

The Holy Spirit and Power

Richard Dawson – Sunday 19th June

Acts 1¹⁻¹¹ / Luke 24⁴⁴⁻⁵³

The last in the 40 Days series we've been looking at over the last few months deals with the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit's work intersects with and, indeed, drives the work and life of the Church. The key points in the study are that the Spirit is the great **Promise** of God, the great **Power** of God and the great **Purpose** of God. I want to focus this morning on the second of these. The Spirit is the great **Power** of God.

Power is not something Christians these days tend to sit very easily with. We perhaps imagine that it is not appropriate to think of ourselves as 'powerful' or, more particularly, as properly seeking power. But the 139 references to power in the New Testament, many of which refer to the power we should have cannot be ignored. And in our reading from Acts today Jesus says 'wait for my power.'

Indeed, the whole notion of the third person of the Trinity is explained, at least in part, in terms of power – God's power. Jesus' ministry is understood and explained in the Gospels in terms of power often.

¹⁷Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and *there was* a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. ¹⁹And all the people were trying to touch Him, **for power was coming from Him** and healing *them* all. (Luke 6)

Add to this Paul's understanding that our goal in Christ discipleship is to understand and to gain the power of Christ for the Kingdom of God is, as he says, a matter of power

²⁰ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. (1 Cor 4)

Again in 2 Timothy

⁷For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Tim 1)

The Kingdom is a matter of power.

The word power and the notion of following Christ are often considered to be mutually exclusive. Many understand the whole idea of following Christ to be one in which we lay down any power we might have so that we may be seen as peace-loving and as non-coercive as possible. Power and Christian faith, it would seem, don't go together well. And there is good scriptural reason for this view.

Jesus eschewed worldly power. He rejected political power on several occasions especially in John 6 where the crowd was about to make Him king. He also rejected the use of spiritual power when he was being taken away by the Jewish rulers to be tried.

⁵²Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?"

In that same passage he rejects the use of violence to achieve the goals of the Kingdom of God. Jesus also resists what might be called 'cultural power' by which I mean the power given to him by the culture of the day. He does so when he accepts women into his inner circle and when he ministers to women and children. He rejects the use of power to reject children and he rejects the powerful demand of the Pharisees to keep his disciples under control when they pick grain on the Sabbath. Jesus rejects all sorts of power at his disposal and His great disciple Paul does the same thing when he proclaims weakness as a real friend rather than strength.

So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12)

Yet even here there is a hint of a power that Paul and Christ do not reject. In this passage it is called the 'power of Christ' and it is the reason Paul rejects other types of power. And this is no insubstantial power. This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead.

¹⁹I pray that you will begin to understand how incredibly great his power is to help those who believe him. It is that same mighty power ²⁰that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in heaven, (Eph 1)

Again power is an incredibly important concept in the Gospels and it is one we should try to understand as best we can. Let me set the tone for today by saying that the goal of any Christian is to become

more powerful in three very important ways all of which are related to the work of the Holy Spirit.

1. The first is that we are to develop a powerful dependence on God.

This may seem like a contradiction but when you think about the worldly sorts of power they all revolve around a kind of dependence which gives power to one who is not naturally powerful. A gun gives power to hurt a person from a distance – a power the user of the gun does not have by themselves. As they become proficient in using the gun they become dependent on it and they gain power. A driver of a car gains huge power by become dependent on the vehicle to move them. A computer user gains terrific power to learn and to interact with others as they become dependent on the computer's ability to reach others through the net. Your smart phone has more computing power these days that the Orion Space mission. What is the Spirit's role in this?

If you think about it dependence requires one thing above all else – proximity – closeness – intimacy. The Baptism in the Spirit brings intimacy with God. In Luke Jesus uses the metaphor of a cloak or some other piece of clothing to describe the infilling of the Spirit when he says

“so stay here in the city until you have been **clothed with power** from on high.”

