

Introduction

In 2003 the first “Hulk” movie came out, and I was really surprised by the CGI in the movie. Part of my surprise was I remember the original show about the Hulk, with a real actor with real muscles playing the part of the Hulk. There were special effects during Bruce Banner’s transformation into the Hulk, with people off camera clearly ripping his shirt from the bottom to make it look like he was growing greatly in size and with a weird green glow in front of his face.

Then in 2008 another version of the Hulk was made, with even more CGI. I was happy that in this second movie Hulk didn’t move around by hopping like a frog. Then in 2012 Hulk began appearing in many of the 729 Marvel movies.

I remember the original Hulk played by body builder Lou Ferrigno. Sure, the transformation of Bruce Banner involved some weird special effects, but Lou Ferrigno *was the Hulk*. They painted his body green, added some really bad eyebrows, frizzed his hair, but Ferrigno *was the Hulk*. He moved around and smashed through doors and fought bad guys. As a six-year-old, watching the Hulk was terrifying. He was so big and so powerful. Part of what made it so real was he was a real actor and not some computer generated character. And listen, as great as the Marvel Hulk was, he never wrestled a bull to the ground, and when you’re six years old, that’s the greatest example of power you’re likely to see.

As consumers of movies and television, it seems we’re never content with enough power. Sure, the TV Hulk was a massive human who had extraordinary strength, but when we get to the more recent movies, Hulk has physics-defying strength. Listen: there’s no way he could swing a tank around by its cannon and throw it. *It defies physics*. It’s interesting that Hulk got more and more impervious to harm with each iteration in the movies.

Part of the problem is we don’t understand true power. We tend to think of power only in terms of its unstoppable, but its true nature is seen in power’s restraint. As amazing as wrestling a bull was to little J-T, Hulk tenderly holding a baby was an even greater display of true power. In the Marvel universe Hulk’s power was always seen in destroying things and smashing things and in his near invincibility. Unrestrained power is merely an explosion; true power is controlled and wielded purposefully.

In our text today we will see true power that cannot be contained, except by the one whose power it is. We will see that this power has real purposefulness in the lives of God’s people. The power that flung the stars into the sky and spoke light into existence and holds all things together by his own will is the same power that is at work in our lives to bring about God’s purposes in salvation.

We’re taking a look at the text Jim covered last week. Just as God spoke through him powerfully last week, God has been speaking to Jim through this text just as powerfully in his own life. It’s a text that we could spend several weeks on, given how rich it is so I’ll be tackling parts of it Jim did not. We’re in Ephesians 1, verses 15–23.

Eph 1:15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:15–23

Faith and Love

Last week Jim focused on Paul’s prayer in our text, showing us that in the midst of his wonderful and amazing declarations of who God is and what he has done, Paul is not writing to offer them mere head knowledge, as if he were preparing them for a theology exam. Instead, Paul wants them to experience God *personally*. He himself had been fighting against God, persecuting the church, having Christians executed and tortured for information. Then Jesus himself confronted Paul, and while he could have used his power to utterly destroy the one who had so violently opposed him, when Jesus confronted Paul he did not do so with raw power or even with judgment. When Jesus met Paul, he met him firmly, but he also approached him with love and mercy. Paul wants the Ephesians to have that same experience, to *know* the power of God in Christ through his Spirit.

The wonderful truth of God in Christ that he’s been expressing throughout this chapter is intended to drive deep into their hearts and bring about real, lasting transformation in them. As we’ve seen a number of times the gospel has never been primarily about going to heaven when you die. The gospel is about eternal life in Christ—and eternal life begins *now*. Salvation is God’s work of transforming his entire universe and this work begins in his people when they trust in Christ. In other words, salvation is not a future event, but a present reality for those who are in Christ. There will be the culmination of salvation when the Lord returns and re-creates the world, but that salvation is a present reality.

We see this in Paul’s explanation for giving thanks for them: he has heard of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love toward all the saints. When he says he “heard” of their faith, he also experienced it. He was in Ephesus longer than any other place he planted a church, but hasn’t seen them in at least five years when he writes this letter. He is still hearing of their faith in the Lord Jesus. But notice how closely he ties the next part: “and your love toward all the saints”.

