

THE BIG PICTURE

Text: Ephesians 1:19b-23

Reading: Psalm 72, Ephesians 1:1-23

Belgic Confession Art 27

Theme: God's power is at work in the world through the risen and exalted Lord Jesus for the benefit of the church.

Purpose: To encourage you with a picture of God's great power at work in Jesus our risen Lord for the church.

Some of you here today are "big picture" people and others of you are detail people.

Some of you can stand back and get a good perspective on your own life, on your family situation, on your work.

Others of you find it hard to see the broad scope of what is going on, but you are great at working out the details of family life and of work; other people have the big ideas but you can put legs on them!

In the church we need both types of people. We need people who can dream big dreams and see the overall framework of what needs to be done, and we need others who can apply these large scale ideas and make them work, who can put all this into action.

The Bible gives us both the big picture of what God is doing in and with the church and it also gives us detail about how the church is to be ordered, administered and run. This passage gives us the big picture of the church. Other passages in the Bible address the detail of church life.

We need the big picture because we often lose sight of who we are and what God is doing in the world and in the church. We often get too focused on my little patch, on my small corner, on what I am doing.

That can cause us to become discouraged, especially if things aren't going so well in my little corner. So at times it is helpful to stand back and take in the full scope of God's great power at work in Christ our Lord. This will encourage us in the present and give us confidence for the future.

This is what we will do today – we'll survey the big picture of what God is doing in Christ in the world and in the church.

Paul began this letter by praising God for all the spiritual blessings he has given us in Christ. In the Greek text verses 3-14 are one long sentence; Paul got carried away as he considered all the wonderful things God has done for us!

After that, as he often did in his letters, he assured them that **he prayed for them** and that he often thanked the Lord for them. He also explained the *content* of his prayers for them. Among other things he asked that they might know God's "incomparably great power for us who believe." That power is seen supremely in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We will take a close look at:

1. Christ's resurrection and reign
2. Christ's rule for the church

1. HIS RESURRECTION AND REIGN

- a. Paul cites the **resurrection of Jesus** as the supreme evidence of the power of God.

In recent years medical specialists and surgeons have made huge advances in medicine and surgery; they are able to make people more comfortable in sickness and to prolong life. But surgeons cannot prevent people from dying and they cannot raise the dead. Only God can create life and re-create it.

In the 24 hours before his death Jesus had been whipped, beaten, crucified, and then pierced with a spear. He was dead and then buried, as we confess regularly in the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds.

God demonstrated his power by raising him from the dead. He caused his heart to start beating, filled his lungs with air, his veins with blood; he gave warmth to his cold body and strength to his stiff muscles. He gave him life!

Paul prayed that we might know this power of God at work *in us*! In the past God exercised his power in his Son, but today he is doing that in you and me – in all who believe in him.

We certainly need to know that power today! We are often discouraged about our sin, we struggle with our doubts, we are paralyzed by our fears. We don't feel strong but weak; we don't feel courageous but rather fearful. Yet God's incomparably great power is available for us who believe.

Each one of us needs to trust in God's great power for our own situation and circumstances.

b. By his power God not only raised Jesus from the dead but also “**seated him at his right hand** in the heavenly realms...” (v 20)

To be seated at someone's right hand was to be given a position of honour and authority. Think of a wedding where the bridesmaids and the groomsmen are often seated at the bridal table in positions of honour.

Or think of how you might describe someone as “my right hand man”.

Jesus is seated in heaven at God's right hand.

He took that position when he ascended into heaven 40 days after his resurrection.

c. He is there ruling **over all powers**. He is “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given...” (vs 21).

Jesus is ruling over *every spiritual power* and force in the universe, including the angels. The good angels are his messengers and agents to do his will; and the evil angels are subject to his supreme authority. Think of the gospel stories where even the demons had to obey him.

Jesus is also ruling over *all the human kingdoms* of the world. He has authority over the president of the USA and over the Prime Minister of NZ. He is Lord of the United Nations, and of China and India.

He is far above “every title that can be given.” He is supreme, sovereign and absolute.

d. He is also ruling **over all time**, “not only in the present age but also in the one to come.” (v 21b)

The present age is this age that runs from creation through to the second coming of Christ.

The age to come looks ahead to the return of the Lord Jesus, to the new heaven and the new earth, to the glory and perfection of heaven.

