

# Followers of the Way

## Moving in power

### Philip Quenby 9-10-22

#### Mark 8:27-38 and 9:1

The theme today is: moving in power – and Christianity is a religion of power. Followers of Christ aren't helpless victims at the mercy of a world under the control of Satan and his fallen angels, but mighty warriors in the army of God – kings and priests in the heavenly kingdom (1 Peter 2:5, 2:9, Revelation 1:6, 5:10) with the corresponding authority to take on the enemy, and win. We're soldiers of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:7, Philippians 2:25, 2 Timothy 2:3-4, Philemon 1:2), equipped with spiritual weapons of warfare that are perfectly crafted to handle whatever challenges and threats we might face (Ephesians 6:10-18). As the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5).

Later, Paul encouraged the believers in Ephesus to, "be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power" (Ephesians 6:10). That wasn't a pep talk of the kind the world might give. It wasn't based on a vague hope or some made-up theology. It was a statement about the reality of the Christian life. Following His crucifixion, Jesus' promise to His followers was (and to this day remains), "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). As Paul emphasised to his friend Timothy, "God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power, love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7). Writing to another of the embattled early Christian communities, he was careful to remind them that the "gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." (1 Thessalonians 1:5). The apostle Peter wrote in similar terms of how God's "divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). What we have to ask ourselves, therefore, is this: if we've been given a spirit of power and all we need for life and godliness, why do so few of us seem to move in power? Why do the vast majority in our nation regard the Church as lacking in power? And how can we tap more fully into the power we've been given, and use this as the LORD intends in these Last Days?

If we're to come at those questions right, we need to get to grips with the **nature of the power** – the difference between Holy Spirit power and any other kind. We need to recognise the **source of the power**. And we need to walk in the **way of the power**. That's what we're going to examine today: the nature of divine power, the source of divine power and the way of divine power.

## **The nature of divine power**

We humans generally have a weakness for some combination of money, sex or power, and Scripture tells us what human beings' idea of power often looks like. The first time the word power appears in the Bible is as Laban confronts his nephew Jacob, who's deceived him, growling, "I have the power to harm you" (Genesis 31:39). In our natural state, that's what we tend to use power for: to dominate, overawe, compel, hurt and abuse. That's our fallen nature talking, still in bondage to sin and beholden to "the god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4), who is Satan. That's mankind's idea of power.

We know what Satan's version of power looks like, since the Bible tells us about this, too: its ultimate objective is "to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10), and it operates through mechanisms like incitement (1 Chronicles 21:1), accusation (Zechariah 3:1), temptation (Mark 1:13), deception (2 Corinthians 11:14), rebellion (Jeremiah 28:16), enslavement (Titus 3:3), lies (John 8:33), lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:7) and counterfeiting of what's good (2 Thessalonians 2:9). Satan's idea of power is grasping after what's rightfully God's (see the five "I will be" statements in Isaiah 14:13-14), behaving with utter selfishness, and crushing anyone who gets in his way. Imagine doing the opposite of what the Ten Commandments say and you get the general idea.

The Christian rejects man's version of power and Satan's version of power. Instead, he seeks God's version of power. This power is rooted in suffering, self-denial and dying to the things of this world: Jesus "began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again." (Mark 8:31). Paul wrote of wanting "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:10). That was Paul's heartfelt personal desire, but Jesus made clear this is the way for all believers: "Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.'" (Mark 8:34-35).

The power released through suffering, death and resurrection is power to save and to heal; to set free from the chains other people put on us and to gain release from bondage to demonic forces. It's power to proclaim a new and better way of living, being reconciled to God, to others, even to ourselves – eventually, to see all things reconciled (Romans 5:10, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Ephesians 2:16, Colossians 1:20). It's power to walk in the truth and the light rather than in lies and darkness. It's power to see happen in our own time and place all those things we read about in the Gospels and the book of Acts. It's power to see the servants of Almighty God do "the greater works" (John 14:12) Jesus spoke of.

This is the nature of the divine power God has set in us. It's power that needs to be used God's way, not man's: when the sorcerer Simon offered the apostles money in return for Holy Spirit power, "Peter answered, 'May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this

ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin.” (Acts 8:20-23).

### **The source of divine power**

So, to access divine power, we need to have not just the right methods, but the right heart, and we also need look in the right place. As Jesus went about his earthly ministry, he demonstrated wonder-working power at every turn, yet many were unsure where his power came from, and uncertain about his identity. When he “asked [his disciples], ‘Who do people say I am?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.’” (Mark 8:27-28). On one level, we might understand the confusion, at least in the first few months “after John [the Baptist] was put in prison [and] Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.” (Mark 1:14). Every age has charlatans or deluded people who say they’re heaven-sent, when they’re not. About a hundred years after Jesus was crucified, a man called Simon bar Kochba inspired a Jewish revolt against Rome by claiming to be the Messiah, and many of the religious establishment accepted that claim – highly ironic, given that most of that same elite rejected Jesus.

