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## **Power**

[John 12:9-33]

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Today we rejoin our study through the Gospel of John.

I hope you remember that John begins with this astounding statement:

*“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life...”*

It's a reference to Genesis Chapter 1, which we spent a year preaching through 3 years ago.

Where God speaks into the void and Light appears.

One Day.

And God speaks and an expanse appears.

A Second Day.

And God speaks and dry land appears, and vegetation – life – appears.

A Third Day.

And God speaks and sun, moon, and stars appear in the sky.

A Fourth Day.

And God speaks and the waters swarm with creatures.

A Fifth Day.

God speaks and creation happens.

So whatever that Word is (which He speaks)... it must carry just an insane amount of power.

It holds all creation together.

Science describes how Creation normally behaves, but not why it is or what it is... what it all means. Science is like predicting the arrival of the mail, but it doesn't give you the ability to read the contents of the letters.

G.K. Chesterton wrote:

All the terms used in the science books, “law,” “necessity,” “order,” and so on, are really un-intellectual, because they assume an inner synthesis, which we do not possess. The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, “charm,” “spell,” “enchantment.” A tree grows because it is a magic tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched.

We can predict when the light will shine, and we find ways to harness its power, but we don't know what light truly is.

We take creation's power and claim it as our own.

We call it science and technology, but it's like, stolen magic forces that we seek to describe and control... but forces for which we lack any meaning or inner synthesis.

Scripture reveals that all creation is the manifestation of God's Word... His Word of power. We'd like to possess that word, and use it to make our own world, like magic.

A magician speaks a word, like "Abra Cadabra," and stuff is created.

Harry Potter says, "Expecto Petronum," and conjures up a savior.

The great Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski defined magic as, "A system or program by which people endeavor to maintain control over spiritual forces."

Well, if all creation exists on a "spiritual force," called the Word of God, then perhaps science and technology is like, practicing magic. Perhaps most religion is just plain magic. Maybe all our striving for power is witchcraft; that is, stealing power and using power for which we lack any "inner synthesis."

The practice of magic is forbidden in Scripture.

Magic is an effort to control spiritual forces for your own purpose.

Well, God speaks a word for 5 days, and creation happens... and wouldn't we like to possess that Word?

God speaks and creation happens.

Well, on the 6<sup>th</sup> Day, God speaks: "Let us make mankind in our image and likeness."

And did it happen?

Us?

In the image of Absolute Love?!

Well, if we're in the image of God, we're not **very** in the image of God.

It's like we still haven't been born.

Scripture says that Jesus is the exact image of God.

He's the firstborn of all creation... and none of us look that much like Him.

"Let us make Mankind in our image..."

And look at us.

You've got to wonder... did the Word of God fail?

And if it did, should we try to finish the job?

Did the Word of God fail?

Isaiah 55 - "My word shall not return void, but accomplishes that which I purpose."

The All-Powerful Word of God.

Actually, I've witnessed the power of the Word.

I'm not asking you to believe this, necessarily, but I've spoken the Word and seen people healed, and I've been healed. I've seen demons and Satan bound and cast out. I've

preached the Word and observed power that scared me, and yet usually when I speak it (that Word of Power), I feel really, really weak. I feel foolish. To be honest, I feel like an ass. And by that, of course, I mean donkey.

Hey, I'd like to tell you a true story:

Once upon a time, there was a little donkey... a jack-ass.

One particular day, he came home, thrilled to death.

He said to his mother, "I had the most amazing day! I went into Jerusalem this morning, and when I did, people lined up on the side of the road, cheering and waving palm branches. Mom, it was a great day for me!"

The old, wise she-donkey looked at her little ass and said, "Sweetie, I'm sorry, but that wasn't about you... but the one you were carrying."

Well, in John 12, Jesus, the Word of God, by Whom and through Whom everything is created and sustained... that Word enters Jerusalem, riding on a little ass.

You'll remember that Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead.

Pretty cool... but because He won't work for them, the Pharisees (Religious Magicians) plot to kill him and Lazarus. Because He gives life, they try to take His life.

