

All Saints Sunday – Epistle

Empowered Saints

Ephesians 1:11-23

All Saints Sunday

Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

Ephesians 1:11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory. 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 I 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, 18 so 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, 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Power Failure

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Power-less*

The writer of this letter (we'll call him Paul) prays that his readers will both realize and start living up to the great "hope," the "riches of his glorious inheritance," and the "immeasurable greatness of his power" which is already theirs (v. 19). That is, he is reminding them that they are the "King's kids" who could be luxuriating and reveling in their status as God's beloved children. Yet the fact that he prays for this suggests that perhaps his readers are not living like this. They're squabbling with each other and just not acting brotherly and sisterly towards each other (Jews against Gentiles, husbands against wives, parents against children, and so on). To use the terminology of this Sunday (All Saints), they have been acting downright un-saintly. Paul diagnoses this as a debilitating case of the blahs: Lackluster Christians running on empty; unaware and failing to use the great wealth and power at their disposal.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Powered by Spirits*

When athletes are energy-deprived, they eat a Power Bar to reenergize themselves. Lackluster Christians need recharging too. But what kind of power, and from what source? Perhaps the power of forgiveness had been drained from the Ephesian church and replaced by the power of vengeance. Or, perhaps the power of kindness had run out and been replaced by the spirit of meanness. Then again, maybe the power of love had disappeared altogether, which is why husbands mistreated and degraded their wives, and so on. Paul makes clear that whatever "power" is displayed depends upon its "power source." But the "powers" that

generate un-saintly acts do not come from God. Instead, they are a throwback to those old “powers and principalities” that formerly energized (em-powered) believers. Paul calls them the “rulers, the authorities, cosmic powers of this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (6:2). Is it possible that the lackluster and blahs, and their results—un-saintly behavior—betray a plugging back into those old “principalities and powers”?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Power Failure

If so, the consequences are catastrophic: A power failure of colossal proportions and deadly consequences awaits those who are plugged into the spiritual forces of evil, the “spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient” (2:1-2). The power (and here the word means “the right” or “the authority”) to be King’s kids is cut gone! Accidental shut off? Or switched off by God? Paul suggests it is the latter when he calls it “the wrath of God” (5:6). To lose that power source means dis-inheritance. And dis-inherited kids revert back to being “children of wrath” (2:3).

PROGNOSIS: The Un-failing Power of Jesus

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Saving Power

So what a surprise that Paul rhapsodizes over the spectacular power play God undertakes to salvage disinherited Kids so that he can bring them back into his household! That God-power literally knocks the reigning “principalities and powers” out when it raises Jesus, God’s first-born, from the dead (v. 20). Jesus’ death seemed to be the crowning achievement of the “principalities and powers,” their claim of ownership over the world. But that power gets over-powered. To top it all off, that same death-destroying God-power puts JESUS in charge of the cosmos: God “seated [Jesus] 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 age to come. And he has put all things under his feet..." (vv. 20-21).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *Powered by THE Spirit*

The death-destroying power that raised Jesus generates a new power for disinherited Kids. It's the power (and here again we mean "the right," "the authority") to be King's kids again, inheritance and all! Trusting Jesus is the automatic hook-up to the life-giving, saint-producing power source. Paul explains it's all on account of the simple hearing the Word of truth and believing it (v. 13). But then being plugged into that power opens the King's kids up to the current of the Holy Spirit, which totally re-vitalizes, re-energizes them.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Empowered (Power-Full)*

These kids, with the Holy Spirit surging through them, start living and acting like, well, King's kids! You could call it saintly behavior, or you could just say that being and acting together like King's kids is what "church" is all about (v. 22). King's kids are not a bunch of lonely "only children" off doing their own thing. Rather, they are siblings who have come to treasure each other and the world. You can see it by the way they treat each other and the way they live, constantly rejoicing to "the praise of his glory" (v. 14). Already they are enjoying their mutual inheritance, the "fullness of him who fills all in all" (v. 23).