Hear me clearly: salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, but faith is never alone. I’m going to say that again: salvation is by faith alone, but true faith is never alone. This is what James was getting at in his letter. God saves a person on the basis of faith in Christ

and nothing more, but faith in Christ is never alone. The work of God that brings about faith in a person always brings about the transformation that accompanies it. Here Paul connects faith in Jesus with love toward all the saints.

Faith in Jesus will result in love for his people. As we see in verse 23, the church is the body of Christ. To love Christ is to also love his body. I'm reminded of Jim's illustration of loving his dog's head but not his body so he carries his dog's head in a bag (not really). You can't love the head of the body without loving the body. Christ is the head and his church is the body so to trust in the Lord Jesus is to also love his body.

This illustrates for us the totality of salvation. It is not merely a change in status or a change in where one will spend eternity. Salvation is God's rescue of a person in which God acts to completely transform every area of that person's life. This does not mean that person is suddenly completely transformed. It means that person is on the path of transformation and the evidence of that transformation will be, you know, *evident*, even as evidence remains that further transformation is still needed.

This is what Paul continues to hear about the Ephesian believers. This is what can be said about all true followers of Christ. Those who are saved by faith alone never have faith alone. The evidence one is in Christ is that person has been sealed, and the seal of our salvation is the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is not present and active in a person's life, demonstrated by the ongoing transformation of that person, there is no evidence that person is a follower of Christ. Without the presence and activity of the Spirit, words proclaiming faith are just words.

Paul says the Ephesians are trusting in the Lord Jesus and demonstrating this faith in their love toward all the saints—Jews and Gentiles. A significant part of this letter will be devoted to addressing the issue of ethnic reconciliation in the church and the end of ethnic hostility through the gospel. We have an excursus coming up next month on this very issue. When Paul says their love “toward *all* the saints”, he doesn't mean all the saints who look and act and think just like them. He means that in the church, we are united by Christ and Christ alone.

Our unity in the church and the reason for our love toward *all* the saints, is Jesus. We are united in Christ, not in our skin color or in our cultural expression or in our economic status or in our educational background. We are not united because we eat the same foods, listen to the same music, or vote for the same candidates—or even *the same party*. Some of us may have these things in common, but do not confuse uniformity with unity. We are not the same yet *in Christ* we are united. This unity is seen in our love toward one another.

This is why it is significant that Paul identifies God not as the God of Israel but as the God of the Lord Jesus. We saw this a few weeks ago. No longer is he a *national* God, as many in Israel had made him to be. He is the Lord of the nations. His plan from the beginning was to save men and women from every tribe and every language and every people and every nation—and unite them together in one body. This is why the descendants of Abraham left Egypt with “a mixed multitude” of people and together became the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

Caleb, one of the twelve spies, the one who represented the tribe of Judah, was a Canaanite who joined Israel and was a member of the covenant given at Sinai. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron the first high priest who himself would become the high priest of Israel, had black skin—the name Phinehas means “the Black Man”—for his mother was an African

woman. Rahab was a Canaanite and married the son of the most prominent man in the most prominent tribe in Israel. Many of king David's famous Mighty Men were foreigners who joined Israel by worshiping the God of Israel. From the beginning of Israel's history they were a mixed ethnic group, just as God planned from the beginning.

It is God's work that causes a person to join his people, whether that meant ancient Israel or it means the church today. The transformation the gospel brings begins with the change in God's people that first causes them to trust in Christ, and then causes them to love his body, the church. A person who claims to love the Lord but does not love his body offers no real reason for anyone to believe his or her testimony of faith, for one of the most basic evidences of faith is love toward all the saints. We are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone.

Enlightened

In Paul's prayer he emphasizes Christ's humanity by praising "the God of our Lord Jesus". Jesus is the divine Son of God—God in every way—yet by calling the Father *the God of Jesus*, he's emphasizing Jesus' humanity. It is the incarnation of the Son of God that brings light into the world—their eyes are enlightened by his coming. This is what Paul is getting at in verses 17–18.

