

FRIDAY APRIL 9

Ephesians 1:15–23 – resurrection power

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,
16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.
17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.
18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,
20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms,
21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.
22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church,
23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

When I read the prayers that Paul prays for the different Christian congregations that he writes to, I'm always struck by how ambitious they are; they sometimes put my own prayers for others, and for myself, to shame – so puny, so lacking in vision! And then I think to myself: why the difference? I suspect it's because Paul had a far greater understanding than me of the huge implications of the death and resurrection of the Lord.

So when I read Ephesians chapter 1, I keep coming across something I so easily forget: that when God is at work in the lives of His people, as I know He is, the 'incomparably great power' that He is wielding is the same power He wielded when He raised our Lord from the dead. No wonder Paul's prayers for other people are so ambitious. If you read this particular prayer in Ephesians chapter 1, it's so bursting with vision that you'll find it doesn't finish until the end of chapter 3!

And as I reflect upon this further, I think of particular instances where the awesome nature of this power is especially visible. In 1980 we visited Kenya. At Nairobi airport we were met by two missionaries from Uganda – Jim and Jean. That evening, over a meal, they talked of stressful times in war-torn Uganda, first of all under the brutal regime of Idi Amin and then with a Tanzanian army force running things and trying to help the country get back on its feet again. On one occasion Jim had fallen foul of an awkward local police officer and had been locked up for a day or so. Jean, being a somewhat forthright lady, marched into the police station and demanded: 'If you've put my husband in jail then go ahead and put me in jail as well!' So he did. Not exactly a bed of roses, as you might imagine: what happened next was startling. This is how Jean described it, and I still remember her exact words 40 years later: 'Jesus was so close that night I could have reached out and touched him'. Was it her imagination playing tricks on her? Possibly, but I suspect not.

Then I remember visiting a parishioner, an elderly lady, who recalled being in hospital on one occasion. 'I saw Jesus standing at the end of my bed' she said. Again: a lady with an over-vivid imagination? If you had known her as I did, you would have known that she wasn't like that at all. Now you may think that her experience, and Jean's in Uganda, were rather exceptional. You could be right. But what they do is challenge us to raise our expectations, including how to pray and what to pray for as we pray for ourselves, as I urge you to do. So: next time you pray for yourself, what exactly are you going to pray for: something safe, or something *daring*?