

The Working of His Power
Ephesians 3:4-7

4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

The man that we read about here in this passage, Saul of Tarsus, better known to us by his gentile name, "Paul", was the first "Apostle", the first "sent one" that God commissioned to go and minister specifically to the Gentiles. And such a calling was truly a strange one to the mind of the ordinary Jew of that day, because as you know, the Jews had a very low opinion of the gentiles. Not only did the Jews reject the Gentiles, they even considered them to be no better than "dogs". And so the thought of accepting them with open arms into the fold of God was repugnant and vile to the Jewish sensibilities.

The reality is though, such biases and prejudices have always been, and still are, very common in most all cultures. In the news lately, we have heard how the divisions between the various castes in the nation of India have caused very violent struggles for them. Theirs is a whole culture built strongly on the concept that people within one caste level are better (or worse) than another caste level and can never cross over from the caste level they have been born into. Theirs is intricately tied to their Buddhism religion which makes their prejudices completely irreconcilable.

And as we know, we here in America also struggle with those same feelings. For myself, I confess that since the introduction of terrorism into our daily lives, I personally struggle with my thoughts and feelings toward mid-eastern Muslim folks.

But perhaps, someday such feelings of bias and prejudice will go away, will leave our hearts completely. We do know that such things are possible, because it took place here in the life of the Apostle Paul.

But may I quickly say to us that such bias and prejudice will never be defeated through the methods and in the manner that the leaders of our day propose. They believe that education and laws and court rulings and other such forced acquiescence will cure the problem. But folks, if that were true, we could simply pass laws and educate away every form of sin and crime and misbehavior, eradicating sin altogether.

So then, how did the heart of this one man, Paul, change, and how were his efforts supposed to bring about that same change within the hearts of his fellow Jews?

A verse quickly comes to mind from the Book of Zechariah (4:6). There we read the simple words . . .

6 . . . Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

With these words, God's angel was instructing Zerubbabel that the great task he was being called to accomplish, that of restoring the temple after Israel's return from exile, could never be done through the might and the power of men, that such miraculous deeds could only be done through the "might and the power of the Holy Spirit."

And the same would be true with the Apostle Paul as he went forth to bring the gentiles of the world into the kingdom of God.

Why would that be so? It is because the underlying foundational basis of prejudice and bias is "sin". No matter how we try to explain ourselves and our feelings, if we have biases and prejudices, they are welling up out from a cauldron of sin within us.

And man, through his own might and power, cannot defeat sin within himself, or within anyone else.

And as we said a moment ago, no amount of explaining, teaching, educating, even punishment, can wipe away the power and the stain of sin. It just is not possible.

And so, we read here in verse 7 of Ephesians 3,

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Here, Paul is telling us that he has been commissioned to give the same gospel that had first been given to the Jews, now to the gentiles. And the same saving power that has been poured out upon God's first family, the Jews, has now been poured out upon the gentiles.

And again, we, you and I, are personally thankful that God's grace now extends to the gentiles, because we are those gentiles.

So then, what is this miraculous "power" that God is telling us about here, a "power" that is able to change hardened hearts into loving Christians? Verse 7 again,

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

Folks, I cannot “over-state” the impact of this word “power”. It simply cannot be overstated. The word itself carries its own inherent impact.

The Greek word given here is “doonamus”, or “dynamis”, the word from which we get our word “dynamite”. And God is very intentional in using this particular word. It denotes a kind of power that is immediate and dramatic, overwhelming to the senses. Nothing can stand against it. To try to stand against this kind of enormous power would be like trying to stand against a mountain of dynamite as it explodes.

And here, there is an added implication within the word, that the power comes directly from the hand of God, a “miraculous irresistible power”.

So may I say again, the strength and the impact of this “power” can never be overstated! Nothing can withstand this power.

So then, as we see this word being used throughout these scriptures we can know the over-whelming effect that is taking place in each circumstance.

It was the same power that parted the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to pass through, while at the same time utterly destroying the Egyptians.

It was the same power that cared for, fed and protected the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness.

It was the same power that was in the Lord Jesus as He turned the water into wine, healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, made the lame to walk, and fed the five thousand.

And as Jesus left the earth to return to the throne of His Father, it is the same power that He sent to dwell on the earth and live within the hearts of men and women like you and me.

Listen to the words of Acts 1:8 (ESV) where, just before He ascended back into heaven, Jesus spoke of this power to His disciples.

8 . . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Some have preached that this special power was for Jesus’ disciples alone. I have heard it preached that the “first-century” church needed what we would today call, a “jump start”, some extra boast of power to get the church going. And that is why God

gave His Spirit with such power. But now, in our day, we no longer have that Holy Spirit Power available to us.

