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April 11, 2010
Power – Acts 1:1-11

Introduction:

WSJ Article about Extreme Home Makeover foreclosures

Tiger Woods

Countless Politicians

Movie stars with drug addiction and suicide

Recently I pulled out my cordless drill to do some projects in our backyard. I put the battery in the drill and pulled the trigger, but nothing happened. I put the other battery in the drill, but again nothing happened. I then charged the batteries overnight again, put them in the drill, but again nothing happened.

There is not much you can do with a cordless drill without any power. I can use it like a screwdriver, but that is not very effective. A drill needs a power source to function the way that it is designed to function.

Christians need a power source to function the way we were designed to function as well. All humans have life in us, but then there is a more significant power source for those in relationship with God.

Read Acts 1:1-11.

The book of Acts is written by the same guy that wrote the Gospel of Luke. In the beginning of the passage where reference is made to the first book, the first book is Luke. And it is in that book, the Gospel, that Luke told about all that Jesus did and said. Now Luke is writing again about the post-resurrection story to tell us the next chapter in God's work. This next chapter is the Acts of the Apostles.

After Jesus' resurrection, the apostles are told to stay put in Jerusalem and to wait. Jesus apparently then reminded them what they had been told when his ministry began.

In Luke 3, John the Baptist has begun his ministry by sharing that God is on his way and John the Baptist is calling people to repent and to have faith in God. He is baptizing lots and lots of people with water and people start to wonder whether John the Baptist is the Messiah. But in Luke 3:16, John says, “**John**

answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

And now after Jesus' death and resurrection this statement comes up again as Jesus appears to his apostles.

The apostles don't seem all that interested though. Jesus brings up the Holy Spirit and they immediately say, "um, is this the time you will restore Israel?"

Their question isn't really related to a spiritual matter at all. It is a political question. It's the type of question you ask when your favorite politician has just won an election and now you want to know when his political platform will start to be implemented. The apostles' question is a practical one, but it is the wrong question to be asking at this time. Jesus has just shared that God's Spirit would soon be coming upon them and all they want to know is when their "kingdom" will be established.

Makes sense to us. If we are honest, we usually prefer the kingdom too. If one path leads to authority and prestige and wealth and the other leads to the Holy Spirit, we are usually going for the things we can reach out and touch.

I had a law school professor that used to repeatedly remind us of the golden rule, "he who has the gold, rules."

When the apostles saw Jesus die and then come back to life, they believed that this was the beginning of their rule. They were ready for their political authority. **"Um, the Holy Spirit is nice and all . . . but when will we have control over all our enemies, when will we be in charge?"**

Jesus quickly dismisses the apostles' question and says that it is only for the Father to know the time when all of His plans will come into fruition. Basically, Jesus says **"it is none of your business."**

Then Jesus returns his disciples to his original point, **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you . . ."** We find this same idea in Luke 24 too. There, Jesus says, **"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."**

Now I imagine the apostles perking up a little at Jesus' language. It is one thing to mention the Holy Spirit, but this time Jesus connects the Holy Spirit with power. He says, **“you will receive power.”**

The power that Jesus has access to is some pretty good stuff. The apostles have just seen Jesus die and come back to life . . . and they had seen him perform many miracles and teach with a wisdom more profound than anything they had ever seen.

The apostles are interested in this power that Jesus says they are going to get through the Holy Spirit.

“Power” is a critical word for understanding what we can expect as the Holy Spirit “clothes us” and “comes upon us.”

The word that Luke uses here is dunamis. It is the root word for dynamic and dynamite. In Latin the word is translated “potentia,” which is the root word for potential.

But the dictionary definition is not enough . . . to truly understand the power of the Holy Spirit is to understand it how Luke uses it in the larger biblical story.

Words always take on unique meanings based upon their context.

I was with my brother this past weekend in Mt. Sterling, where I grew up, and we use lots of different words that have a unique meaning to us. For instance, when one of us says, “go” and a random time it means we compete in whatever task is before us. If we are getting out of the car and one of us says, “go” then immediately we sprint towards the door. To an outsider, “go” means “go.” It just means to move somewhere. But to us it means competition.

The various authors of the Bible use words differently too and it is important to understand how particular authors use words to truly understand what they mean by them.

Usually when we think of power we think of authority or force. The center for the basketball team was overpowering. We demonstrated power by bombing another country. A gun is a sign of power. Or your muscles. Or your job title.

But Luke's use of "power" in Acts is different than this. **It is personal and relational.**

We get a better understanding of "power" for Luke when we **look at the other times Luke uses the word.** We aren't going to be able to go through all of Luke's uses of "power" but we can look at a couple examples.

The first time that Luke uses "power" is when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary to tell her that she is going to give birth to Jesus. Gabriel says to Mary, **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you."** Here the power of the Holy Spirit makes Mary pregnant. And all 5 of the Holy Spirit references in Luke 1-2 are related to pregnancy and birth.