Nothing could be quite so evocative of intimacy that having he Spirit wrapped around us like clothing. God wants to be that close to us that we take Him everywhere we go and we rely on Him to keep us warm and protected. The Spirit does this in our lives – brings God close to us – helps us know what God is saying and wanting of us. The question is, are we ready for this kind of intimacy with God – Do we want it?

If we want to keep God at arm's length then we are not ready with such intimacy but if we truly want God's power and purpose in our lives then we will open our lives to such intimacy.

Intimacy is scary. When we marry we say yes to intimacy and I'm not talking about sex. Rather I'm talking about the kind of openness and sharing only possible between two mature adults – adults who are willing to talk about their own fears and foolishness; adults who are willing to confront their own weaknesses; adults who are willing to look truthfully into their own lives. This is what a true marriage opens up for us.

God wants the same kind of relationship with us. God is looking for deep intimacy. Are we ready for that?

2. The second kind of power the Spirit can give us is to develop the power to **understand and recognise evil** – first in ourselves and then outside ourselves and when we do this we begin to gain power **over** evil.

Naivety is not innocence in the kingdom of God – it is an expression of sin. There is no need for us to be naïve. There is innocence which is not naivety but we dare not be naïve about evil. The Spirit works to wake us up to evil and wherever you find the Spirit at work evil is exposed. We see this time and again in the ministry of Jesus but also in His followers

¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" (Luke 10)

But the larger part of the Spirit's work is to wake us up to the working of evil within us. The Message translation brings this out beautifully when it translates Jesus' words to the sleeping disciples just before His arrest like this

³⁸Stay alert, be in prayer, so you don't enter the danger zone without even knowing it. Don't be naive. Part of you is eager, ready for anything in God; but another part is as lazy as an old dog sleeping by the fire." (Mark 14)

The Spirit's key task is to teach us and to inform us but we must be ready to learn – open to learn and this largely means we need to be asking questions of God – seeking answers from God – seeking to be open to the Spirit on every occasion. IN his warning about the work of the antichrist John reveals the dynamic work of the Spirit in this manner

²⁴Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵And this is what he has promised us, eternal life.

²⁶I write these things to you concerning those who would deceive you. ²⁷As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him. (1 John 2)

The anointing is the coming of the Spirit upon us – it the Spirit clothing us and through it we can both hold fast to the basic truths of the Gospel **and** be able to avoid naïve assumptions about matters which are currently before us. In this way we gain power over evil.

3. Finally, God calls us to gain power over fear. Fear is a much greater enemy than we think. Fear stops us doing many good things and makes us do many bad things. Jesus was typically a man without fear. Before the so called rulers of His day he spoke fearlessly. To

the evil spirits who confronted Him He commanded fearlessly and in the storms He slept.

The Bible is full of wonderful quotes about resisting and avoiding and fighting fear. There are dozens of them and if you download this sermon you will find a link to many of the [here](#). Let me sum them up in two short sentences.

First, the only thing to legitimately fear over and above ordinary and sensible fear of things like large moving objects and weapons of mass destruction is God. And the fear that we are to have of God is more like awe or respect or complete mind-blowing astonishment.

The second thing is that fear is bad, crippling and to be avoided at almost any cost.

The Psalmist understands fear to be one of our greatest enemies, **4** Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23)

At the heart of Jesus' teaching in Matthew is a command **not to worry**. IN other words – not to let fear dominate our lives...

34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matt 6)

The last thing Jesus said to His disciples was about fear...

27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14)

Finally Paul identifies the Holy Spirit specifically as **not being a spirit of fear...**

⁷ For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (2 Tim 1v7)

We are baptized in the Spirit in order that we might find a way through our fears to defeat fear as both a cause of wrong and action and an impediment to right action.

The result of achieving these things is power – power to add to the kingdom of God; power to obey God, power to address evil – in ourselves and in others. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to produce these things in us.

Won't you ask God to fill you anew with the Spirit?