

Above Every Name

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

O God, your Word is more precious than fine gold,
and sweeter than purest honey.
As we turn to your Scripture, send your Holy Spirit
to infuse your Word with truth and grace,
so that the good news of your love would shine
before the eyes of our hearts and delight our senses,
so that we cannot help but respond
with wonder, faith, and gratitude. Amen.

Background

Bible commentators over the years have described this first chapter of Ephesians in various ways, as a: *racehorse, gateway, golden chain, kaleidoscope, snowball, an operatic overture, and a flight of an eagle.*

In other words, Ephesians 1 soars in its description of Christ's supremacy, majesty, and mystery like none other.

Paul is in a spiritual rapture as he writes: bursting with adjective upon adjective, superlative upon superlative. In fact, this whole passage is one long prayer, one long sentence. I'm sure Paul's childhood Greek tutor would have cringed at Paul's 169 word sentence we're about to read.

In Paul's prayer, he yearns for the church in Ephesus, for Immanuel Presbyterian, ALL churches and ALL believers EVERYWHERE to know God more intimately and personally. He wants us to be warmer in our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with one another.

So let's hear now the word of the Lord from:

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23 (NRSVue)

¹⁵ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, ¹⁷ 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, ¹⁸ so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you,

what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰

God 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, ²¹ 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.

²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

***The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.***

SERMON – “Above Every Name”

Cambridge historian Richard Rex teaches at Queen’s College, and he writes that there have been three great crises in Christian history:

The first revolved around the theological question: **What is God?**
This raged in the early church.

The second revolved around the ecclesiological question: **What is the Church?**
This led to the Protestant Reformation and ensuing fragmentation of the church.

Rex says we are currently in the middle of the third question, which is an anthropological one: **What is Man? Or “What does it mean to be human?”**

My doctoral mentor Leonard Sweet puts it this way in his new book **“Jesus Human: Primer for a Common Humanity”**:

“It is our sacred duty to be human... the story of humanity is the story of the First to the Last Adam: the First Adam, a failed human, and the Last Adam, the consummate human—The Human One. Our identity crisis is only a crisis because we have failed to find our identity in Christ and in the storyline of humans created in the image of God...”

Jesus doesn’t help us rise above our humanity. In his divinity, he enters our humanity. So if our faith leads us to dehumanize others, it certainly isn’t a Jesus Christianity. We can’t be truly human without the Divine. Christ the King brings the two together. Thank God, we have help from Jesus, the Son of God, who is also the **Son of Man**, which can be translated **“The Human One.”**

Paul prays for the Ephesians, and he prays for us, that we would perceive this spiritual reality with the **eyes of our heart**. We need the divine gift of spiritual insight to see how vast the resources of God’s power available to us are. We can tap into the same power of the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead on Easter morning. This “power, power, wonder working power” helps us see things differently, LIVE differently. We’re given a new focus to spot the poetry and perceive the spiritual reality that we’re “fearfully and wonderfully made” and “the world is charged with the grandeur of God.” Even if our life circumstances are just “fair to middlin” or just plain lousy.

God’s work in Christ is a game-changer for us. Our incarnated, crucified, risen, ascended, reigning, and returning Lord RESIDES in us. So in Christ, we find our new identity: we’re **saints of God**, destined for greatness—even in the midst of dishes, bills, and the daily grind. In Christ, we’re **the church**, not just brick and mortar and committees, but the mystical Body of Christ. And Christ is the Head of the Church. In Christ, we’re sealed and marked by the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit of God’s power at work in us is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. The same power that enthroned Jesus at the right hand of God. The same power that put all authority under his feet. The same power that lifted the name of Jesus far above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, above every title given in this age and in the age to

come. On earth and in the heavenly places. That power is at work in us, individually and collectively.

The good news is that Christ uses his power to restore humanity to its rightful place. I love how CS Lewis puts it in *The Weight of Glory* :

"The dulllest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship... There are no ordinary people."

In Christ, we're extra-ordinary.

- In Christ comm-unity is possible in a world of dis-unity.
- In Christ, reconciliation overcomes alienation.
- In Christ, we can wage peace.
- in a world falling to pieces.
- In Christ, we can live to the praise of God's glory.

I love how Eugene Peterson puts it, "Jesus is eternally and tirelessly bringing everything and everyone together."

In Christ we find coherence. Community. Connection. In Christ, we can trust that God is actively at work in our past, our present, and our future.

- **THE PAST** where we can learn redemptive lessons of faith from the good and bad.
- **THE PRESENT** where we're empowered to obey God's will.
- **THE FUTURE** we can look forward to with confidence and hope because God will right wrongs and bless humans.

Paul really emphasizes God's power available for us. It's a major theme in Ephesians. In fact, v. 19 can literally be translated, "*according to the power of the power of his power.*" Paul uses three different words for power here, with subtle nuances.

John Calvin likens the depths of God's power in Christ to a sturdy tree:

- ♦ God's **ischus** (power) or "**inherent strength**" is like the root system.
- ♦ God's **kratos** (power) or "ability to overcome" is like the tree.
- ♦ And God's **energeia** (power) or "power in action" is the fruit.



When Paul wrote of this power that breaks chains, it wasn't an easy time for him: he was on house arrest and guarded by a Roman soldier while composing this letter. But his soul was unfettered, overwhelmed by God's blessings lavished upon us.

And so in the midst of the challenges of the real world, our aging bodies, notifications of insufficient funds, or loved ones we get worried sick over, we can perceive the hope we're called to. Our eyes begin to sight those God moments, where eternity intermingles with the here and now. So don't forget who you are in Christ, Immanuel:

- You ARE a child of God—chosen and adopted into God's forever family.
- You ARE forgiven and set free to forgive.
- You ARE sealed and stamped by the Holy Spirit—forever marked as God's beloved—guaranteed.
- You have a glorious inheritance awaiting you, A treasure in heaven.
- Christ is making all things new. You ARE a new creation.

All of these blessings are coupled with Christ.



There are things in life that always come in pairs:

- Salt and *what?*... Pepper
- Peanut Butter and *what?*... Jelly
- Rice and *what?*... Beans
- Macaroni and *what?*... Cheese
- Green Eggs and *what?*... Ham
- Bert and *who?*... Ernie
- Jack and *who?*... Jill
- Hansel and *who?*... Gretel
- Barbie and *who?*... Ken
- Romeo and *who?*... Juliet
- Tarzan and *who?*... Jane

So it is with Christ and blessings—it's always a package deal. It's a "two-fur": Christ and spiritual blessings, bundled together.

So my constant prayer for you Immanuel, this Thanksgiving weekend and always, is that:

- the eyes of your heart,
- your innermost self,
- your will, your reason,
- your understanding,
- your conscience,
- and your dependence upon Christ

would be **reawakened, renewed, and refreshed.**

That your love for the saints and faithfulness to God would be **enriched** and **enlivened** and move from glory to glory. And may your **knowledge of God**, not just be ABOUT God, or FACTS about God, but may you **KNOW GOD better**, more intimately, more personally, more closely.

And may you know that Christ the King, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the name that's above every name... the name that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, may you know that THIS ONE lives in you and lives in us, now and forever more!

Amen.

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