He prays that the God of the Lord Jesus, the Father of glory, would give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus, so that the eyes of their hearts would be *enlightened*. We live in a world of light, so we don't feel the impact of these words. In the ancient world when the sun went down, most tasks would cease. Work certainly ended. They had oil lamps, but oil lamps were dim and did not enable people to continue the *same* tasks at night. Light was scarce in the ancient world.

Try to imagine living in your home with windows made of glass, but without electric light. During daylight hours most areas of your home would have enough light for you to function, but with windows you can have light inside even when it's cold or raining outside. Now imagine you didn't have glass windows so you'd have to close the windows with wooden shutters when the weather was bad. Even during the day, light would be scarce. In our world when it gets dark outside, we're able to continue doing everything at night that we could do inside during the day. We don't really understand what it means to be *enlightened* because we live in a world of light. To receive light in the darkness would be very meaningful to them. It was life-changing.

Jesus is that light. Jesus is the one who shines in the darkness, as John put it, and the darkness has not overcome the light! It cannot. We spent three weeks in the book of Acts looking at the city of Ephesus and its culture before we got into this letter to the Ephesians. They were a people who lived in a world of magic—a world of darkness. There were unseen, hostile forces arrayed against them that had to be navigated, yet they were navigating blindly—in darkness. There was constant fear that someone had cast a magical incantation against them and so they spent time and money to ensure they were protected with counter spells. They wore magical amulets with various names written on them, all purported to protect them against spiritual forces that were hostile to them.

Paul comes along and proclaims Jesus to them, and here he prays that God would bring enlightenment to their hearts, that the darkness would be pushed out by the light of Jesus,

and the result of this enlightenment would be their intimate knowledge of the hope that is theirs in Christ, and their intimate knowledge of the riches of his glorious inheritance that is theirs in Christ, and then he piles up a bunch of words that say essentially the same thing.

After listing the first two outcomes of their hearts being enlightened, Paul almost stumbles over his words starting in verse 19. He prays they would intimately experience “the immeasurable greatness of his power”. It’s as if he cannot state *strongly enough* just how great God’s power is. The greatness of his power is immeasurable—it’s beyond the scale of measurability. On a scale of one to ten it’s so far past ten that you can’t calculate the number. It’s the word from which we get our English word “hyperbole”. There is simply no scale by which we could measure the greatness of his power.

Even the word “greatness” is a power word. First, it’s immeasurable. Second, it is the greatness of it that cannot be measured. The very word “greatness” means a quality that exceeds a standard. Do you see his piling up of words here? It is immeasurable, for there is no scale that it can be measured by. It is the *greatness* that cannot be measured, and the very word “greatness” means the quality that cannot be measured. There is no measuring tape by which to measure the greatness that exceeds the scale of greatness itself.

He’s not done! The immeasurable greatness is of his power. It is his power that exceeds the scale of greatness, and it is the degree to which his power exceeds that scale of greatness that cannot be measured! Paul is clearly struggling to describe God’s power. I think he would have liked that old Newsboys song that I used to hate. At first glance the lyrics to this song seem quite glib but they are incredibly profound.

Verse 1: How you gonna reckon with a God like this? When you gonna face what you can’t dismiss? Whatcha gonna say to the Soul Kiss that is my God? “Fearsome like the sag in a fat man’s chair”? “Sweeter than a patch of Rogaine hair”? How do you define what you can’t compare? This is my God.

Verse 2: How you gonna reckon with a God this Great? Why you gonna measure what you can’t equate? Whatcha gonna say to the Checkmate that is my God? “Stronger than the burn of an aftershave”? “Tender as a burger in the microwave”? “Rarer than the air in an empty grave”? This is my God.

Newsboys, “Who”

When I first heard this song I thought it was silly and maybe even blasphemous to compare the fearsomeness of God to the sag in a fat man’s chair, or to compare his power to the burn of an aftershave. Then one day I was clucking my tongue when this song came on and then it hit me: what’s an apt comparison of God’s power? A nuclear bomb exploding? Sure, that’s “stronger” than the burn of an aftershave, but it hardly compares to God’s power. A nuclear bomb doesn’t even cause a ripple compared to the power of a supernova, but not even a supernova begins to describe God’s power. That’s when I realized this is the point of the song! There is no point of comparison between God and literally everything else. This is what Paul is saying by piling up these words about God’s power: you can’t quantify them for they are so very great even the idea of *measuring* God’s power is absurd!

