

19-21 That power is the same as the mighty strength He exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

"That power is the same" — Paul adds reinforcing terms to demonstrate that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and set Him in supreme authority, is the power available to the believer who is joined spiritually to the resurrected Christ.

"Far above all all rule and authority... and every name... invoked" — many in Ephesus called on

the name of Artemis as the Queen of Heaven, among other demonic names and powers. Christ's power transcends all rivals.

• *For further study*, read Acts 19:23-41; Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15; 1 Peter 3:19-22.

22 And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

"Placed all things under His feet" — from Psalm 8:5-6. Hebrews 2:6-9 also applies this to Christ.

"The church... the fullness of Him" — should show the world a picture of life under God's kingdom authority and justice.

SUMMARY Paul is writing to believers in an expanding group of churches around Ephesus, people who have intentionally chosen Jesus as their Lord and had an encounter with the Holy Spirit. The apostle is praying for their experience of Him to continue to deepen. They need the growing revelation of how the power and authority of the Lord totally eclipses the demonic strongholds over their region — and their lives. Jesus is their Lord, they are His body and through prayer and praise, they have His power because they know Him.

APPLICATION A church congregation is declining if it is not growing, and the powers of darkness are either able to stifle growth and life — or we are active in Christ's authority to assert His kingdom rule. The early church was more aware than us of the unseen spiritual realm. Through knowing Jesus better and better, they could exercise their faith to bring good, and curb evil. Our more comfortable existence deludes us into thinking we don't need this, but in our unbelieving world, we need that deeper, personal, more real experience of Jesus to bring His good order and reach others.

QUESTION *How aware are we of Christ's power working through us, the church? What is the priority of the church prayer meeting?*

PRAYER Lord Jesus, we are sorry that we have often tried to institutionalise the vital personal choice to trust You, and we have not exhorted one another to grow deeper in the experience of knowing You.

Help us to follow Your way by being shepherds and encouragers of one another. May Your love so fill us, that it overflows in meeting the needs of those around us, especially those who have nothing to offer us in return.

And may we grow in revelation of divine truth, and wisdom in applying it, confidently showing Your light and Your love to the confused world around us. For Your glory, Amen

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Bible readings for Sunday, November 22, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **November 22**

Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand — read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: **Knowing about God must grow into experiencing God**

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 — The Good Shepherd will lead with justice

Matthew 25:31-46 — Glory and judgment in Jesus' second coming

Ephesians 1:15-23 — How the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes

Also read: Psalm 95:1-7a, Psalm 100

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24 — The Good Shepherd will lead with justice

The scattered exiles will return to their land and a divine leader

11-12 **For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I myself will search for My sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after My sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.**

"Scattered on a day of clouds" — the dark day of judgment, Ezekiel 30:1-5; Zeph. 1:15, when they were taken away in exile.

13 **"I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.**

"Bring them out... from the countries" — gather those dispersed to Assyria and Babylon.

14 **"I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.**

"Lie down in good grazing land" — restored to the mountains of Israel, the centre of the land promised to the patriarchs. See Psalm 23.

15 **"I myself will tend My sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.**

"I Myself will tend My sheep" — by contrast with the abusive leaders whose attitudes had resulted in the exile, Ezekiel 34:1-4. But compare vv.23-24.

16 **"I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice."**

"Shepherd with justice" — including justice against those who gained from oppressing others.

20 **Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: "See, I Myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.**

21-22 **"Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, I will save My flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.**

23 **"I will place over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.**

"One shepherd, My servant David" — or like David, and of his line (also v.24). Clearly fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

• *For further study* see Psalm 89:3-4, 20, 29; Jeremiah 23:5-6.

24 **"I the LORD will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken."**

"I... will be their God... My servant David will be prince among them" — seems to contradict v.15, "I... will tend My sheep". This foretells the divine/human nature of the Messiah; in John 10:11-18

Jesus the "good shepherd" reveals Himself both as the Davidic Messiah, here, and the incarnate God of Israel, v.15.

