

Power

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Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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Today we start a new sermon series called, *For This Very Purpose*, and I included the word “very” because it emphasizes the importance of it. What is so big and so important that God would come to us thousands of years later after this letter was written and say, “This is for you today in 2024 as you think about what this year is going to bring for you. I have something to say to you, and it is going to change your life”? In the book of Ephesians, that is exactly what Paul is doing for us today because that is what he was doing for the Ephesians at the time. You see, Paul knew the Ephesians. He had been there before. He had helped them start this congregation, this group, this people of God in this place. And now, years later, he was writing back to them, saying, “Look, there is more. Remember what I showed you. Remember who God is. And there is more to come.”

I hope that this year, in 2024, that is kind of how you feel, that no matter what happened last year, whether it was fantastic things, or really devastating things, or a mixture of both more likely, that as we look to this new year, we see that there is a purpose for us. There is a way to go through God’s purpose for us that helps people see Him more clearly, that brings hope to the world, and that brings all the things that we desire and want to do—but it does it through Him, not through us.

We find out that this grouping of purpose and power is really important. And as I already found out, to fulfill my purpose and live every day of doing whatever it is, my power is not enough. My will is not enough. And yet, what God reminds us again and again is that He is enough, and He will make it happen.

Let’s see through Ephesians how this works. Each week, we’re going to take up one chapter. If you have the Bible out in front of you, it is going to be helpful a little bit too. And hopefully, you will get a little bit more out of it as well. But today, when we talk about Ephesians, I want to give you a little bit of an intro, and then we’re going to dig into this very first section that Paul writes.

It is all about power, and it is all about hope. The first thing it does is Paul introduces himself, even though most of the people already know him.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, who are faithful in Christ, grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You will notice here that Paul introduces himself as a follower of Jesus. Is this how you introduce yourself to people? Not usually, right? What might you say? You might talk about what your occupation is. You might talk about one of your other vocations, like “I am a mom of two kids,” or “I am a dad.” But you almost never say, “I am John, and I am a follower of Jesus” although that is our primary identity. When you think about identities, when you think about who you are, this is the one that encapsulates all of the others. You cannot draw a circle bigger than this one. Everything else fits inside this one, that you are loved by God, that He has saved you, and that He has given you His Spirit to live within this world to bring His purposes to bear. That is who you are. That is who I am. That is who everyone who’s in Christ is. Every little thing after that follows from there.

So, Paul reminds them that is who He is and that is who they are as well. What we’re going to see through the rest of this chapter is that what Paul wants the people to do is to see Jesus more clearly. And specifically, that you’re going to see that Jesus’ power is revealed by hope.

Let’s go to verse 3. Verse 3 is the longest sentence in the Bible. Verses 3 through 14 are one sentence in Greek. If you’re an English teacher, or you enjoy grammar, Paul’s writings may seem terrible. Run-on sentences all over the place. You can go into the Greek text and look at how he wrote, and there is comma after comma after semicolon after semicolon after semicolon. It makes no sense. And yet, that is how he wrote, because there were key points he wanted to get across, the ideas in which he put them. They just build and build and build and build.

The neat thing about it is that this whole verses 3 to 14 is all about the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. One God in three persons—And the first section is all about God the Father, the second about the Son, and the third about the Holy Spirit.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing, even as He has chosen us in Him.

Who chooses? God is the one who has chosen us before the foundations of the world. God has chosen us. He has chosen you. He said, “You are mine. You are the one that I love.” Now, what’s happened in the meantime? Well, in this broken world, we experience the sin and the devastation that that brings, and we walk away from Him. And it is not until we see Jesus and see who He is and the hope that He brings that we see that God does love us, that He brings us back to Him. He chooses us first. This language is going to keep going. Paul’s reminding them in love that He has predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

In love, He predestined us for adoption to Himself as the children of God through Jesus Christ. According to what? According to His purpose. Of His will. What God wants is to bring His people back to Himself. And He is going to go to any length to do that. He is going to take you and me, and He is going to adopt us into His family.

What happens at adoption? At adoption, a child is adopted into a new family and given a new name. From then on, that child introduces himself as somebody different. As somebody who’s part of a family to which he didn’t belong before. The same thing is here: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ,” “John, a follower of Jesus.”

This is who we are at our core. We are adopted into the family of God because He has chosen us. Do you see how that movement is? God moves toward us. He wants to bring us back to Himself. And how does He choose to do that? He does it through baptism. This is exactly what Paul says throughout all the rest of his letters.

