

Ephesians 1:22-23 Under His Feet

Life is full of competitions and battles and we all like to be winners; no one likes losing.

When it comes to winning rugby games against other nations, especially the Aussies, I like us to win and to win by a large margin.

When we win the America's cup back or it's the shot put or some other sport, I, like most kiwis, feel pumped. We are on the winning team, after all, we are kiwis.

I guess there have been many times I have felt like a winner or a loser. I recall a trip to Kaikohe with a team a few years ago. We just went to serve and run seminars and take services, just do whatever we could do to encourage that small fellowship. On the Saturday our first job was to spend about 4 hours chain sawing up trees for a rest home with the local men's ministry group. I just had my trusty Craftsman 55cc 20" from Mitre 10 and two of the farmers from the local churches had these massive, really expensive chainsaws. There were about 10 trees to cut up, some of them greater than 20" diameter, but I kept pace with these other two. After about 2 hours one of the big machines broke down and after three the other one. For the last hour only one guy was still cutting up logs at a steady pace with his old but trusty 20" Craftsman. It felt good.

Around the same time my oldest son and I went fishing off Tiritiri Matangi in the Auckland harbour. The fish were coming in steadily and we had a huge burley trail of crushed oyster shells and guts. I had hooked snapper up to and around 50 cm often but on this day I pulled up a personal best of 56cm. I was pumped until ... about ten minutes later my son pulled up a 65 cm snapper which made mine look rather average.

There was no overt competition going on in either case but in one I felt like a winner, and in the other a loser.

Now in life there are real challenges and real struggles that come at us from every which angle, but too often Christians see themselves as overwhelmed, not able to cope, depressed and worried; they see themselves as losers in this life when in fact they shouldn't. They have failed to understand how it is we get to overcome life's obstacles and who we really are in Christ Jesus. Even when people rip us off or stab us in the back, none of us are victims, we have a authority in Christ Jesus, a position in Christ that makes all the difference.

Would you stand with me in respect of the Word of God as I read to you our text this morning? Would you stand?

Ephesians 1:22-23 New International Version (NIV)

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

I want you to pause for a moment and consider this,... God has placed all things under His feet. There is nothing in this life or in the universe that is over His head, nothing that is powerful enough to get in the face of Jesus and intimidate Him face to face. No, all things are under His feet.

Now, you might be aware of progress in science where we see things prophesied regarding micro chips in hands or the movement towards moral decay 'as in the days of Noah' and panic. Or you might look at all that is happening and say, He is still in control, nothing is above Him, all things must come under His feet.

Now I understand that life can be really cruel at times and that there are often medical reasons behind depression and anxiety, but I believe that in most cases, if we really knew who we are in Christ Jesus and how we fit in His body and under His authority most of those things would have to go.

There was a man, a king, whose life is recorded in 2 Chronicles 14-16, a believer who was unnecessarily defeated; became a loser in life unnecessarily.

His name was Asa and he was the king of Judah.

2 Chronicles 14:1-5 New International Version (NIV)

14 And Abijah rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. Asa his son succeeded him as king, and in his days the country was at peace for ten years.

² Asa did what was good and right in the eyes of the LORD his God. ³ He removed the foreign altars and the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. ⁴ He commanded Judah to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, and to obey his laws and commands. ⁵ He removed the high places and incense altars in every town in Judah, and the kingdom was at peace under him.

Man, this king was a wise man: he walked with God, he sought God and God's will first in all things. He even commanded his subjects to seek God and the land prospered and was at peace. Asa put God first, sought after God and times were good.

2 Chronicles 15:1-2 New International Version (NIV)

15 The Spirit of God came on Azariah son of Oded. ² He went out to meet Asa and said to him, "Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.

So a prophet warns Asa who is doing good, keep seeking God and God's kingdom and you will do well but turn from God and things will turn to custard, my paraphrase.

2 Chronicles 15:12-13 New International Version (NIV)

¹² They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and soul. ¹³ All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman.

Things are going very well for Asa and the people; they are deadly serious about seeking God. Asa walks with God for over 30 years serving God, ministering to the Lord and to others, hearing thousands of sermons but then,

2 Chronicles 16:11-13 New International Version (NIV)

¹¹ The events of Asa's reign, from beginning to end, are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. ¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was afflicted with a disease in his feet. Though his disease was severe, even in his illness he did not seek help from the LORD, but only from the physicians. ¹³ Then in the forty-first year of his reign Asa died and rested with his ancestors.

