

See the Invisible: Do the Impossible

A stirring eleven-segment exposition of Ephesians 1:11-23

Day One

See the invisible: do the impossible

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, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know... (Eph 1:17-18).

Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:17).

Can you see the invisible? Can you do the impossible?

That's what the next few days are all about. Are you ready!

Whether you feel discouraged right now and your life seems sluggish or gluggy, or whether you are travelling well, God's Word can refresh you get you up and running.

In Paul's day, people did not have a New Testament. They were reliant on spiritual insight and revelation. In the letter to the Ephesians, the apostle passed on to his readers the great truths that the Spirit had revealed to him. He prayed that God would open their eyes so they, too, would have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (See also Col 1:9-12). Today, the New Testament is readily and freely available; but we still need the Holy Spirit to open our spiritual eyes so we can see what it is really saying. Like Elisha's servant, we are surrounded by the forces of heaven, but we need spiritual insight to perceive them. We need to see the invisible.

During these next few days, as we deeply consider verses 11-23 of Ephesians 1, don't be surprised if you grow increasingly thrilled with the wonders of what God has done for us in Christ. As your eyes are enlightened, so your heart will rejoice.

Pray that you will be filled with God's Spirit as you read. Perhaps you have spiritual cataracts that make everything seem dull and grey. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a kind of celestial cataract surgery so everything will shine in brilliant, stunning colour. The invisible can be visible and the impossible can be possible.

And by the way, don't leave off after the first couple of days. Stay with it right to the end of the chapter or you will miss out on the best bits!

So what?

1. Read 2 Kings 6:8-23.
2. Spiritual enlightenment comes from both Spirit and Word. The truth is in the Word. So pray as you read for the Spirit to give you new insight and understanding.

Day two

An eternal inheritance

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:11, 12, ESV).

One popular idea about Christianity is that it is all about ‘pie in the sky when you die’. Like many such sayings, this is both true and false. The *central* message is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins and rose again for our justification. Yet there is an inheritance—a guaranteed inheritance for all who put their faith in Christ. It is ours right now. Let’s look at some key words in this text.

Inheritance. Just as a heritage of land was allocated to each of the tribes of Israel when they entered the Promised Land, so our inheritance has been allotted to us. Forever!

Predestine. The word is *prohorizo*. You can see the connection between this word and our English word ‘horizon’. What it means is that God has set limits or horizons for us in which we may safely live and move and have our being.

Purpose. The Greek word here was used by Jesus for the orderly laying out of the showbread in the Temple (Matt 12:4). So is God’s purpose for us. This same noun is used in the well-known text Romans 8:28. In everything God works for our good because he has called us according to his purpose. The outcome of God’s purpose must be good. It may not always be nice—but in the long run it is always good. In everything.

Counsel and will. In the New Testament, these terms are almost synonymous, but ‘counsel’ may also include a sense of action. So we have been predestined according to the *activated* intention of God’s *overall* intention. This is God’s definite will. Observe how Paul goes to some pains here to establish how certain God’s purpose is for us.

Remember that this is a letter. Maybe Paul paused here to re-read what he had already dictated (verses 4 and 5 in particular) and then thought, ‘I have to say more about this.’ And so he returns to it. He wants to hammer home the fact that no matter what happens God has an underlying and unchanging purpose which he works out in ‘all things’. This is not coincidental. God is not capricious or whimsical. We can trust him simply because he is God. Whatever happens along the way we know that there is an imperishable inheritance waiting for us one day. How good is that! What a marvellous hope! Ultimately it is all to the praise of his glory.

So what?

How true is the following statement?: ‘Knowing that God has a purpose for my life makes it easier to keep going even if I don’t know what that purpose is.’ Discuss with a friend or family member.

Day three

Word and Spirit

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14, ESV).

The Gospel is 'the word of truth'. This is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture (Jn 17:17; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 2:15; Jas 1:18). Nowadays, for many people, 'truth' no longer means 'truth'. In our post-modern generation, truth is simply what you make it. This means that your 'truth' is just as valid as my 'truth', which is actually nonsense. By definition, truth is exclusive. If one thing is true everything that disagrees with it must be false.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13). So we have a twofold witness: Word and Spirit. Furthermore, Jesus himself actually *is* the Truth (John 14:6). Truth is embodied in him. To know him is to know the truth.