Some of you are probably saying . . . **uh, oh keep the Holy Spirit away from me.**

But Luke's use of "power" this way reveals something about power to us. **It is very relational.** When we think of someone becoming pregnant we know that it is ideally the result of intimacy and lovemaking, and gentleness and mutuality. In fact, when pregnancy happens in an impersonal way, or a harsh or forced way, we understand this as a violation of the person.

The Holy Spirit comes upon Mary in this way because of her faithfulness. She has a relationship with God. **From this one example we start to see a biblical model for "power" that is very different from our conception of power that implies force.**

The prophet Zechariah affirms this distinction by saying, **"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord."**

The kind of power that is synonymous with might is not the type of power given by the Holy Spirit or consistent with the Spirit's work.

Another early occurrence of “power” in the Gospel of Luke is in Luke’s account of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness. We discussed this passage several weeks ago. Jesus goes into the wilderness and is tempted by the devil to command stones to become bread, to become the ruler of all the kingdoms of the world, and to prove his divinity by jumping off the top of the temple and having an angel save him at the last minute.

Each of these temptations is an invitation by the devil for Jesus to exercise worldly power: power to impose his will on a rock, power to impose his will on the nations of the world, and power to become a celebrity by his miraculous rescue by an angel. And out of each of these things might have come something good . . . feeding lots and lots of people with rock bread, ruling the whole world justly, and demonstrating the miraculous.

But Jesus said “no” each and every time because Jesus does not use “power” in this way. For Jesus, “power” is personal and its usage is always consistent with Jesus’ identity. Power abstracted from relationship, power without any engagement with love, power imposed from the outside is NOT Jesus power and is NOT Holy Spirit power.

Eugene Peterson says, **“whatever the power of the Spirit means, bullying force is not a part of it. The power of God is always exercised in personal ways, creating and saving and blessings.”**

After Jesus repeatedly tells the devil know in the desert, the bible says in Luke 4, **“then Jesus filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee . . . he began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.”**

Jesus is always personal and relational. We see this repeatedly as he enters into his ministry. Jesus talks with the people he performs miracles on. He teaches through everything that he does. His power is not one that manipulates or overwhelms . . . it works in conversation and combination with those that he is helping.

Jesus tells the apostles that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them and then he says, **“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

The Holy Spirit's relational power is most evident as it reveals God more clearly. **All of the Holy Spirit's power is channeled towards bringing people closer to God.**

Several months ago when we discussed the Holy Spirit I discussed how the Bible makes it clear that when we put our trust in Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit. But that this is not the end of the story. We then live a life seeking to be filled more fully with the Spirit. I emphasized that there is a difference between having the Holy Spirit and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is a process for us.

But the power of the Holy Spirit is always directed towards bringing people closer to God. For non-believers the Holy Spirit is prompting a relationship with God. For believers, the Holy Spirit is prompting a greater and greater relationship with God.

Many Sundays at the end of the service I give you a final blessing from Ephesians 3:20. **"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."**

When we understand that the power of the Holy Spirit is relational and that this power's most profound pull is always towards God . . . we can start to see what it does for us. Why when we hear in Acts 1 that we will receive "power" that it is something to rejoice in.

In the Holy Spirit we literally are given the "power" to change the world. We become living torches through which God lights our world. We have supernatural power to transform lives through God. As God's power works within us, it not only changes us, but it seeks to change our family, community and world.

Unfortunately, we too often treat the Holy Spirit as the embarrassing third cousin of the trinity and hide it in the closet. Holy Spirit power makes us uncomfortable because we can't control it.

I call it the glitter effect. I hate glitter because you can't control it. You open up a container of glitter and no matter how careful you are with it, it goes everywhere. It is evil. It seems to multiply and years later you will find glitter hidden in cracks and crevices.

The Holy Spirit works like this and it scares us. We either talk about the Holy Spirit at all or when we do we rationalize God's work in this way. We like to say to ourselves if the miracles of the Bible occurred in our world today that we have a much easier time believing, but that is not true. We would have rationalized them. We would have talked about the natural healing properties in the mud that Jesus rubbed on the blind man's eyes or about how Lazarus was never really dead . . . that makes us much more comfortable. Don't get me wrong, we don't mind talking about the power of God . . . we just don't like talking about it at work in our lives and the lives of those around us.

But this relational power takes all sorts of forms.

(wedding example)

I like to think of the Holy Spirit in terms of a light bulb. We, as humans, are a glass bulb. Just the bulb. Alone we can't do much. We are just there. But when we enter into faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us that we receive "power," the Holy Spirit. And this power becomes our filament. We are no longer an empty bulb but have a source of light within us. It is powerful because it has given us a purpose, but at the beginning we can just put off a little light. Other's see it and the darkness around them is lit. But over time, our filament becomes brighter and brighter and more and more people are impacted by our light.

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