

Immeasurable Greatness
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Ephesians 1:15-23

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far 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 age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ ‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³²All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴²for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

I will admit that most Sundays I emphasize how Jesus, being human, can sympathize and understand what we go through and encourages us from a place of experience. The human aspects of Jesus give me great comfort and I suspect they do for you as well. This Sunday, Christ the King Sunday, is just right for preachers like me who don't emphasize as often Jesus as God. Of course, I acknowledge and affirm without question that Jesus is one with God, an equal part of the Trinity. And the awesome power that comes with being God is undoubtedly a comfort in a different way. I just don't speak like that regularly.

Paul does and Matthew does and the gospel of John does, too, so there is much we can gather from them. Beginning with the beginning of John, the almighty nature of Christ is the first quality John lists. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”¹ This Word and this beginning we also find in the first chapter of Genesis: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”² All things, light included, came into being through the Word, who is Jesus. Not only does Christ hold the power of creation but that power is so great that he need not do anything but speak to bring things into being. Think to the healings Jesus did with his words: “Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.” The centurion knew what Jesus said was enough: “the centurion sent friends to say to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.’”³

Maybe we forget this because we remember Paul’s letter to the Philippians, which includes this: “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.”⁴ I always wondered if emptying himself meant Jesus shut off his God abilities, more specifically, having no foreknowledge of how others would behave. It seems it would be hard to be around us if he knew the bad decisions we would make and chose not to change them, or us, so we would retain free will. But, of course, we trust that God in all three persons is around us at all times and the same circumstances still hold true. No, since Christ retained the ability to give life - think Lazarus and Jairus’ daughter – and the ability to make whole – the many healings – and the power over nature – think the calming of the waves and the cursing of the fig tree – I must conclude that emptying himself has to mean something different. After all, we don’t believe that Jesus was only human while he walked the earth, but 100% human AND 100% God.

This emptying, known in theological circles as *kenosis*, has to do with Jesus becoming subservient, leaving the comfort of heaven to live among us and as us. No Godly attributes were missing from the human Christ. When we speak of subservience, I cannot think of a better reading than the one we have from Matthew today. “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these

¹ John 1:1-3.

² Genesis 1:1-3.

³ Luke 7:6-7.

⁴ Philippians 2:5-7.

who are members of my family – the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned - you did it to me.” Who better fits a description of inferior in the eyes of the superior than this list, among whom Jesus names himself one. And yet, this is same Jesus of whom Paul speaks to the Ephesians, saying, “God put [God’s great power] to work in Christ when [God] raised him from the dead and seated him at [God’s] 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 age to come. And [God] has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

Today, we make certain to remember the immeasurable greatness of Christ. John reminds us through Jesus’ words: “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world”⁵ and “Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.”⁶ Before Abraham, I am, *ego eimi*, the same as the one who sent Moses with these words: “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, “I am has sent me to you.”⁷ This immeasurable greatness is, by its nature, impossible to itemize, but we can begin to wrap our heads around it when we come back to the life-giving and the wholeness-giving and the power over nature. Then we add the ways in which Jesus has touched our lives. Then we multiply that by the number of Christians throughout time, and even those who don’t claim the moniker of “Christian.” In this circumstance, we begin to finally use that high school math and think about the *n*th degree, or maybe googolplex or infinity, none of which begin to quantify the greatness of God through Jesus. Perhaps the most moving, beautiful way to think of Christ’s immeasurable greatness is simply this: Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ. And Christ died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ reigns in power for us. Christ prays for us. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray: Almighty Lord, we come before you with gratitude and humility, grateful beyond words for all that you have done for us, humbled knowing we could never earn what we have been given. We thank you for being our God and for creating us as your children. Amen.

⁵ John 8:23.

⁶ John 8:58.

⁷ Exodus 3:14.