'Gospel' means good news. It is good news because it offers us *salvation*. This word can mean deliverance, release, liberation or wholeness. Here it probably means all of these. Through Jesus we are delivered or released from sin and all that goes with it. Isaiah the prophet put it well: *But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed (Is 53:5).*

To believe means to trust. It is not just a mental nodding of the head. ('OK, I believe that. Cool.') It is a sense of total reliance on Jesus for liberation from the deadly curse of sin and for freedom to live a brand new life. ('Lord Jesus, I believe that you died for me and I trust you to forgive my sins, to blot out my past and to give me a new life.')

The Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee that the new life we have is real, that there is a wonderful inheritance ahead for us, and that one day we shall possess it to the praise of the glory of God. What an extraordinary hope we have in Christ! No wonder our hearts are filled with joy even in the darkest times.

So what?

- Which three of the following statements are NOT true? Why? (a) If I live a good life I will go to heaven. (b) I can be sure I am going to heaven because I pray and go to church (c) In spite of my sins, I know I have eternal life through Christ (d) In the long run everyone goes to heaven regardless because God is love (e) Through Jesus' death all my sins are blotted out forever.
- Which one of these three terms means the most to you personally?— 'Gospel', 'salvation' and 'inheritance'. Give reasons for your answer.

Day four

Sealed by the Spirit

In him you also, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14, ESV, modified).

A seal in biblical times was usually made by laying melted wax over the join in an envelope or a parcel and then stamping it with a signet ring or an engraved stone bearing the owner's initials or name. The scroll of Revelation chapter five was sealed seven times. Wax seals were obviously not strong but like Humpty Dumpty, once broken, they could not be put together again. So any tampering would be obvious. One writer says such seals guaranteed both the ownership and the correctness of the contents of a package or document, or even a tomb.

With Ephesians 1:13, it is sometimes thought that the actions of hearing, believing and being sealed are simultaneous. But clearly they are not. We hear before we believe and we believe before we are sealed. Paul understood this. How can we believe until we have heard, he asks elsewhere (Rom 10:14). And something cannot be sealed unless it already exists. The original grammar also makes this plain.

This is exactly what happened at Ephesus at the birth of the church there (Acts 19:1-6). Paul preached to them (they heard), he baptised them (they believed) and then the Holy Spirit came upon them (they were sealed).

This sealing by the Holy Spirit is critical. New life is received in Christ and when the Holy Spirit comes upon us, he validates the transaction. The Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee of the genuineness of our new faith and of the inheritance that now lies before us. Although we have not yet received it, it is actually already ours (Eph 1:3). On the great Day of the Lord, we will acquire possession of it.

The Holy Spirit was promised both by the Father (Joel 2:28) and the Son (Luke 24:49; John 14:16, 26). Before his ascension, Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit upon his disciples (Acts 1:5-8). In fact, he would not allow them to begin their ministry until the Holy Spirit fell on them, even though they had walked and talked with him, prayed with him, listened to his teaching, observed his miracles, seen him taken to be crucified and met him after his resurrection. *Here's a question:* if these disciples could not serve the Lord without the empowering of the Holy Spirit, how can we? It's worth thinking about.

So what?

- What do we need to do to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit? See Acts 2:38, 39; Luke 11:9-13.
- For more on the empowering of the Holy Spirit, read Acts 8:1-4-25 and 19:1-6.

Day five

Pray Without Ceasing

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:15-16, ESV).

Elsewhere, Paul writes of faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13). The earlier verses in Ephesians chapter one have a lot to say about hope. Now we come to the other two parts of the famous trilogy: faith and love.

Faith. In English, the noun 'faith' and the verb 'believe' look very different. In the original Greek of the New Testament, however, 'faith' (*pistis*) and 'believe' (*pisteuo*) are similar. To believe is to exercise faith. To have faith is to believe.

The faith of the Ephesians was noteworthy. Paul had heard about it. This was no easy-believism or simple intellectual assent. It was real and life-changing. Which immediately confronts us with a challenge: what kind of faith do we have?

Love: This is the well-known term *agape* (pronounced a-gar-pay). It is one of several Greek nouns for love, most of which have to do primarily with warmth of feeling. In contrast, *agape* has to do primarily with the will. *It is not just something we feel; it is something we choose to do.* In some circumstances—like helping a dirty and sick person in a diseased slum—we may feel anything but warm feelings. We may actually feel uncomfortable or even repulsed. But *agape* keeps going anyway. That is why it is sometimes called 'anyway love'.

Paul writes here of love for all the saints. Some will always be more loveable than others, but *agape* reaches out equally towards them all.

Give thanks: Here the verb is *eucharisto* from which we derive the name Eucharist, often used to describe the Lord's Supper. Paul makes the remarkable claim here that he never stops giving thanks for the Ephesian Christians and praying for them. They are constantly on his mind.

