greek word so we immediately think God's power is something that goes bang there I've woken you up and blows things up and destroys things well of course that's not the idea at all is it God gives us his power to enable us to live for him and to do what he wants us to do what he has asked us to do what he has commanded us to do and actually just to help us sometimes day by day live for Jesus and so as Paul thinks about these slightly discouraged Christians he prays that the power of God's Holy Spirit would be their very real experience he wants them living beyond their expectation as I thought about that I did wonder whether our churches today maybe you as an individual need a fresh realization of that God is at work in your life his power is here in this place do we need that fresh realization I guess before we are too quick to say yes we need to ask ourselves why is there something that's stopping God's power either working through us or or working through the church is there something that's that's just putting a big dampener on how God works is it that we've not left him any room in our lives to work for you know our lives are so full of other things that are far more important than God well we've kind of squeezed them out maybe that's the case well as we'll see in a moment Paul will give us some really important reasons for seeking fresh wind fresh power as as the American pastor Jim

Simbala called it in his book and there's only one real purpose for God's power you know Paul described it in verse 21 as so there would be glory in his church Jesus said you'll get this power so that you will be my witnesses that's why we have God's power oh it's nice to know it's there but it's not so that we can go around healing people unless you are of course a very talented doctor in which case God's giving you some gifts there but it's not really for these fantastic experiences great though they might be you have God's spirit in you so that you can live for Jesus and when you live for Jesus you will be his witnesses day in and day out it is isn't it an incredible and humbling thought that the Holy Spirit is the enabling power behind the witness of the church in the world he is the ability given to Christians for the completion of the great commission of world evangelization and we've heard a bit about it that's a huge relief it's not down to me and it's not down to you oh we can do things in the power of God but ultimately it's God's spirit so if we want to claim this power for ourselves then we better be completely behind the strategy of heaven which is to win men and women for Christ let's look at this prayer let's look at verses 16 and 17 as Paul prays here for the power to strengthen the inner man I pray he says that out of his glorious riches out of God's glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith now our culture of course is more concerned with the outer man gym members keeping fit anti-aging creams plastic surgery whatever it might be we've got to look good on the inside it doesn't actually matter if inside we're rotting away as long as on the outside we're looking good but that's not God's ambition for us his ambition is that inner man the eternal bit of us gets stronger and stronger and stronger day by day paradoxically of course as Christians on the outside we may look terribly weak and rather vulnerable as was in the case of Paul ill persecuted beaten imprisoned and yet inside he was utterly lion hearted and he would write to the

Corinthian church we do not lose heart he says outwardly we are wasting away and yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day why is it the priority of God that the inner man is strengthened well says Paul so that Christ may dwell without question I think the most remarkable fact of scripture is that Jesus Christ himself through the presence of the Holy Spirit will actually enter a heart and life settle down and be at home there that's the sense of what Paul means because to dwell you know is not what you do as a lodger or what you do as you rent a room that's not the sense of what Paul means here what he means is Jesus Christ has come into a life and he's there to stay that heart is his in John 14 we find Jesus talking to his disciples about homes they had all left their homes for him he was saying to him that he would shortly leave them and prepare a home for them meanwhile their hearts would be the home for his spirit oh they find that really hard to understand until at Pentecost and then they felt that presence didn't they a tremendous wind the flames of fire so demonstrable symbols

God was there the spirit had come home Robert Munger a Presbyterian minister from a few decades ago he wrote a wonderful little book entitled My Heart Christ's Home anybody read it anybody brave enough to put their hand because you're probably over 50 nobody has well there you go My Heart Christ's Home in it he pictured his life as various rooms so he said Christ came in and I showed him into the library it was his mind the control room of the house and he writes in his book of his embarrassment embarrassment at Jesus viewing the books in his library the magazines on his coffee table the films in his collection and he writes

I turned to him and said Master I know this room needs a radical alteration will you help make it what it ought to be then he says we went to the dining room the place where our appetites are met and it dawned on Robert Munger of all the things he had fed himself on that were not ultimately satisfying and in some cases were harmful and how much he knew then he needed to feed himself on Jesus the living room where he relaxed put his feet up he realized how much time he spent relaxed with his feet up and how much time he should have spent in prayer and then he talks most challengingly of all of the closet under the stairs the room is locked it's dark and it's where he said he put things from his past life that he found hard to give up and so he'd locked them away and he writes in his book how the Lord came to the room and asked for the key and Robert Munger says you can't go in there Lord and the Saviour is saying to him but I need to it needs cleaned out and Munger says at that point he knew he didn't just need to open up he need to give the title deeds of the house to the Saviour do you see the point the inner man is where the Lord Jesus comes and dwells and if he's going to come and he's going to dwell he's going to own and we need to give it all to him there's nothing in there that we can keep hidden away that he doesn't deal with how much therefore we need the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen that inner man to ensure that our hearts are homes that Jesus will be at rest in and that we will be at peace knowing his presence the power to strengthen the inner man then verses 17 to 19

