

Presence- Part 3 How to be strong in the Lord

Valleys Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 1st Sep 2013

Intro

- Previously looked at Paul's letter to the Ephesians and saw how through the Gospel Jesus has given us access to the presence of God.
- We then looked again at Paul's letter to the Ephesians to see what are the *lifestyle implications* of having free access to God's presence?
- This week we will finish looking at the book of Ephesians and answer the question- how can we be 'strong in the Lord'?

Read Eph 6:1-19

3 ways to get strong in the Lord and the power of His might:

1. RELIANCE- Trust in Him rather than superstition or self

- v10 “..be strong in the Lord” (i.e. not some god or goddess or magic practise).
- Ephesus was a place where many different gods and goddesses were worshipped (up to 50 of them). Many worshipped a number of gods. Artemis the the most important deity to the Ephesians and her temple was there (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world). Ephesus had a reputation for the occult – Acts 19:17-20 tells of the new believers there burning their occult scrolls.
- The Ephesians believed in Astrology- that the stars ordained people's lives. The goddess Artemis had the signs of the zodiac like a necklace around her neck. They believed that she was the queen of heaven and as such was able to break the power of fate. The silversmiths used to sell statues of the goddess to visitors, but their trade went down as people became Christians and the people rioted and as a result Paul had to leave the city. The city had a population of 250,000 (the third largest Roman city after Rome and Alexandria).
- It would have been a temptation for those who had never met Paul and become Christians to tag Christ onto the end of their list of gods and keep practising magic and superstitious ways. Paul writes to them to make sure Christ is the one they are being strong in rather than the former habits.
- There is a long tradition of six magical names of what was thought to be powerful beings which were associated with Ephesus (known as the Ephesian letters or Ephesia grammata) and which were quoted by the 'magi' (Plutarch says) to cast out demons and by athletes for assistance and protection. An ancient writer named Pausanias relates an interesting and relevant parable about an Ephesian wrestler who travelled to Olympia, Greece, to compete in the games. The athlete was unbeatable in the wrestling event, winning match after match. During one of the competitions, however, the referee discovered he was wearing an anklet inscribed with the six Ephesian Gramata- the magical words invoking spiritual powers. This was immediately removed, whereupon his opponent from Miletus proceeded to three consecutive victories over him because of his loss of magical power (source zondervan illustrated Bible commentary vol3 pg 336 (Pausanias as cited in Eustathius, Comm. ad. Hom. 19.247, also cited in The Suda)).
- Paul's description of our challenge mentions wrestling-v12
- What areas are we tempted to tag onto our trust in Jesus?
- Many see reading their stars as a fun thing, but it is placing trust in something other than God, just like the non-Christians Ephesians did.

- Wales superstitious- 'touch wood', not crossing on stairs, not walking under ladders etc.
- Talismans- protective objects, charms- lucky objects, St. Christophers, crucifixes as charms.
- Christian superstition- God won't bless me if I go to the theatre/cinema, don't tithe, don't say my prayers tonight before I go to sleep etc. Obsessive compulsive, ritualistic behaviour as a protection rather than simply trusting Jesus.
- Faith in our selves rather than trusting in God's power.
- Rigid adherence to the 'medical model' without any acknowledgement of God's healing power also not good. Paul did extra-ordinary miracles in Ephesus by God's power. Let's thank God for medicine and use it, but not discount His healing either.
- Repentance is key for getting set free, and pray, sometimes also deliverance where there is a stronghold to break.
- Fear is a root to ritualistic behaviour and superstition. However, knowing the Truth sets us free from this- let's choose truth instead of the lies.