Paul prays for the Spirit of God to enlighten the Ephesian believers to this reality of their hope and their inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of God’s power toward those who believe.

Piling Up Words

Paul doesn't stop there, however. He wants them to understand the incredible nature of God's power, the "immeasurable greatness" of it, and that it is actively *toward* those of us who believe. It isn't as though God possesses this immeasurable power and does nothing with it. It is *toward*, or in the direction of those of us who believe. In other words, this immeasurable greatness of God's power is actively working on our behalf.

In verse 19 he says it is "according to the working of his great might". "Working" means it is God's present activity on our behalf. It is the working "of his great might". Here he uses still more words for power and strength. "Great" means it is capable of functioning effectively. God can do what he desires to do. *Period*. Paul has already sort of said this, though, hasn't he? If God's power is beyond any scale of measuring power and if the amount of power that is beyond any available scale is also itself immeasurable, surely God is capable of doing what God wants to do. Paul is piling up these words for a reason. And he's still not done.

He is actively working his great, or his capable-of-doing-what-he-wants-to-do *might*. His might is his ability to demonstrate his power. We see more piling up of similar words here. He is working, indicating an active expression of his power. He is working out of his greatness, or his ability to do what he wants to do. And what is great is his ability to demonstrate his power.

Do you see the piling up of words here? God is actively working out his will and purpose in Christ, demonstrating not only his ability to do so, but his eagerness to do so, and all of this, Paul says, is *toward* those of us who believe. But he's still not done.

In verse 20 he says all this willingness and ability of God to actively demonstrate this power that cannot be fathomed, let alone measured, was on full display "when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places". The immeasurable greatness of God's power according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ was aimed squarely at raising Christ from the dead and seating him at his right hand in the heavenly places.

This is the exaltation of Christ to his rightful place as the Lord God who reigns over all. There is no greater declaration of his power than this: he raised Christ from the dead. And yet, he's still not done. When he seated Jesus at his right hand, he gave him authority over everything that is not God. There is God and there is—literally—everything else. The exalted Jesus, conqueror of sin and death, is presently reigning in heaven over *everything*. But simply saying that isn't enough. Paul continues.

His throne is not merely "above" everything else, it is *far above*. Then he lists some of the things Jesus is far above: all rule and authority and power and dominion. There is no being, whether human or angelic or demonic or any other category that may exist, over which Jesus's authority is not "far above". Every spiritual force is far below the authority of Jesus. But he's still not done.

He adds that Jesus has been exalted "above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come". When we hear this we tend to think only in terms of there being the one true God whose name is Jesus, and the names of all the false gods, whether Zeus or Artemis or Asclepius or Baal or Ashtaroth. It certainly includes false gods, but Paul means something more.

The Ephesians didn't think of magicians like we think of David Copperfield and David Blaine. They really and truly believed hostile spiritual forces were called on to act against them or their loved ones through the invocation of magic. When the Ephesians heard this read from Paul's letter, they were hearing it in *their* context. They heard that Jesus is above every name and the names that came to mind were more than the various Greek and Roman gods; they were also the names of supernatural beings who could be called upon by name. Paul says the name of Jesus is above *every* name, which means the names of any hostile spiritual forces that may seek to harm them. But Paul still isn't done.

In verse 22, not only is his greatness immeasurable, and not only is there no scale by which to evaluate his power, and not only does he work his great might with an eagerness to show and demonstrate it, and not only has he shown us his power by raising Jesus from the dead, and not only has he seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, and not only has he raised him far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and not only has he given him a name above every other name that could possibly be invoked in magic, both now and in the world to come, he has also put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church. Do you get the sense that Paul wants the Ephesian believers to recognize the unimaginable power that belongs to our God?

The culture of Asia Minor in general and Ephesus in particular was thoroughly steeped in magic. Magic involved invoking the names of gods and other spiritual beings to cause them to act on behalf of the one invoking the magic. Significant sums were paid to magicians to cast spells for or against people, or on behalf of one's self as a protective measure against other spells being cast against them.