This means that Jesus is ruler over all of time and history - over the past, the present and the future.

e. This is **the big picture** of what God is doing in and through his Son. Jesus is Lord and he has everything in his hands; everything and everyone is under his control; nothing is outside of the scope of his reign, and nothing in the world happens by chance. He is Lord of all!

It is this big picture view of Christ's reign that has prompted many Christians to get involved in many areas of society, including politics. We want to see Christians in parliament, in the cabinet, as prime minister, as the attorney general, as the governor general. We want to see Christian serving as lawyers and judges and police officers. We want Christians to extend and promote the good rule of Christ over this nation. “God defend New Zealand” – this is our national anthem and our prayer for our nation!

This view of Christ's rule over all things has also prompted us to establish Christian Schools, and Reformed believers have often led the way in this endeavour.

We believe that Jesus is Lord of history, maths, biology, English, and physics. Everything was created through him and for him. We want our children to have a Christian world and life view, to have the mind of Christ, to know that "This is my Father's world".

This is why Christian parents teach their children at home or send them to a Christian school, despite that extra financial cost and the extra travel, because we want our children to know that Jesus is Lord. We want them to apply this in their lives and families and careers.

In the same way you need to apply the rule and reign of Jesus to your home and family, to your study and work, to your sport and recreation, to your friendships and your marriage.

Jesus has been raised to reign over the entire world as Lord.

2. He rules over everything **FOR THE CHURCH.**

In verse 22 we read, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...."

This was prophesied in Psalm 110:1, "The LORD says to my Lord; 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'."

a. Jesus is the **head over everything.**

Paul has already used this word in this chapter in verse 10: God's purpose is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ."

At that time when a column of numbers was added up the total would be placed at the top of the column. The total was the *sum* or the *head* of everything else. This is the word used here. Jesus is the sum total of all things, everything adds up in him. He is over all things. He leads and guides all that happens in the world. He is doing that by the power of his word and Spirit.

b. He is doing this **for the church**, that is, for the benefit of the church, for her welfare, for her good.

This is a staggering thought: all the authority and power and might of Jesus is directed towards us and to our well-being. We, as the church, are the object of his interest and the goal of his work. Everything Jesus does is for our benefit and advantage.

This has been a great encouragement to the church of Christ through the ages.

God used this to encourage Elijah "during the perilous reign of Ahab, [where] the Lord kept for himself seven thousand who had not bowed their knees to Baal." (BC Art 27)

It motivated and encouraged the apostles during the difficult days of the early church in the Roman Empire.

It gave strength to the protestant men and women during the Reformation. Despite the terrible persecution they faced in the Lowlands Guido de Bres could write, "This holy church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man." (BC Art 27)

And this is an encouragement to us today. The church in NZ is small and weak. People in society usually ignore us and sometimes ridicule us. They think of us as backward and irrelevant. They regard our biblical values as out-of-touch with the modern and post-modern world.

But these verses assure us that the church of Jesus Christ is at the center of all that God is doing. All of Christ's power as Lord is directed towards us as the focus of his interest and the object of his attention! As far as God is concerned the Church of Jesus Christ is the main player!

Knowing this strengthens our faith and fortifies our hope. No matter what happens Christ will win and Satan will lose!

c. Paul goes on to describe the church as **“his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way”** (v 23).

“His body” describes the entire church throughout the world, the church universal, “the holy catholic church” which we also confess in the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds.

We are connected with him in a living relationship, in the same way as your head is connected with your body. Every true Christian is a living member of the church, a vital part of the body. There is a spiritual unity between the Lord Jesus our head and us as his body.

We are “the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” This means that Jesus fills us as his body; he fills us with his Spirit and his gifts and his presence. He gives us life and power, comfort and strength, mercy and grace, kindness and compassion, forgiveness and love. We are made complete in him.

The word “fills” is in the present tense, which means that this filling is an ongoing process. Jesus is still filling us as his church and will continue to do so until he returns.

This is the big picture of the church of Jesus.

The church of Christ is catholic, worldwide, universal. This holy catholic church finds expression in local congregations which will meet everywhere on this Lord's Day in church buildings like ours, in large stone cathedrals, in school halls and in people's homes.

We gather together to encourage one another in our faith and to give praise honour and glory to our powerful God and to his Son, Jesus Christ, who is seated at his right hand and who is head over everything for the church!

Amen