

Life: Exalted like no other

April 3, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for April 19 focuses on Ephesians 1:7-10; 18-23.*

Forbes magazine ranks Russian President Vladimir Putin as the most powerful person in the world. United States President Barack Obama is second.

Finishing out the top 10 are:

- Xi Jinping, general secretary, Communist Party, China;
- Pope Francis, bishop of Rome, Roman Catholic Church;
- Angela Merkel, chancellor, Germany;
- Janet Yellen, chair, Federal Reserve, Washington, United States;
- Bill Gates, cofounder, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation;
- Mario Draghi, president, European Central Bank;
- Sergey Brin, cofounder, director of special projects, and Larry Page, CEO, Google (tied for ninth place);
- David Cameron, prime minister, United Kingdom.

The *Forbes* list is an intriguing combination of political heads of state, financial leaders, philanthropists, entrepreneurs and, of course, the extremely popular pope, known for his love of all kinds of people and humble acts of service.

The power of Jesus

However powerful these people are, though, it is nothing compared to the power of Jesus, whom the Apostle Paul describes as the one who is “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” (Ephesians 1:21). *The Message* describes it this way: Jesus is “in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but forever” (Ephesians 1:21).

Stocks may rise or fall in reaction to the words of Janet Yellen or Mario Draghi. Bill and Melinda Gates may substantially lower deaths from malaria due to the good work of their foundation; Pope Francis may be honored as one of the most popular leaders in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. But none is exempt from the rule of Christ. God has “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” (vv. 22-23).

Source of eternal riches

Jesus Christ not only is the apex of power over all creation, but he also is the source of riches, power and hope for his followers. The riches available to his church are not temporal; they are eternal. Christ’s finished work of death on the cross redeems us, or buys our freedom from slavery to sin (v. 7). We also are forgiven of our sin and are released from being haunted by the overwhelming guilt of the mistakes we have made (v. 7). Redemption and forgiveness add up to a life of joyous, eternal freedom for the believer. This is true wealth.

The power believers inherit through Christ is “the same as the mighty strength (God) exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms” (v. 23). This is the power that enabled Paul to say, “I can do all things through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). This power is not based on one’s wealth, intellect, influence or business acumen. It is a mighty strength from God that enables us, the body of Christ, to be used by him to fulfill his mission in

the world.

In addition to riches and power, the exalted Christ also is the source of hope. Scripture assures us, “when the times reach their fulfillment,” God will “bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (v. 10).

Paul told the Christians in Ephesus he wanted them to “know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people” (v. 18). I like to think of this kind of hope as an assurance that, no matter what the circumstances of our daily lives, we know ultimately God will bring everything into unity. In his letter to the Romans, Paul expresses this kind of hope by saying “in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (8:28).

The hope we have in Christ

If Paul were to write a new letter to the Christ’s followers today, I believe he would continue to exhort us to acknowledge the hope we have in Christ. Many times believers live defeated lives not discernibly different from the lives of non-Christians. We have, perhaps unconsciously, taken on the constrictions of the finite, fleeting power and wealth that characterizes the world apart from Jesus.

A friend of mine recently said of his generation: “Millennials don’t read the Bible anymore. They read Christians.” I wonder what people see when they read me. Do they see a joyless, fearful, defeated person or a child of God who has gained the rich inheritance of Christ’s power and hope? What do people see when they read you? Perhaps God is leading you, too, to know “his incomparably great power for us who believe” (v. 19).