The Bible says it is a sin not to pray for people we are responsible to pray for (1 Sam 12:23). Some people say, 'I just pray for others when I feel led.' If we are honest, we often miss people when we pray like this. We nearly always need reminders. There is a discipline in prayer that is essential for genuine discipleship.

So what?

1. Make a list of at least seven categories of people for whom you should pray e.g. your family and friends, missionaries, colleagues... who else?
2. Over the next few days, set up seven blank pages, one for each category and insert the actual names of people you know in the relevant category.
3. Allocate one category to each day of the week and make it the basis of your regular daily prayer.

Day six

The Eyes of the Heart

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, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened (Ephesians 1:17-18, ESV).

In verse 17, Paul is careful to specify exactly which God he means. This was necessary in a pantheistic world where there were many gods. It has almost come to this again in our day. People have many objects of worship and many different concepts of what God is like. To us there is but one God (1 Cor 8:6). He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's look at this prayer more closely. It bears repeating often.

Spirit: Translations vary as to whether this means 'spirit' generally or the Holy Spirit. But given that the outcome is ongoing revelation, it must refer to the Holy Spirit

Wisdom: The name Sophia means wisdom. If that is your name you are right here in this verse. True wisdom is not a matter of intelligence or education. It has more to do with character. See James 3:13, 17 where the qualities of wisdom are listed—humility, purity, peace, gentleness, reason, mercy, good fruits, impartiality and sincerity—qualities that even a child may demonstrate. Wise people show their wisdom by the way they live.

Revelation: A revelation (*apokalupsis* from which we get 'apocalypse') is an unveiling, a disclosure. This is the original title word used in the book of Revelation. It means spiritual perception: seeing things in the Spirit that may not be known otherwise. And it focuses on our knowledge of Christ. First and foremost, we are to know him.

The letters *phot* are in the centre of the Greek verb for 'enlighten'. Just as a camera perceives an image and then records it, so Paul prays that we might perceive truths about Jesus and record them in our hearts. And as a camera needs correct illumination to capture a clear image, so we need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

Elisha's servant saw the hosts of heaven when the prophet prayed, 'Lord, open his eyes' (2 Kings 6:17). The Spirit enables us also to see the unseeable; to visualise the invisible.

In the song 'Blessed Assurance', the brilliant hymn-writer Fanny Crosby wrote, 'Visions of rapture now burst on my sight.' The thing is that, although she penned thousands of hymns and poems, she had been physically blind since infancy. But spiritually? Spiritually, her eyes were wide open!

Are you beginning to see the invisible? Now is the time.

So what?

1. How often have you prayed for a spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of Christ? In the light of James 3:17, write down five ways in which such praying might affect your life.
2. The Holy Spirit reveals truth through the Scriptures. What about reading the Word on your knees and asking the Spirit to open the eyes of your heart as you do?
3. If you know it, use the song 'Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord' as a meditation today.

Day seven

Things to Know

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 (Ephesians 1:18, ESV).

The eyes of our hearts need to be open because there are things that we need to know.

Calling: First, the hope to which God has called us. In this first chapter of Ephesians, hope is a major theme, and it is consistently linked with God's eternal purpose for our lives.

Previously, we are told that we have been chosen, selected and predestined (verses 4, 5, 11, 12, 14). Now Paul adds the verb 'call'. The meaning is plain. Just as Jesus called his first disciples to follow him (Mk 1:15), so we are called.

Here are some of the outcomes of this calling.

- We *know* that in everything God is working for good (Rom 8:28)
- Conformity to Christ (Rom 8:29)
- Suffering and hardship, following in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Pet 2:21)
- Humility: the calling is his choice (1 Cor 1:26-27)
- Walking worthily (Eph 4:1; 2 Thess 1:11)
- Righteousness (Rom 8:30)
- Holiness (Eph 1:4-5; 2 Timothy 1:9)
- A heavenly home (Heb 3:1).

Glorious inheritance: The word 'riches' occurs fifteen times in Paul's writings, five of them in Ephesians. Earlier the apostle discusses the riches of our inheritance in him. Now we read of *his* inheritance in *us*. This is extraordinary. To God, we are of great value. We are his riches. His greatest treasure is the Church. No matter how wretched and poor we may see ourselves to be, God sees us being of incredible value. We belong to him and he finds great joy in us. It is all of grace. Not that we chose him but that he chose us. It seems too much to believe. And so Paul prays for the eyes of our hearts to be open to see it—to see the invisible.