I must tell you that I see nothing of that teaching within the pages of these scriptures. Such beliefs and teachings must come through erroneous conclusions within men's minds because they simply are not given within the words of this Book.

When the Lord Jesus left this earth in His Bodily Form, He sent His Holy Spirit to continue the work that He had begun. And His Holy Spirit was then, and is now, as mighty and as powerful as Jesus was.

May I emphasize that by reminding us that Jesus, the Almighty and powerful One who simply spoke and the whole world came into existence, is one of three within the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, each one and all Three being co-equal and having the same Almighty power to do and to accomplish anything and everything that could possibly come their way.

And now, here in these words of Acts 1, we are told that God's Spirit, with all of His might and power, has been given to each of us who receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

In these words and following on with many other of the same declarations, God is saying that He will not only put His Spirit into each of us who believe, He will also pour out His Spirit upon us and we will receive His might and power beyond anything we could hope or imagine.

May I emphasize this again by saying that I grieve at how so many of our church leaders today have minimized and even removed such teachings from their pulpits.

Folks, God has not changed and the mighty working power of the Holy Spirit has not been removed from our presence. Nowhere in the scriptures is that said.

The mighty working power of the Holy Spirit is still the same today as it was in those first days. The Holy Spirit is here and He is powerful. And He is in you and in me with that same power and might.

And that is how the Apostle Paul was able to bring about massive changes within the hearts and the souls of men.

Not by persuasive words or clever conversation, not by any might or power of his own, but by the mighty working power of God's Holy Spirit.

So why then has God given us, you and me, these words of scripture? Verse 7 again,

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

And Acts 1:8 (ESV)

8 . . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Again, the question, "why did God give these words to you and me?" The answer is simple and forthright. Now that we have received Christ and His salvation into our own souls, we are now to be as the Apostle Paul was then. We are to be the voice of Christ, His arms, His hands, His feet to go on forth and to pass on that which we have been given to every other person we meet along our way.

Listen to these words of instruction from Colossians 1

24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, 26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

This is God passing the responsibility on to you and me. The blessed gift of salvation that God has given to us is not something to be held closely for our own personal benefit. But rather it is a treasure to be shared with as many as will receive it.

And yes, these words speak of our having to suffer afflictions as we go about fulfilling the work that Jesus left for us to do. And we will, in many ways.

As we said in our message last week, we must now be willing to give up on all our old self-centered ways and habits and desires. The eternal salvation of another person's soul is so much more important and valuable than some personal needs or enjoyment we might try to hang onto.

May I share a quick personal application of these words! I remember well the earlier days of my life when my whole focus was given to my becoming the president of a bank, and on all those benefits that followed along with that title, an upscale home, spending time with upscale friends, going to upscale restaurants and to upscale cocktail parties.

But suddenly, one day, through no power of my own and to no credit of my own, all of those foolish pursuits changed. They were not important anymore. I suddenly began to see the needs of others above my own.

What caused that change in me? It was this “power” that God speaks about here, the “power” of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Unbeknownst to me, the mighty working power of God’s Holy Spirit changed my mind, my hopes, my dreams. And may I say, I am so very glad. I know that I am far happier and more blessed today than I could ever have been following after that “broader path” that I had chosen for myself.

So then, what should these words in today’s passage mean for you, personally? Verse 7,

7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power.

First, are you mistakenly thinking that God intended these words for the Apostle Paul alone? If so, may I declare to you with all authority that these words are also meant for you, personally!

The “gospel” that he speaks about here, has the power of the Holy Spirit residing within it and if you are saved, you have also been appointed to be a minister of that gospel. In other words, that which God has given to you, you must pass along to the next person and to the next and to the next.

Folks, “grace” is a mighty river that must be allowed to flow freely, unencumbered by your or my hesitation or fear.

You might say, as Moses did, but I am slow of speech and I don’t know what to say.

Let none of that concern you. Yes, study these scriptures to learn, but have no concern for what you might say as you minister. These words from Matthew 10:19 (ESV)

19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.

This is a trustworthy promise. When you find yourself needing to say a word from God, the mighty working power of God’s Holy Spirit who lives within you will give you the exact words you will need to say.

I hope to spend more time telling us about this precious mighty working power of God's Spirit, and I especially invite you to begin to search through these scriptures, asking God to reveal His Spirit to you. You will be forever blessed.

For today, may we close with these words again from the Book of Zechariah (4:6) . . .

6 . . . Not by might, nor by power, (your power, my power) but by my Spirit, saith the LORD.