He says this is the moment at which this happens when you are adopted into His family. When the water pours over you, or when you are under that water, the old life is gone. And when you were raised from that water, the new life began. Adoption happens through baptism. Adoption happens through baptism.

This is why we can look back at our baptisms. As an objective event in reality, you can put it at a place, at a date, at a time, and you can say, at that moment, heaven and earth broke in together, and God did something

new. He wrote my name in His book, and He made me part of His family. And that promise to be part of His family is good today, throughout all of eternity. I don't know about you, but that kind of changes my perspective on Who I am, about what I am supposed to do in this world, at least raises those questions. Well, if that is who I am, if that is who God has made me to be, what am I supposed to be doing here? What am I doing with my 2024? Let's get to the Jesus part.

After God the Father, we start talking about who Jesus is. In Him, we have redemption through the blood of Jesus. The forgiveness of our sins according to the richness of His grace. All these things are tied together. That Jesus died for us, that He forgives our sins, and it is out of grace. This gift that we do not deserve on our own, but that He gives to us.

Which He lavishes upon us. Has anybody used the word lavish in the last year? I don't know, it seems like an old word that I am not sure we use too often. But in this context, it makes so much sense. That God has lavished His grace on us in this way that is unfailing. He makes known the mysteries of who He is through Jesus.

We understand who the Father is through Jesus. As Jesus gives Himself for us and loves us, we see too that that is what the Father desires. For us to be brought back to Him, to know Him. All this is according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Himself—everything on heaven and on earth. So now we get to it. This is God's purpose for the world, for you and me and everyone. It is to unite all things to Himself, to bring us back to Him. That is what He desires. That is what He is all about, to lovingly bring us back to Himself. If you're talking about a mission statement or what is the mission of God in this world, it is to bring His people back, to himself, not out of coercion, not out of compulsion, not out of guilt, but out of love—this love that he lavishes upon us. As we see who He is more clearly, we understand how good that grace is, and how good, how much he loves us.

Let's continue. In Him, then, we have obtained an inheritance. We've been chosen, we've been adopted, and now we get an inheritance as the people of God. Having been predestined according to His purpose. What's His purpose? To bring us back to Him. So that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might then give Him praises in all the world.

Paul's talking to his Ephesian friends now. He was there three or four years ago. He had started the church in Ephesus. He'd done incredible things with them. And he is reminding them, saying, you who are the first ones in this area to see the hope of Jesus and experience his power, don't forget it. Don't forget it. It is you that God is going to work through to show the rest of your neighborhood, your community, and your city who He is. Remember the purpose.

Then we get to the Holy Spirit. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth and the gospel of your salvation, believed in Him, you were then sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance. You see, the Holy Spirit is the one that lives with you from the time of your baptism. When those waters were poured over you, the Holy Spirit has been present with you in your life, guiding you, leading you, and showing you what God's kingdom is all about. And when you failed, when you've needed those extra moments of silence and reflection during a confession time, and you're like, Pastor John, that was too short. I need a little more time to confess all these things. That is the Holy Spirit working in you, showing you, not how terrible you are, but how far you've looked away from God, and reminding you that He is there with you, that He loves you, and that every time you turn back to see Him, His words to you are, I forgive you. And just like that father in the story of the prodigal son, you get that big hug. Welcome home. This is the Holy Spirit living with you, reminding you that that is your future, that living with the Lord and in His new creation for all of time is your future.

And today as we live in this world, and as we try to share little bits and pieces of that future with the world around us, that is the Spirit working in and through us to help people see God more clearly, to see that they are loved, to see that He wants them to be brought back to Him. This is the work of the Spirit with us.

So what is God's purpose again? Let's be clear on this. It is to bring His people back to Himself. That is what God wants in this world, above all things. How is He going to accomplish this? Well, Paul gets into it.

This is the second section, and he says for this reason, because God is this way because God has this purpose, here's what He is going to do. Paul encourages them. He says I've heard of your faith. I've heard of your love. I've heard how you've been keeping Jesus at the forefront of who you are

and in your city. I will never cease to give thanks for you, remembering you at all times. So now, here is what God is going to work through you. The spirit of wisdom and revelation of the knowledge of Him is going to do these things. It is going to open the eyes of your heart. It is going to remind you that the hope that you have, God has called you to that hope from the moment of your baptism. He has given you hope that will never fail, that will never fade. And then He is going to point your eyes to see the treasure of that hope.