SUMMARY Ezekiel was a prophet of the exile times. His words brought a perspective on that failure and God's purpose for Israel after it. The earlier part of the prophecy highlighted the cause: "Should not shepherds take care of the flock...you have ruled them harshly... so they were scattered because there was no shepherd", Ezek. 34:2-5. But God's rescue plan would resettle them to multiply again on "the mountain heights of Israel... their grazing land". New leadership would come through an anointed descendant of King David, a messianic leader, who would fulfil both divine and human shepherding roles.

APPLICATION We know the "one shepherd" v.23, the Good Shepherd Jesus, and His church is where He calls His sheep to Him and tends them. The call of church leaders, despite diverse titles, is to be pastors — His assistant shepherds — and all spiritual gifts and leadership skills should bring His pastoral encouragement and care.

QUESTION *What or who does God want to bring back to Himself, in our time?*

Matthew 25:31-46 – Glory and judgment in Jesus' second coming

At the end time Jesus teaches there will be a separation and a judgment

31 **"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne.**

"When the Son of Man comes" — a Messianic title alluding to Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of Man is a heavenly figure given authority, glory and sovereign power by God in the end times.

32 **"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.**

"All the nations" — Gentiles as well as Jews.

"Shepherd separates the sheep" — Palestinian sheep and goats often grazed together, but the less obedient goats were of a different nature and needed to be separated at times.

33 **"He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.**

"The sheep on His right" — the place of honour for believers, the obedient sheep.

34 **"Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.**

35-36 **" 'For I was hungry and you gave**

Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.'

"Take your inheritance... for I was hungry..." — not salvation by works, but salvation that *produces* works revealing a person's right relationship with God through Christ.

37-39 **"Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger and invite You in, or needing clothes and clothe You? When did we see You sick or in prison and go to visit You?'**

40 **"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me.'**

41-43 **"Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me**

nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite Me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after Me.'

44 **"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help You?'**

45 **"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for Me.'**

SUMMARY The clear teaching of Jesus is that there will be an end time and a judgment, when He will return in glory, to include His own "sheep" who follow Him. He will exclude "the goats", the independent-minded people who know about Jesus, but have resisted His claim on their lives as Saviour and as Lord. We can have a mental assent to who Jesus is, yet not belong to Him or have a life changed by Him. Those who by repentance and faith have become His disciples, will have lives marked by His compassion for others.

APPLICATION A casual reading might give the impression that good works lead to salvation, but the Bible is clear this is not God's way. In James 2:14-26 there's a teaching about the necessity of good works, but the passage as a whole makes clear that what James is saying, is what Jesus is saying: the proof of faith is a changed life that becomes fruitful. The good works, which are commendable, do not *lead* to faith or salvation, but *result from* faith and salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. The Bible is crystal clear that salvation cannot be earned, because that would deny God's grace in making it an unmerited free gift.

QUESTION Social action in the world, and pastoral care within the fellowship, are both important. What is the emphasis of this teaching?

Ephesians 1:15-23 – How the Holy Spirit opens our spiritual eyes

Coming to faith in Jesus begins a process of growing confidence and empowerment

15-16 **For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.**

"Ever since I heard" — Paul had lived in Ephesus, but wrote for the multiplying churches of the region.

"Your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love" — genuine personal faith always results in a changed life, evidenced by a new love for others.

17 **I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.**

"You did not do for Me" — the focus here is within the fellowship of believers (v.40) but elsewhere the Bible teaches helping people of all persuasions.

• **Further study:** Prov. 19:17, Luke 10:25-37; Gal. 6:10.

46 **"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."**

"Eternal punishment... eternal life" — either this judgment happens before the millennial kingdom of Christ starts on earth, or it closes the earthly age, Rev. 20:11-13. Christians agree on the most important point: judgment will come.

"Spirit of wisdom and revelation" — the focus of the prayer is a request for a deeper experience of God and insight into His working and purposes. Wisdom is knowing how to apply divine truth to everyday life.

"Know Him better" — not know *about* Him, but know and *experience* Him personally.

18-19 **I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe.**

"Eyes of your heart" — inner awareness.

"Know the hope to which He has called you" — the Holy Spirit in believers grows spiritual confidence in Jesus, His Lordship — and His return.