2. AWARENESS- Know His power as well as His grace

- v10 "be strong...in the power of His might"
- Many Christians love to hear about God's grace and preach about it all the time and yet have little faith in His power, or no real concept of it.
- Paul prays for Ephesians to know God's power- Eph 1:19
- 2:7 Paul became a minister according to two things happening in conjunction with each other: 1. the gift of God's grace 2. given to him by the effective working of His (God's) power.
- What does this mean? It means that Paul could not have been saved and become a minister of the gospel if only one was true and not the other. God needed to be both gracious to him by forgiving him AND God had to have the power to change Paul as Paul was trying to destroy the Church before becoming a Christian.
- Grace becomes only truly effective through power. What do I mean? Say your computer is broken. I might be gracious enough to offer to fix it for you but if I don't have the power to fix it you still end up with a broken computer. Equally I might have the power to fix it but not the grace to offer and you still end up with a broken computer. However, if I have the grace to fix it for you and also the power to do so, you end up with your computer fixed!
- God not only had the grace to save us, He also had the power to do it.
- A Roman triumph was a huge civil ceremony celebrating the achievements of an army commander in winning a great battle. On the day of his triumph, the general wore a crown of laurel and the all-purple, gold-embroidered triumphal painted toga, regalia that identified him as near-divine or near-kingly. He rode in a four-horse chariot through the streets of Rome in unarmed procession with his army, captives and the spoils of his war. At Jupiter's temple on the Capitoline Hill he offered sacrifice and the tokens of his victory to the god. Thereafter he had the right to be described as "man of triumph" for the rest of his life (source: Wikipedia). In Eph 4:7-12 Paul appears to be saying that Christ had a triumph, plundering the enemy's territory, taking many captives in his train and giving those captives as gifts instead to His Church. Paul, as Jesus' enemy, had been captivated by His love, and given as plunder, becoming the gift of an Apostle to the Church. Christ is the true victor- not only does He have the power to plunder Satan's kingdom, but He also gives that plunder as trophies to the Church- each of us is a gift to the Church from our powerful "man of triumph".
- Paul says that God's power is available to us and that this power is like the power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in Heavenly places far above all

other powers (Eph 1:19-22).

- Jesus' resurrection is the greatest miracle that has ever happened- He is the only one to truly beat death- many have been raised (by Jesus) only to die again e.g. Lazarus) but Jesus has defeated death itself and has a physical body which is now beyond death and decay- He's the first to truly become as Adam and Eve were before the Fall. We shall follow on our resurrection day, but even now the power that raised Jesus is operating in our lives- Paul goes on to say that whilst we were dead in our sins God made us alive. It took the same power that raised Christ from the dead to raise us from our spiritual death- whilst we were in rebellion to Him He broke us free by His power.
- Powerful though Jesus' resurrection from the dead was it didn't end there. God's power goes on- Jesus wasn't just raised from death but also exalted to the right hand of the Father- co-regency, reigning with the King of the Universe with all other powers under His feet (like the foot-stall found in Tutankhamen's tomb which had his enemies depicted on it for him to rest his feet on). Jesus has authority over all the powers of the evil one. This same power which exalted Christ has also given us authority now over all the powers of the evil one. We have been lifted to a place where Satan is our defeated foe and he is under our feet. Nothing can now separate us from the love of God, even though we may go through many trials. Christ has also secured a place in Heaven for us- it is a done deal. It took nothing short of the greatest known power in the Universe to accomplish this on our behalf- this power is already working in our lives and God wants us to realise it and live our lives now in the light of it.
- So it took the power of God to save us- 2:8 says we are saved by grace through faith, but that faith which saves us is faith IN SOMETHING- it is faith in God's POWER, ability to rescue us.
- Once we realise that this same power which raised and exalted Jesus, this same power which saved the greatest early persecutor of the Church, Paul, is also working in our lives and has been unleashed powerfully in our salvation then we shall have increased faith for the things we ask of God, because we know He also has the power, the ability, to answer our prayers. If He can do the hard thing by saving us He can do the lesser thing in answering our prayers:
- Eph 3:20 'Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, ACCORDING TO THE POWER THAT WORKS IN US'. Let's start to trust that power a little more. This is key to Paul's desire that we be 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might'
- Paul gives another important insight in 3:16 as to how we get strong in the Lord- we ask him to fill us with His Spirit 'be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man'. It is as we are filled with the Spirit that we are able to move in God's power and live the life He's called us to live. 5:18 literally says 'keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit'- God wants us to have a continual flow and to keep drinking and being filled.

3. DISCIPLINE- Practise discipline as a soldier

- (see other sheet)

Summary

3 ways to get strong in the Lord and the power of His might:

- **RELIANCE**- Trust in Him rather than superstition or self
- **AWARENESS**- Know His power as well as His grace
- **DISCIPLINE**- Practise discipline as a soldier

Song?

Ministry time