So what?

1. Of the eight outcomes of our calling listed above, which three seem to be the most important for you right now? Give reasons for your choice.
2. How difficult is it to believe that you are part of God's inheritance? Why? What can you do about it? This would be a good discussion point.
3. Note that in both Eph 1:18 and Rom 8:28 the word 'know' is used. How can we be so sure?

Day eight

The Greatness of His Power

And what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:19-20)

The third truth that Paul prays for us to know is the immeasurable greatness of his power. Let's think for a while about the terminology he uses.

- *Immeasurable*: Paul's original term was the fascinating word *huperballo* where *huper* means 'above and beyond the norm', as in English expressions like hype, hyperactive, hyperbole and hypermarket, and *ballo* means 'I throw' (think of a ball). So, to coin a word, God's power is 'hyperballistic'. Like a rocket through space, it goes far beyond what we can imagine. It is all-surpassing power.
- *Greatness*: Our prefix 'mega' (as in megaphone, megahertz, megalomania) is related to the original term used here and conveys the idea of greatness.
- *Power*. The word is *dunamis*. Obviously all the 'dyna' words in English stem from this. God's power is dynamic, explosive.
- *Working*: Two words are used here—the noun *energeia* and the verb *energeo*. They have to do with being effective, with making or actualising. So God's power is energising and productive. It works! As the old gospel song says, it is wonder-working power.
- *Great*: English words ending in 'crat' or 'cratic' such as autocratic, democratic, plutocratic all draw on this Greek word (*kratos*). The idea is of strength, forcefulness, dominion.
- *Might*: God's power is mighty.

We could sum up these terms in a more contemporary fashion as the *Christocentric, hyperballistic, megathonic, dynamic, effective, theocratic, mighty power of God!* Sounds impressive, eh?

But the Scripture gives us an even better summary. This power is like the power God worked when he raised Christ from the dead! And it is 'for those who believe'!

This is almost too much to comprehend. Is it really true? Can such a resource be ours? The answer is Yes! When it comes to spiritual warfare, we have access to such power that no sin, no wickedness, no addiction, no passion, no habit, no fear, no discouragement, no dismay, no darkness, no demon, no terror can overcome us. We can do the impossible! We need an ongoing revelation of this great truth of the indescribable, unsearchable dynamism that is ours in Christ. Lord, please open our eyes that we may see.

So what?

1. How was the resurrection achieved? (Rom 8:11)
2. Which of the following is *not* relevant to apprehending the power of God in our lives? Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; Eph 3:20-21; Jude 1:20; Nehemiah 7:69.
3. Which two things can we do to achieve stronger faith to claim God's power? See Mark 9:24; Romans 10:17.

Day nine

Far Above All

God... raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places 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 (Ephesians 1:20-21).

Jesus

It was by the resurrection that God demonstrated the deity of Christ (Romans 1:4). There are many credible stories of people being brought back to life, but all of them died again, eventually. Jesus is the only one who was raised and has never died. His resurrection is unique.

God's right hand: This is a figurative expression that means a place of honour and authority. It speaks expressly both of the headship of Christ over all his people and the triumph of Christ over all his enemies (Psalm 110:1).

In the heavenly places: This is not to be understood geographically. Heaven is neither 'up' nor 'down'. The heavenlies are where God dwells—and in this sense they are everywhere (2 Chron 2:6; 6:18). But specifically, the heavenly places are those where his Presence and Power are manifest.

Far above all: This phrase again contains the prefix *hyper* and means exactly what it says. Christ is supremely exalted. Not just above, but far above every other claimant to superiority, every—

- *Rule:* the word is *arche*, which means anyone or anything who claims to be first (as in words like archbishop, archangel, archduke). Anyone who claims to be first in anything makes a false claim. Only one person can be first and that is Christ.
- *Authority:* as a single policeman can stop a huge truck, authority always trumps power. Christ's authority supersedes all other authority.
- *Power:* name the most powerful, dynamic force you can think of and it shrinks before the power of Christ.
- *Lordship:* Christ is far above every monarch, dictator, president, prime minister, premier, archbishop, billionaire—whoever you like to name. The Greek term includes the word *kurios* which means 'Lord'. There may be lords aplenty, but he is *The* Lord.
- *Name:* Think of any name you like, past, present or future, but God has given Jesus a greater name, the name that is above every name, that at his name every knee should bow and every tongue confess that he is the Lord (Phil 2:9-11). His name is the saving, cross-centred name of Jesus (Matt 1:21). He is far above all! What a name! What a Saviour!

