

The Power That Works in Us

Ephesians 3:20

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** The letters Paul wrote to the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, and Colossae, along with the epistle written to a man named Philemon, are often called the “prison epistles.”
 - A. He wrote them in AD 60-62 while he was a prisoner in Rome during his first imprisonment.
 - B. He spent this two-year period in house arrest as verified in Acts 28:16: *“when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.”*
2. Earlier (3rd preaching journey) Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans from Corinth (Rom. 16:23).
 - A. **3** In the epistle to the Romans he expressed his desire to visit the saints in Rome.
 - B. For example, in Romans 1:10 he expressed this intent when he said he prayed *“if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.”*
 - C. At the time, little did Paul know the amazing chain of events God’s providence would unleash that ultimately fulfilled his desire and prayer to visit the Roman saints (Rom. 8:28).
3. **4** Paul’s journey to Rome began in Acts 21 where Paul was almost killed by a Jewish mob in Jerusalem for what they falsely perceived as his desecration of the temple (Acts 21:26-31; vs. 29: Trophimus).
 - A. He was rescued by the Roman garrison but arrested (Acts 21:31-33, v. 40: Fortress Antonia).
 - B. In time he defended himself before the Jews and the Roman authorities in Judea and appealed to Caesar (Acts 24, 25 & 26; took over two years, 24:27; **Acts 9:15**: *“Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.”*; **Acts 26:17**: *“I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles...”*; Rom. 8:28).
 - C. Paul’s voyage to Rome (Acts 27) included a shipwreck on the island of Malta (27:39-44; due south of Sicily), an encounter with a poisonous snake (28:3-6), and several miraculous healings (28:8-9; *“father of Publius”*; plus *“the rest of those on the island who had diseases”*).
4. **5** It was God’s providence that brought Paul to Rome.
 - A. Even though Paul was under house arrest in Rome, he was given enough freedom to interact with others and teach God’s word (e.g., teaches *“leaders of the Jews,”* 28:17-29).
 - B. Luke records this in Acts 28:30-31: *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*
 - C. Paul’s mention of *“the saints...who are of Caesar’s household”* in Philippians 4:22 also supports the view he wrote the prison epistles from Rome.
 - D. What an amazing journey and result were accomplished through God’s providence! **Rom. 8:28**: *“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God...”*
5. **6** Man has always had a difficult time trusting God; lack of trust in God is at the heart of every sin.
 - A. ****** Adam and Eve: Gen. 3:1-6
 - B. ****** Israelites:
 - (1) Deliverance from Egyptian bondage: Ex. 5-12

- (2) Red Sea crossing: **Ex. 14:11-12:** *"Then they said to Moses, 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt? 12 Is this not the word that we told you in Egypt, saying, 'Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than that we should die in the wilderness.'"*
- (3) Bitter waters of Marah: **Ex. 15:22-27**
- (4) Manna: **Ex. 16:3:** *"And the children of Israel said to them, 'Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'"*
- (5) Water at Rephidim: **Ex. 17:1-7** (waters of Meribah, Moses struck the rock; also, water at Kadesh, **Num. 20:1-13**)
- (6) Refusal to enter Canaan: **Num. 14:1-4:** *"So all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, and the whole congregation said to them, 'If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' 4 So they said to one another, 'Let us select a leader and return to Egypt.'"*
- (7) Failure to heed the warnings of the prophets:
 - (a) They had no reason to distrust the Lord.
 - (b) They knew how the Lord delivered them from the Egyptians; He keeps His promises!
 - (c) They knew the consequences of obedience and disobedience: **Levs. 26; Deut. 28.**
 - (d) The words of Jeremiah the prophet sums up their lack of faith in God:

Jer. 6:16: *"Thus says the LORD:
 'Stand in the ways and see,
 And ask for the old paths, where the good way is,
 And walk in it;
 Then you will find rest for your souls.
 But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"*
 - (e) They had every reason to trust in the Lord but did not!
 - (i) They paid a heavy price for their distrust: e.g., Assyrian & Babylonian captivities.
 - (ii) Total rejection by God: **Matt. 23:37-38:** *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! 38 See! Your house is left to you desolate..."*
 - (f) **** We must learn from their evil example and not repeat it! I Cor. 10:1-13**