[19 : 31] Paul talks about the power to love with that lovely video at the beginning it was really clever Paul here wants us to know something that is essentially unknowable the amazing quality and dimensions of the Saviour's love we have such a superficial and small view of love even when we grasp what the Bible says of it so Paul gives us a couple of metaphors to help us understand what grasping it really means one is botanical we've got to be rooted something is going to grow really strong I'm not a gardener I prefer concrete but there you go but if something's going to grow it needs good roots apparently and he gives an architectural here as well he talks about something that's grounded that has strong foundations you want a big building like this I guess it has really strong foundations you see when the rubber hits the road of our Christian life or our church life it's how well rooted we are how well grounded we are in the love of God that will help us and Paul gives us these limitless dimensions of height and width and depth

I wanted to break into that chorus Jesus love is very wonderful but I won't I will empty the place instantly but you get the point don't you and the reality is of course you can get really low in life you can feel as though you've committed the most heinous of sins you can feel as though your life has got just rock bottom and below rock bottom and do you know what the love of God in Christ is there for you or you can have the most spiritual high you've ever had the greatest experience you've ever had of Christ do you know what there's always more there's always more John talks about Jesus saying to his disciples I want to show you the full extent of my love and he he did it by you know by washing smelly feet but as a picture of of what he would do on the cross with arms outstretched pinned to a wooden cross that's the extent of the love of the

Lord Jesus Christ I don't know about you but do you know sometimes I'm just utterly speechless at that that you know transcendent sense of something that you really want to grasp and yet it's unknowable it's too vast can't understand it can't get a head around it but you know when Christ comes in and dominates your life the one obvious characteristic that will be shown will be love and just in case we don't understand what kind of love Paul is describing and why we need the spirit to empower us John would say this is how we know what love is Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our life for our brothers but did you notice something important there in verse 18 he says we have power he says but together with all the saints there's something here you see about God's power that that isn't individualistic at all it's communal it needs all of us to know and to understand God's love you can't do it on your own we need each other the person to sit side needs to tell you what God's love has meant to them this week because even if you felt in a cold and difficult place they can come and they can warm your heart they might be able to demonstrate it to you in some way you see that's why church is really important for Christians you think that's a terribly obvious thing to say but do you know I get terribly fed up with some folks at you don't tell them that but do you know they say to me I said to him I didn't see you last Sunday no I was quite busy oh that's funny I always thought

Sunday was a day of rest I was resting they said I had a busy week do you know I get cross I know you shouldn't but that's a daft way to go on God has given us this vehicle that we call church but he's given us it as a community we need to be here there's no point sitting in your living room on your own relaxing because you won't get any sense of the love of God in Christ that's really meaningful there or you might get a wee bit of it but who wants a wee bit of anything would you not rather have it all John Stott wrote do you know it takes the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God because as isolated Christians we can only ever know some of it oh and by the way of course it's crucial to our witness isn't it by this shall all men know that you are my disciples that you have love for each other

I hope Bellevue will listen to the tape I don't suppose they will they're probably glad to be shot of me for a day here's the last point verses 20 to 21 it's a wee doxology at the end of Paul's prayer I don't know what your prayers end up like mine usually end up a kind of confusion of words and I thought I better get on I'm going to work Paul has time to kind of give us this wonderful doxology that really is all about a power to do so we thought about a power to strengthen our inner man we thought about a power to love here's a power to do because the heart of Paul's prayer is not that we know something but that we do something we serve here a God of no limits now maybe you're sitting there and you're thinking you know what I'd be really happy if

[26 : 35] I could just accomplish the things I know about the things I've been praying about the things I've been thinking about here's Paul telling me about things I haven't even imagined about he wants us to do but you see the point it's not about us it's not about you it's not about me it's not about what we can do because you know what we can do now that means nothing to our Tanzanian friends we can do nothing on our own anything we do for Christ is done in his power at work in us and someone once said you know what would you attempt for God if you knew you couldn't fail if you just knew it wouldn't work what would you do maybe you'd go off to Tanzania maybe you'd just talk to your neighbour about the

Lord maybe this morning you'd open your heart up to the Lord Jesus Christ and you could say come in come in I think too easily we allow ourselves to doubt and limit the power of God to accomplish all that he wants to do through you and through me we have a God of no limits again John Stott says he is able to do more than we can ask or think or imagine for his expectations are higher than ours and he does not give his grace in calculated measures well is Christ at home in your heart have you made that commitment maybe you've tried you know maybe you've prayed that the

God we thank you for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ we thank you for the way he came and he lived and he identified with us as human beings we thank you for the fact that he died that he took my sins on Calvary he dealt with him we thank you that he rose and that now he is ascended in heaven he's at your right hand and father we thank you that we are not alone he hasn't left us that in our hearts we have your spirit father we claim him we own him we ask for him to come and to anoint us yes but to live within us we turn over our hearts and lives to him as individuals this morning yes but also corporately as fellowships whether here at Bruntsfield or at Bellevue or any of the other churches in Edinburgh father may they be spirit filled and spirit empowered places of worship that this city this land might be claimed again for

[32:12] Amen