When Paul was still in Ephesus, some five or so years before this letter, many of the new believers in Ephesus were convicted when they saw the power of Jesus over demons and they brought out their books of magic and burned them. As we saw several weeks ago, the books had a street value of roughly nine-million dollars. These believers had been holding on to these books after coming to Christ in faith. The truth is the old way of life clings to us, whether it's magic or lust or anger or pride. It takes time to get rid of it fully. It was only when there was such a public demonstration of the Lord's immeasurable power among them that they were moved by the Spirit to destroy these evil works.

Having destroyed their books of magic doesn't mean their memories—and fears—of magic were destroyed. They still lived in fear that their enemies were casting spells against them. They still felt the impulse to wear a magical amulet designed to protect them, whether they had the so-called magical "Ephesian letters" written on them, or *the names of various deities and powers who could protect them*.

Do you see why Paul piles up his words here? Not only will the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe and the working of his great might mean incredible things for the future, Paul says this power is actively working *in this age*. Right now. In the present. The name of Jesus is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and is above *every name that is named*, not only in this age but also in the one to come. This means there is and will never be a power greater than that which is possessed by the Lord Jesus.

Application

Again, we need to see how this power is directed. It is no mere unconstrained and uncontrolled explosion. It is controlled and wielded *purposefully*. Paul prays for them to know their hope that is in Christ and to know the riches of their inheritance in Christ and to know the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. It is *toward* us. The extension of his power has a goal or a place in mind, and that goal, that place is *us who believe*. The idea is the expression of this power is directed at us. It is seen both in its active force but also in its restraint.

This power is not the power of judgment. The Lord Jesus does not stand over us with his foot on our necks, arms raised in victory for having vanquished and destroyed his enemies. Instead, we see his power on display like the Hulk holding a baby with tenderness and compassion and affection. I'll never get tired of reading the prophetic words of Zephaniah concerning the day the Lord would come in his full power. After speaking of cutting off the nations and destroying their defenses and leaving their battlements in ruins and laying waste their cities, leaving them desolate, the Lord speaks of what is to come with those he loves.

Zeph 3:14 Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! ¹⁵ the LORD has taken away the judgments against you; he has cleared away your enemies. The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall never again fear evil. ¹⁶ On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. ¹⁷ The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. ¹⁸ I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. ¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

Zephaniah 3:14–19

Do you see the Lord's power *toward* us who believe? It is actively working on our behalf. God celebrates his people and celebrates the ongoing display of his power in his people. He is actively working to transform them. We see glimpses of this transformation throughout this letter to the Ephesians. New Testament scholar Clinton Arnold lists seven things God's power is doing for us.

He writes that an awareness of God's full power can enable believers to resist the power and influence of demonic spirits as we will see in chapter 6. Seeing God's full power enables us to accomplish a variety of good works throughout our lifetimes as we will see next week. God's full power enables us to overcome ethnocentrism and live in unity with others different from ourselves in the church as we will see in chapter 2. God's full power develops in us patience, humility, and gentleness in chapter 4. God's power causes us to have less and less self-centeredness and causes us to live in a way that reflects the self-sacrificial love of Christ for the benefit of others in chapter 5. God's full power causes us to serve the body of Christ in accordance with our giftedness in chapter 4. God's full power causes us to get rid of ungodly practices such as sexual immorality, greed, lying, anger and rage, stealing, filthy

language, and alcohol abuse in chapters 4–5. God’s full power causes us to develop healthy and Christ-centered family relationships in chapters 5–6.

What Paul is explaining to the Ephesians, and by extension to us today, is the basis for God’s calling in our lives. For the first three chapters of this letter there are no commands, only declarations of who God is and what God has done for us in Christ. Paul lists truth after wonderful truth about God’s power toward us in Christ, and it’s only after he makes these significant declarations that we are given our first command:

Eph 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1–3

Notice that after all the incredible declarations of what *God* has done and all the power *God* has toward us who believe, Paul instructs us to simply walk in a manner worthy of this calling. That is, our right response to the good news of God in Christ is to live in a manner that reflects all that God has done and reflects God’s power toward us. Further, it is to live that life *in community*. To have faith in the Lord Jesus is to love his body as well, and Paul instructs us to do this in response to the gospel.