6. **7** The purpose of our lesson today is to bolster our faith and trust in God; the title of our lesson is: **The Power That Works in Us.**

II. DISCUSSION:

I. **8** Paul: A joyful optimist:

- A. Paul may have been the most unjustly and mistreated figure in the entire history of mankind except for the Savior Himself.
- B. Paul catalogues his mistreat in **2 Cor. 11:22-29** (24 aspects of suffering!):

- ☛ “in labors more abundant,” (vs. 23),
- ☛ “in stripes above measure,” (vs. 23),
- ☛ “in prisons more frequently,” (vs. 23),
- ☛ “in deaths often.” (vs. 23),
- ☛ “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.” (vs. 24),
- ☛ “Three times I was beaten with rods;” (vs. 25),
- ☛ “once I was stoned;” (vs. 25),
- ☛ **9** “three times I was shipwrecked;” (vs. 25),
- ☛ “a night and a day I have been in the deep,” (vs. 25),
- ☛ “in journeys often,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in perils of waters,” (vs. 26),

- ☛ “in perils of robbers,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in perils of my own countrymen,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in perils of the Gentiles,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ **10** “in perils in the city,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in perils in the wilderness,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in perils in the sea,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in perils among false brethren,” (vs. 26),
- ☛ “in weariness and toil,” (vs. 27),
- ☛ “in sleeplessness often,” (vs. 27),
- ☛ “in hunger and thirst,” (vs. 27),
- ☛ **11** “in fastings often,” (vs. 27),
- ☛ “in cold and nakedness” (vs. 27),
- ☛ “besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.” (vs. 28).

C. ****** But that was not all!

(1) Thorn in flesh: 2 Cor. 12:7-10

(2) Roman imprisonment:

(a) First Roman imprisonment: Acts 28

(b) Second Roman imprisonment and execution: 2 Tim. 4:6-8

D. I doubt anyone of us will ever be called on by the Lord to endure such suffering.

E. **12** In view of Paul’s many sufferings the prison epistles are truly amazing and encouraging.

- (1) The prison epistles are filled with positive and upbeat passages from the apostle’s pen.
- (2) ****** For example, in Philippians he writes of his confidence to boldly “speak the word without fear” despite his “chains” (Phil. 1:14).
- (3) ****** He expresses a clear purpose in life and death: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:21).
- (4) ****** He is determined to put his past behind him and reach “forward to those things which are ahead” and “press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13-14)
- (5) ****** He expresses his ability to look beyond his chains and “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4)
- (6) ****** And, despite being in chains he was able to “Be anxious for nothing” and experience “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:6-7).
- (7) The number of lessons and applications for us from these epistles is nearly inexhaustible!

2. **13** Troubles don’t always go away:

A. Remember, the verses we’ve just read from Paul’s letter to the Philippians.

- (1) When Paul wrote this letter, his future was still very uncertain; we know the end of the story, Paul didn’t.

- (2) Paul could very well have been facing torture and/or execution.
 - (3) That Paul could maintain his faith and trust in God, without losing his joyful optimism, is a great lesson for us to learn and imitate.
- B. ** In reality Paul was imitating the example of Christ (1 **Cor. 11:1**: “*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*”).
- Heb. 12:1-5**: “*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. 4 You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*”
- C. ** Like Paul, we too can overcome any obstacle:
- (1) Sin: some persistent sin that is always bothering us (e.g., anger, cursing, addictions).
 - (2) Temptation: see last point.
 - (3) Persecution: we are more likely to be the object of verbal persecution today.
 - (4) Trials: financial setbacks, relationship issues, health issues, etc.
- D. ** It is important to note that when we are suffering:
- (1) God may not alleviate our suffering:
 - (a) Jesus in the garden:

Lk. 22:44: “*And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*”

Matt. 26:42: “*Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, ‘O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.’*”
 - (b) Paul’s thorn in the flesh:

2 Cor. 12:8-10: “*Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”
 - (2) ** But, through God’s help we can deal with anything life throws at us:
 - (a) Finances: our “ship” may never “come in,” but God will not abandon us (Matt. 6:33).
 - (b) Relationships: our loved one’s may break our heart, but God will comfort and sustain us (**2 Cor. 1:3**: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,*”).
 - (c) Health: cancer, heart disease, etc. may ravage our bodies and kill us, but God will comfort us in pain and ultimately deliver us into Paradise.
 - (d) Persecution: our enemies in this life may even kill us, but God will eternally destroy them and save us:

2 Tim. 4:6-8: “*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the*

faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

3. **14** God's great ability:

A. How could Jesus or Paul remain so joyfully optimistic despite having such terrible problems?

B. Obviously, they kept their faith and trust in God. How did they do that?

C. They remembered the truth taught in Ephesians 3:20:

****Eph. 3:20:** *“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

D. ****** There is so much in this life to beat us down and challenge our faith.

(1) Every day Satan puts more stumbling blocks in our path (1 Pet. 5:8).

(2) I became a Christian nearly 50 years ago in the state of Indiana.

(3) However, I lived in other places for over 40 years before returning to live again in the Hoosier state.

(4) Upon permanently returning to Indiana (five years ago) I found one thing quite disconcerting: an astounding number of Christians I knew from my early years had departed from the faith.

(5) Brethren who I never thought in a million years would fall away had broken marriages, broken homes, unruly and unfaithful children, had quit attending services, had slipped back into the world, and some even defected to denominationalism.

(6) Sadly, and obviously, they forgot the lessons of the prison epistles!

E. ****** We can find great comfort, strength and encouragement in Ephesians 3:20.

(1) Our great God is not just “able” to help us, but His ability is “exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think”!

(2) ****** No matter how much life beats us down, no matter how much Satan “sift[s]...[us] as wheat” (Lk. 22:31), God can completely sustain and comfort us through anything!

(3) Whether it be the tragedy of a loved one's death, the dread of a cancer diagnosis, a financial disaster, relationship problems, false brethren, a powerfully strong temptation; it doesn't matter!

(4) God's power can sustain us, comfort us, and “deliver us from the evil one.” (Matt. 6:13)

F. **15** How is this possible?

(1) ****** Paul said God “is able to do” these things “according to the power that works in us.”

(2) ****** What “power” is that? It is “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph. 1:19).

(3) ****** Imagine that! God's “mighty power” works for us and “works in us”!

(4) That power is with us and in us 24/7, 365 days a year!

(5) **16** In Ephesians 1:20-23 Paul describes four aspects of that power:

(a) ****** It is the power “which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead”;

(b) ****** It is the power which “seated Him [Christ] at His [God's] right hand in the heavenly

places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.”;

(c) **17** It is the power which “*put all things under His [Christ’s] feet,*” (cf. Matt. 28:18);

(d) ****** It is the power which “*gave Him [Christ] to be head over all things to the church, which is His [Christ’s] body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*”

(6) ****** Do we really appreciate the tremendous power God can bring to bear in our lives?

III. CONCLUSION: 18

1. There is only one potentially weak link in this powerful chain: you and me!

A. Do we have the faith to believe and rely on “*the working of His mighty power*” in us?

B. Let us pray daily for the faith to rely on “*His mighty power*” which “*works in us.*”

C. Let us meditate daily on the fact this power is in us and available to us if we willingly, by faith, take hold of it and apply it in our daily walk with Christ.

2. Christ promises to be with us “*always, even to the end of the age.*” (Matt. 28:20)

A. Let us submit our lives totally and completely to Him and allow “*His mighty power*” to work in our lives each day.

B. If we do there is nothing we cannot overcome! **19**