So what?

1. Pray through the five attributes of Christ given above. Take them one by one and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a fresh revelation of how each one applies to Jesus.
2. Think of two or three great songs about the name of Jesus and meditate on them during the day. Maybe you could even write your own song. Why not?

Day ten

All for the Church

And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:22-23, ESV).

Verses 20-21 are repeated in verses 22-23 in summary form. But the terminology is changed slightly. It is not just that Christ is far above all things, marvellous as that is, but that all things have been put under his feet. This is an even stronger image. It evokes ideas of treading on serpents or scorpions or cockroaches or other pests and crushing them to death. And he is not only head of the church but he is cosmic head over all things. His will and his word are of supreme authority.

And now comes the really exciting part. Verse 22 says that God 'gave' Jesus. Gave to whom? There is only one possible answer: the church. There are two astounding truths here.

Under his feet. If all things are under his feet, and we, the church, are his body, then they are under our feet too. Jesus himself said this (Luke 10:17-20). We have authority to stomp on the enemy of our souls and thoroughly neutralise him.

This applies in particular to sin. The one thing Satan wants us to do more than anything else is to sin. For when we sin, we deny the efficacy of the Cross and the power of the resurrection. We count the blood of Jesus a valueless thing and deny the power of redemption (Heb 10:29). We reject our calling to be holy.

No matter how irresistible sin may seem at times, we can deal with it. Even when it appears, as it often does, more like a beautiful butterfly than a deadly wasp, we may still tread it underfoot. For all things are under his feet and under ours as well.

The church... is the fullness of him who fills all in all: what an amazing description of the church. It is the complete representation of Christ on earth. The word 'fullness' was used by the Gnostic heresy to describe a pantheon of all known gods. The Bible says here that Jesus is himself the 'fullness'. There is no room for any other god. And the church is the manifestation of that fullness (1 Cor 12:27; 1 Tim 3:15-16).

As we look back over history, we have to ask ourselves how that can possibly be true? How often has the church given the very opposite impression? But as we take it at face value, believe it, and begin to live it through faith in our supreme Lord, it begins to happen. First we need to see it by faith in the realm of the Spirit, and as we have a Spirit of revelation, it begins to work out visibly in our communities and districts and towns and cities. Let's do it by faith! Let's see the invisible and do the impossible in Jesus' name!

So what?

1. Name three areas or practices in your local church life that could be different if the congregation really understood that we are the fullness of Christ on earth.
2. What can you do to see this begin to happen?

Day Eleven

Every Spiritual Blessing

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:3, 22-23, ESV).

Although the words are different, there is a great similarity between the opening and closing verses of Ephesians chapter one. Paul begins by declaring that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing; he concludes by affirming that we are the fullness of Christ. (That's right!)

Preachers sometimes talk about identification with Christ. We probably should begin by thinking about his identification with us. Though he was equal with God, says the apostle elsewhere, he humbled himself and took on human form. He became one with us.

Christ took our sins upon himself, even becoming sin for us—in other words, taking all the corruption, ugliness and wickedness of sin and absorbing it all into his own body to the extent that he even felt cut off from God (Matt 27:46).

In a similar way, through identifying with Christ, the opposite happens. We take all God's blessings into our lives and we become like him. He became sin; we become righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). This is an astonishing concept. But it's true.

An old song says, 'When God looks at me, he sees not what I used to be, but he sees Jesus.' And that's it! And that is why the Bible uses the phrase 'in Christ' over and over again. When we put our faith in Jesus, we are found in him. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:3),

A young woman told me how she used to hear evil voices in her head and was powerless to stop them. Was it just her mind? Was it the devil? Either way, she was seroipuously distressed. As she left my office, I urged her to read Ephesians chapter one every day for a week and to write her name in at every point where she could. When she returned she was really excited. The voices had stopped. She was free! I asked her if she had done the Bible reading. 'Oh, yes,' she replied. Then she proceeded to recite the whole chapter by heart! No wonder she broke through.

It was claiming those many blessings by faith and seeing herself in Christ that turned things around for her. May the eyes of your heart be enlightened by the Holy Spirit too. May you see the invisible and do the impossible through the power of the risen Christ..

So what?

1. Read aloud through Ephesians chapter one regularly, starting right now, referring to yourself every time there is a personal pronoun that could apply to you. For example, 'In him I have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of my trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon me' (Eph 1:7-8).
2. Ask God to fill you with his Holy Spirit and to give you wisdom and revelation in your own life.