Do you see what Paul is saying to us? God’s power is directed toward us, to empower us to live for him, and a significant way in which he empowers us is through his people. This is why he says in verse 23 that God has given Christ as head over all things *to* his church, which is his body, and he fills all in all. What this means is Christ’s full authority over all things, including hostile spiritual forces that would seek to destroy us, is directed toward the church, giving to us—in community—all the resources we need to resist evil and pursue good as we follow him.

The church is the recipient of God’s resources as we engage in God’s mission of bringing cosmic transformation to all of creation. The church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and Christ fills this temple with himself. The church “is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all”. We don’t merely have some of God’s unimaginable power. We have the fullness of him who is far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. *We lack none of God’s power, for God is with us.*

We saw last week that Paul was writing that they—and we—may have an experiential knowledge of God, that the truth of God in Christ would be driven deep into our hearts, that we may be enlightened in the midst of all the darkness of this world. Paul desired that they—and we—would let this knowledge of who God is and what he has done penetrate the deepest parts of our being and transform us and how we live and face whatever our circumstances, whether we experience plenty or are in need, whether we face good health or they find a tumor, whether we go through a time of suffering or great joy.

We may not fear magical incantations or spells cast against us today. For us magicians are little more than experts at slight of hand. None of us would truly fear David Blaine—unless we were at a show and he asked for our wallet. But there are plenty of “names” that cause us fear today, “names” that represent powers that are truly greater than we. Or to put it another way, there are *identities* that are either assigned to us by others or that we

take on ourselves. Either way, these “names” hang over us and threaten to undo us. We know, however, the name of Jesus is above every name—above every *identity*.

If you fear sin as that thing that controls and dominates your life, the thing that you have no power to control, take heart, Christian, for Christ has authority over it. He has *immeasurable power* over it. He demonstrated this by resisting the devil’s temptation in the wilderness and then again in the garden before the cross.

If you fear anxiety and are overwhelmed by it and the fear it causes, take heart, Christian, for there is no limit to his power. Not only is his power unimaginable in its greatness, he is eager to demonstrate it. Know that his power is toward you, not against you. This means every moment of your life is in his hands.

If anger dominates your life and you cannot understand where it comes from and why you cannot rid yourself of it, and if it threatens to suffocate you with its madness, know that the part of his power that exceeds the standard by which power is measured is also itself immeasurable. This means he can enable you to release it, to hand it over to him, for he is able, especially when you aren’t. He became our substitute, taking God’s wrath for sin onto himself, submitting himself to it, and then after experiencing its worst, he walked out of the tomb. Take heart, Christian, for that power of resurrection is toward you.

If your life is filled with shame, whether because of what you yourself have done or because of what has been done to you, take heart, Christian. The Lord of immeasurable power allowed himself to be stripped and beaten, mocked and scorned, and nailed to a tree for both public humiliation and private suffering for all our sins, both those we commit and those committed against us. It’s only a matter of time before the shame will be left behind completely when we are raised to new life with Christ.

If the name of regret is what threatens you, ask yourself what you could possibly have done that is greater than his power to save. Take heart, Christian, for God in Christ through his Spirit is making all things new, and this transformation begins with you. It means you are a new creation in Christ. The old is gone and the new has come. Who you were is not who you are in Christ.

If pride is the crushing power that threatens you, whether that pride is manifested in thinking too much of yourself or it manifests in thinking of yourself too much, take heart, Christian. God’s love to you in Christ isn’t rooted in who you are, but in who he is. God is not impressed with you, even as he loves you and exults over you in loud singing. He’s celebrating who he is and what he has done so that you can celebrate him instead of yourself.

But enough about the things J-T struggles with. If you’re here this morning, there is something in your life that threatens to overwhelm you, things that are greater and more powerful than you, things you cannot control. Take heart, Christian, for God is *powerful*. The apostle Paul piles up words and struggles mightily to try to explain us the greatness of our God and his power to save. Salvation is as much a present reality as it is a future one, which means the power of Jesus’ resurrection is God’s power present among us right now.