

“God’s Gift of Power” (1 Corinthians 1:17–2:5)(12.22.19)

LET US PRAY.

1 Corinthians 1:17–2:5 (NIV84)

17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.

26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. 2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. 4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: God’s Gift of Power

INTRODUCTION:

I have read hundreds and hundreds of sermons by the prominent preachers from centuries past. In the reading, they seem fairly ordinary; and yet, they were extraordinary in bringing people to faith. What the written word on the page cannot capture is the movement of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of the hearers. The preachers believed their gospel message whole heartedly and without reservation. God the Holy Spirit used the foolishness of what was preached to change the hearts of men and women.

Like Paul, I can proclaim, “Woe to me unless I preach the gospel.” Studying God’s word, reading & listening to sermons, reading commentaries, discovering illustrations is all a joy to me. During this process, I take pages and pages of notes.

What I don’t like to do, is actually write the sermon, to actually start writing. Why? From experience, I know it will never be as good as it could be. I want the message to be witty, engaging, to have a hook, to be sticky, to create sound bites that people remember. Will it create an emotional response, is there a sound logical argument and progression...oh if only it was perfect...people would love Jesus and the pews would be packed.

That kind of preaching isn’t always possible. Maybe once in a blue moon, but it isn’t sustainable. But worst

of all, as Paul explains in our passage, God just doesn't work that way. There is no divine power in it. There is no divine dynamis. If people are converted by human efforts, they can just as likely be unconverted by the things of this world.

I pray that today's message is conveyed by divine dynamis, the Greek word for power. From dynamis we derive our word dynamite. May this message be divine dynamite that convicts, converts, and convinces that we proclaim Christ Jesus, and Him crucified.

BODY:

Clearly, if you have been paying attention, this section of the opening portion of 1 Corinthians is important. There is so much truth being conveyed. They are foundational truths for the "Big C" Church and the local church. Otherwise I would not have spent four weeks wrestling with them. This week, I added the 17th verse. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

- (C1:v17) Lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power

- o This is a humbling and scary thought. Paul is saying that our intentions may be honorable; our motivations may be pure; we may eloquent; we may use classical philosophical wisdom; and yet we may do more harm than good.

- o Nowadays, there is a huge push to tell stories in our preaching. In fact, here in the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference of the UMC, we are having a Bishop Convocation in January where the workshops center around better story telling.

- ♣ Yes, Jesus told parables. Yes, we can learn from stories. They are an effective communication tool. The key question is whether they contain dynamis.

- ♣ 2 Peter 1:16 "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

- ♣ I would like to be a better story teller but stories have their place. The danger is substituting anything for the power found in the cross of Christ. Instead of going to the Bishop's Convocation, may I be infused with divine dynamis.

- ♣ It has occurred to me that there is a danger that you might limit these truths to preachers. Every disciple of Jesus is to share their faith. It might be with your family. It might be with a neighbor. It might be with a co-worker. Remember NOT to empty the cross of Christ of its power.

- (C1:v18) The message of the cross is the power of God

- o What is the message of the cross? It is a message of love. It is a message of judgment. The message of the cross is that Jesus resolved judgment with love, once and for all.

- ♣ Romans 5:8 (NIV84) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- ♣ John 3:16 (NIV84) "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

- o The message of the cross is that the forces of darkness have been defeated. Death has been defeated. The demons have been defeated. The Devil has been defeated.

- ♣ Hebrews 2:14 (NIV84) Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—

- ♣ Colossians 2:15 (NIV84) And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

- (C1:v25) The weakness of God is stronger than man's strength

- o Our natural response to this is, "Why of course this is true." But we need to look at the testimony of our lives to see if we have truly believed that we should ALWAYS trust God over the ways of humankind.

o There is even more to this statement. Does God have any weakness? No, God has no weakness. Paul is saying that there is no comparison between human and divine power.

♣ Here is an illustration: Man has created some horrific weapons of mass destruction. The Tsar Bomba, a secret Soviet nuclear weapon, was the largest thermonuclear device ever detonated. On the other hand, God created our sun, and all the suns of all the galaxies.

♣ Let's compare the two. Our sun's energy engine is essentially a perpetual thermonuclear explosion, just on a much larger scale. To give you a bit of perspective, the Tsar Bomba released about  $2.1 \times 10^{17}$  Joules of energy, while the Earth receives nearly that same amount of energy from the sun every second of every day.

• (C1:v24) Christ is the power of God

o This is a huge subject beyond what can be covered today. I will put some supplemental scriptures in the sermon comment section on our website. You know that Jesus is the Word of God, who was with God in the beginning, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made. You know that God created the world by speaking it into existence. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. The birth of Jesus.

o Colossians 1:15–20 (NIV84) 15 He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

o The Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon, said, "Christ is personally the power and wisdom of God; Christ's gospel is the power and wisdom of God; and, Christ in the heart is the power and wisdom of God.

• (C2:v5) A demonstration of the Spirit's power

o Jesus said in Luke 24:49 (NIV84) I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

o Here are some quotes from The Way to Pentecost by Samuel Chadwick:

"Every kind of power comes in the Spirit: intellectual power, moral power, spiritual power, and physical power. He quickens the mind, purifies the heart, and strengthens the whole man."

o And, "The one vital cause of failure in the Church is in the poverty of the spiritual life of its people."

o In scripture Zion is the heavenly city and Babylon represents the center of evil in this world. "The work of the Spirit depends upon the power of the Spirit. No other power will do. The energy of the flesh cannot do the work of the Spirit. For His power there is no substitute. When Zion covets Babylonish gold, envies Babylonish garments, copies Babylonish ways, adopts Babylonish altars, and fights with Babylonish weapons, Her strength fails because the Spirit of Power is lost. Carnal resources are no asset in spiritual enterprise."

• (C2:v5) Faith that rests on God's power

o Ephesians 1:18–23 (NIV84) 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he [God] has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 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.

o Jesus says in John 14:12–14 (NIV84) 12 “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

CONCLUSION:

How can this be? What did Jesus mean that anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing? He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. First he means that He himself will be advocating for us and empowering us. Second he means that what we do must glorify the Father. Third he means that we must continue on Jesus’ mission. Fourth he means that prayer is the communication channel. Jesus will do it.

No, we will not walk on water or raise the dead. Let us not be like the Jews that demanded signs and wonders. The greater thing we will do is the expansion of the kingdom. We have the message of the cross, which is the power of God to those who are being saved. We have been set apart so we have Christ the power and wisdom of God. We have the testimony of God.

Because we are in Christ Jesus, we have been equipped with godly wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Let us lift high the cross of Christ. Then the Holy Spirit will demonstrate His power. Our faith does not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power. Our faith is based on divine dynamis. May God light the fuse of our dynamite.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV84)

7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

Hebrews 1:1–4 (NIV84)

The Son Superior to Angels

1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

John 10:18 (NIV84)

18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

Revelation 5:12

In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

Acts 4:7

They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”

Acts 10:38

how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Luke 24:19

“What things?” he asked. “About Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.

1 Corinthians 5:4

When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

Philippians 3:21

who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Luke 5:17

One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

Mark 5:30

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

Luke 6:19

and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.

Mark 1:27

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.”

Luke 4:36

All the people were amazed and said to each other, “What is this teaching? With authority and power he gives orders to evil spirits and they come out!”

Matthew 24:30

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

Mark 13:26

“At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.

Luke 21:27

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Luke 11:20

But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

Philippians 3:10

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

Hebrews 7:16

one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life.