There may perhaps have been room for doubt at the start, but Jesus soon removed it. He was careful to act in such a way that anyone who paid close attention to what they saw and heard could no longer have any reasonable doubt in their minds. His miracles paralleled and surpassed what God had done through the spiritual giants of the Old Covenant. So, just as manna had been provided to Israel during her desert wanderings (Exodus 16:4-35), which the LORD described to Moses as “bread from heaven” (Exodus 16:4), so Jesus – born in Bethlehem, which means, *place of bread* – described Himself as being both “the bread of life” (John 6:35, 6:48) and “bread that came down from heaven” (John 6:41, 6:50, 6:51, 6:58). And just as Elijah saw God raise the widow of Zarephath’s son from the dead (1 Kings 17:17-24), so Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:35-43, Luke 8:49-56), the widow of Nain’s son (Luke 7:11-17) and Lazarus (John 11:17-44) back to life. In the same way Elijah saw a widow and her son fed miraculously from meagre portions of oil and flour (1 Kings 17:15-16), so Jesus fed thousands with only a few loaves and fish (Mark 6:35, Mark 8:1). In these and many other ways, he showed Himself to be a greater Moses and a greater Elijah. Moses was the great mediator of the Old Covenant and Jesus is the great mediator of the New Covenant. Elijah was the archetype of the great prophets of old, but Jesus is the fulfilment of the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17).

Into the bargain, speaking about Himself, Jesus stated that “one greater than [the prophet] Jonah is here” (Matthew 12:41, Luke 11:32), “one greater than [the proverbially wise king] Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:42, Luke 11:31) and “one greater than the temple is here.” (Matthew 12:6). He’s greater than the greatest prophet, the greatest earthly king and the most complete religious system.

Almost all these events – the raising of a dead girl, the feeding of a multitude, what Jesus said about being greater than what had gone before, plus calming a storm (Mark 4:35-41) and casting out demons (Mark 5:1-20) – had taken place by the time of the episode we

heard about in our Bible reading. The disciples saw and heard these things. As they themselves attested, they were “eyewitnesses” (Luke 1:2, 2 Peter 1:16).

The disciples, then, weren’t short of evidence. In fact, when Jesus first called him, “Nathaniel declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.” (Mark 1:49). And now, when Jesus asked his disciples the question, “What about you? ... Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ [Messiah].’” (Mark 8:29). Peter saw that Jesus is our source of divine power. This is where all the evidence points, but evidence alone won’t get us to the place of acknowledging it. Matthew’s Gospel tells us Jesus’ response to Peter’s declaration of faith was to say, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17). We can’t do it without God’s enabling, but the LORD says, “You will seek me and you will find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13). If you haven’t already done it, seek Jesus with all your heart today. He’s the source of divine power, and much more besides.

### **The way of divine power**

Well, we’ve talked about the nature of divine power and the source of divine power, so next, we need to reflect on the way of this power. There’s order in the Kingdom of heaven, which means there’s a right way to use divine power, and a wrong way. The devil tried to get Jesus to use divine power the wrong way when he “led [Jesus] up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendour, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.’” (Luke 4:5-7).

Peter recognised Jesus as the source of divine power in one breath, then objected loudly when Christ explained the way of power had to lead through a path of suffering, rejection and death. “Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. ‘Get behind me, Satan!’ he said. ‘You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’” (Mark 8:32-33).

It’s a well-known exchange: first Peter rebuking Jesus, before Jesus then rebukes Peter. The hinge on which the narrative shifts from one person’s rebuke to the other’s is the phrase, “when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples”. Jesus turned from the voice of this world (which is under the control of the evil one) to look at the people who were to be His messengers to the uttermost ends of the earth. In doing so, He recalled the task for which He had come: not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45), to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), to give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), and so that we might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). From a place of focussing on His divine mission, He was able to resist another of Satan’s attempts to derail and side-track God’s rescue plan for fallen humanity.

And, having done that, Jesus then spoke a universal message – delivered not just to his disciples but also to the crowd that had gathered: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

(Mark 8:36-38). Here's the way of power laid bare: we might sum it up in 10 Rs, grouped in 2 sets of 3 and 1 set of 4:

**Group 1:** reflect, reassess and recalibrate. **Reflect** on the message the world pumps at us day by day and hour by hour. **Reassess** how we respond to it, seeking to "have in mind the things of God, [not] the things of men." (Mark 8:33). **Recalibrate** to bring our thinking and acting into line with God's ways. We'll almost certainly face rejection for it, but this is the necessary first step to moving in power.

**Group 2:** remember, recognise and resist. **Remember** our call is to be "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." (2 Corinthians 5:20). **Recognise** that we can't leave it up to someone else to do this job for us. **Resist** the devil, because when we do that, "he will flee from [us]" (James 4:7). "Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Peter 5:9). If (or when) suffering comes, we have to face it as mature adults, not little babies. The truth is, it goes with the territory. It's part of the way of power.

**Group 3:** rebuke, renounce, rededicate and resolve. **Rebuke** the voices that try to speak Satan's lies into our lives, even if they come from people we love and trust. **Renounce** the things of this world and their claims to "authority and splendour" (Luke 4:6). **Rededicate** ourselves to God's service and **resolve** to use our weapons of warfare as they're designed to be used. This is the path towards dying to self, being reborn into new life with the Lord, and moving in His power.

### **Moving in divine power**

Power and authority go hand in hand. Our power as believers isn't our own. It's a delegated power. There's power in the Name of Jesus and we have power of attorney to use this Name. It's the name above every name (Philippians 2:9), at which every knee in heaven and on earth must bow (Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:10). Demons are compelled to submit to this Name. As "Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:8) told the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin), "Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12).

Jesus "said to [the disciples and the crowd], 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power'" (Mark 9:1) – a promise that was fulfilled at the first Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21). We're Pentecost people. We're Holy Spirit people. We're people of power. There's "greater power with us than with [our enemy]" (2 Chronicles 32:8). It's time to believe it. It's time to act on it. It's time to move in power. Amen.