What's the treasure of that? What do we get out of that hope? What do we get out of understanding that God loves us and that we're saved in Jesus? We are blessed with eternal life, eternal life that gets to be lived today and throughout all of eternity. That is the riches. It is the relationship. It is the togetherness. It is the unity of God with His people, including you. That is the treasure. Remember who the treasures are in the Old Testament? God's most treasured possession? It is you. It is what He is always been after. So, if the eyes of our hearts are opened, if we know the hope to which we're called and we understand what we're aiming for, what's the benefit of all this, then, well, we have to say this.

The way that God works is through hope. Hope is the thing that will open the eyes of the blind, that will enlighten the eyes of our hearts. You see, when Jesus went to people who were blind and He either spoke to them or touched them, He showed them who He was, that He could make all things right, and that He could set the world straight once and for all. And they went off just praising His name and giving thanks to God, for they used to be blind, but now they can see. Paul knew this specifically. Do you remember? At one point in his life, he was blind too. When Jesus interrupted him from persecuting the church, Jesus blinded him. It wasn't until Paul went to a gathering like this, of the church, that Jesus led him to where he confessed that he had been wrong. When he confessed that Jesus was truly Lord, the scales fell off of his eyes, and he was baptized. I mean, if anybody can talk about how hope opens the eyes of our hearts, and of the blindness that we experience, it is Paul.

What kind of power does God use to accomplish His purpose? He uses hope. I think this is the key strange-counter-cultural thing about Jesus, about the church, about our place in this world, that we are all about using hope to accomplish our purpose. And what is our purpose? It is to bring people back to God. Focusing on those two things, Paul says to the

Ephesians, this is what we're all about. This is what we're called to do, to see God's power made real through hope. And if anybody had seen that or knew it, it was this group, this church in Ephesus. When you go back to the book of Acts, you see what Paul did with the people in Ephesus. When he went there for the first time, he healed the sick; he made the lame walk; he made the blind see. All the people who were worshiping other gods stopped to look, to see what this was all about. And many, many believed. The people that Paul was writing to had seen the power of Jesus in reality.

They'd seen how it changed their friends' lives, and many of them were those people. I think you've seen the same thing. I think in your own heart, in the lives of the people around you, in your family, you've seen how hope changes our outlook. It changes our lives. It changes the way we focus, who we are, what we do, and what we care about. And that works, because hope is the power that God uses to bring about his purpose.

Paul ends with this incredible verse. All of this is so that you would know the immeasurable greatness of God's power toward us who believe according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He gave Christ all power and all authority and all rule and all kingship above every name that could ever be on all of heaven and in all of earth. Who is the king? It is Jesus. It is this little baby, this coming of the King at Christmas that we just celebrated. It is Him. Who is it in which we can hope that will change everything? It is only Him. It is immeasurable. And it is great.

And when we talk about God and power, we have to make sure to remember that this power is for a different purpose. It is strange. If His purpose is to bring people back to Him, what kind of power is He going to use? Well, it is not the strength of armies. It is not the strength of gold. It is hope. Hope in Jesus. A different purpose needs a different power. And the people in Ephesus needed to hear that. Ephesus was the center of Roman life in all of East Asia. The governor was there. The big lines of commerce, and the trade routes, all went through there. They saw what power could do in a city. But they knew that as the people of God, they were called for a different purpose. And so they needed a different power.

Paul finishes by talking about the church. He says this, and he put all things under Jesus' feet. He gave Him as the head over all things to the church, which is His body. So the church is the body of Christ, and the fullness of

the church is the fullness of Christ. The power that we have is only the power of Jesus. And what is His power? It is hope.

It is hope. Some of us get nervous when we start talking about the church and power together, for good reason. But when we remember that God's purpose is to bring people back to Himself, He needs a completely different power to make that happen. All the other ways that we try to have power in this world are not going to work. His power is hope. It only and ever has been. Hope in Jesus.

As we close out today, I hope you remember that God's power is made real through you, through the Holy Spirit working in and through you. You are called to be close to Him, and as such, to help other people experience that as well. How do we go about that? By sharing hope. I hope that as you start off this new year with the resolutions and all the things that are going to happen, remember what your purpose is. It is to help others see Jesus more clearly. How will you go about doing that? By bringing hope where you can.

Let's close in prayer. *Heavenly Father, we thank you for leading us and guiding us today. We thank you for giving us this letter today through your scriptures that even from thousands of years ago makes so much sense today. As we look into our world, our lives, and this next year, Lord, we have so many plans, we have so many wants, so many needs.*

We pray, Lord, that you would align us around your purpose. To help others see you more clearly, to be brought back to you. And that as we follow you, as we trust you, Lord, we know that you will give us opportunities to share the hope of Jesus with those around us, so that they, too, could walk with you more closely.

All of this, we pray, as we walk your way together. In Jesus' name, Amen.