Loser! But how does that happen? Someone can go to church, serve God, hear hundreds of sermons, run the Sunday school, lead the worship and then disconnect themselves from the church and the habit of seeking after God and look to man only for solutions.

He got a foot disease that eventually killed him. He was defeated, literally.

In these last days, you will be kept from being anxious and depressed when you realize, as we were saying a couple of weeks ago, if you realize that all things were created by Him and for Him and all things will be put under His feet.

We need to realize, to know, that God has put all things under the feet of Jesus.

When life begins to feel overwhelming, when it feels like that business, that relationship, that health issue is coming down on you and threatens to swamp you, you and I need His perspective, all things are going to be put under His feet, and they can be even today if you and I follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit and speak life and scripture into our situations.

Do bad things happen to good people? You know they do, but we are not victims. We belong to a body which has at its feet all things.

Do you recall the day when the disciples set off across the lake to Capernaum?

Jesus was watching from a mountain top. He saw the boys set out and a gale blow and the waves come up treacherously. The boys on the boat were terrified, "We are going to die," they all thought. And then Jesus walks on the water out to the boys and calms the storm.

This water, these waves that seemed so ominous, so terrifying, that looked like they could overpower the disciples. Where were they? They were under His feet. He had authority over them and everything else in this world that claims the authority to take you out and crush you. They were under His feet, and those things that cause you great concern too can be as well if you would just pray and exercise your authority as a child of God.

Well, you say, Russell, that is a nice devotional thought, that was kind of encouraging but how does that help me practically, how does that show me how to be a winner in this life and not let life's curveballs overwhelm me?

Notice the rest of the verse.

Ephesians 1:22-23 New International Version (NIV)

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

What does that mean?

It simply means this. If you are connected with a local church, if you have chosen to join a church and be an active member in it, connected as it says in 1 Corinthians 12 like the hand is to the arm, every part necessary to collectively reflect the power and life of Christ, then you are in His body and He is the head and you, as a member in His body, also have under your feet 'all things.'

That immediately begs the question, "If being connected to the church puts me in a position of authority so that as part of His body all things are under my feet as well, then the question becomes, well what is a church, what constitutes a church?"

This letter to the church in Ephesus answers that question best.

It says in Ephesians 4:

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷ But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸ This is why it says:

***"When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people."***

⁹ (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰ He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Now you wrestle with this question as I have, but I am convinced that the church is not the building; it is the people. But a small group of people having a bible study does not constitute a church; a church is a group of people, I believe, who come under the influence of the 5-fold equipping ministries. If a group of Christians is not being influenced by the 5-fold equipping ministries, they may be having good fellowship but are not in a church and functioning biblically.

God loves all of His kids to be connected with a church and a church is a group of people who I believe are influenced by, under the umbrella of, these 5 ministries.

I believe that what Jesus said in Matthew 24 speaks about the times we are heading into, that in these last days many will take offence and their love for the brethren will grow cold.

Then Jesus warns us to hang in there and be faithful to the end.

The reason is, that when you are not connected to the body, with Him as the head, with the fullness of Christ, His many Spiritual gifts flowing through the church, you are vulnerable, and all things are not necessarily under your feet.

I know that I am preaching to the Choir because you are here, so you are connected to the local church. But scripture would suggest that we are heading into times when many will stop coming to church and say, I can go it alone, I don't need to be connected with the body of Christ, my mates and I constitute a church. Be careful, they are wrong. That is a prophesied error that will arise in the last days.

You and I serve Our Father in Heaven, and He has so designed the church that we each need each other and each others' gifts and strengths to be overcomers in this world. He loves us, His kids, to humbly and respectfully do life together.

Around 50 times in the New Testament, Christian living is described in "one another" terms.

When you and I are detached from the body of Christ, it's then that we are most vulnerable to depression, discouragement and defeat!

Asa sought God and walked with God for many years, he said, "I know it all, I don't need to go to the temple and seek God anymore, I have been there, I have done that and I am OK on my own, sorting my own problems out, making decisions that suit me," and he was defeated.

Precious family, I believe, I know, that God is in the process of doing something through this church that will not be modelled on another church, that will shape generations for eternity. Satan would love each one of you to take offence over something, to get distracted by some new teaching, for you to go away on your own and do your own thing. That is how he works.

Can I encourage you to stay in the body, with Jesus as the head, with the fullness of Christ flowing through the members of the church, with all things being placed under His feet and therefore your feet.

Stop believing it's impossible, or that you won't cope or that there is no hope, or that this thing or that situation is going to take you out.

Stay connected to the church and prayerfully put that thing under your feet.