You see, they don't know what life really is... what the Word means.

And neither does the crowd.

### **[John 12:12]**

*The next day, a great crowd who had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.*

Jerusalem means "City of Peace."

Jerusalem was the capital of Israel... Jerusalem and its temple, where God chose to dwell with His people. And it's Jerusalem that is referred to as "our Lord's Bride."

*So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying, "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it...*

Hosanna means "Save now."

They're quoting Psalm 118.

They mean, "Save us from Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans!"

Israel was an occupied nation.

They could use a powerful King to drive out the Romans and the Greeks.

They call Jesus, "King of Israel."

It's a term Jesus never uses in reference to Himself, and remember what happened the last time what the crowd tried to make Him King?

He ran away.

Whenever people ask, "What would Jesus do if He were President?"

That's your answer... He ran away.

They call out, "Blessed is the King of Israel," and what does Jesus do?

*And Jesus found a young ass and sat upon it; as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on an ass's colt!"*

*His disciples did not understand this at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and had been done to him.*

*The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead bore witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. The Pharisees then said to one another, "You see that you can do nothing; look, the world has gone after him."*

*Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew went with Philip and they told Jesus. And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified."*

You wonder why John makes such a big deal out of Philip, Andrew, and a few Greeks who want to see Jesus. We don't understand. John says he and the disciples didn't understand either. But now as an old man writing the Gospel, he does. And so, he quotes Zech. 9.

Let's read it:

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he;  
Humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass.*

*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
And the war horse from Jerusalem;  
And the battle bow shall be cut off,  
And he shall command peace to the nations;  
His dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth.*

*As for you also, because of the blood  
Of my covenant with you,  
I will set your captives free from the waterless pit.*

(The Grave, even Sheol)

*Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;  
Today I declare that I will restore to you double.  
For I have bent Judah as my bow;*

*I have made Ephraim its arrow.  
I will brandish your sons, O Zion,*

(That's guys like Philip and Andrew.)

*Over your sons, O Greece,  
And wield you like a warrior's sword.*

See? John is telling us Zechariah 9 was happening that day, as the Word rode into Jerusalem.

Zechariah says He comes to bring peace to Jerusalem, but not just Jerusalem ... the Nations. Isaiah prophesies, "Unto us a son is born, a child is given, Prince of Peace, and the government shall be on his shoulder, and of the increase of His government there will be no end." (Isaiah 9:6)

That is, no gates or walls will stand against it.

That's power.

Isaiah prophecies that the "Kings of the earth" will bring their "Glory into Jerusalem," and indeed "all flesh" will gather there and worship.

It's this great Old Testament hope, and the Greeks are already coming, and Jesus says, "**Now** is the Son of Man glorified." "Son of Man." The term comes from Daniel and Ezekiel.

In Daniel 7, God gave a "Son of Man" an eternal kingdom, that all people would serve Him.

In Ezekiel 34, God says, "Son of Man," prophesy to the dry bones, the whole house of Israel that will rise from the pit and enter the land.

That's power.

Do you see what John is telling us?

It was happening that day, and it's still happening:

Absolutely astounding and unstoppable power.

Even His enemies mutter prophetic declarations of truth, saying,

"Look, the world has gone after Him."

Now, it's Sunday in John 12. It's the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week.

At the end of the (6<sup>th</sup> day of the) week – a Friday – the Word will cry out from a Roman Cross,

"It is finished."

When we receive Him and believe Him, we enter the 7<sup>th</sup> Day, made in God's image by the Word "That will not return void."

John is telling us: This is God's Word of Supreme Power with which God spoke the stars into existence, and you into existence. This is the King of Kings, Conquering all things...

But He's riding on an ass.

2000 years before, Isaac, the Child of the Covenant and promised seed rode an ass to this very spot to be sacrificed ... and God provided a Lamb. But that wouldn't have anything to do with this, would it?

He's the King of Kings, riding an ass.

That's what John and the disciples didn't understand that day.

They thought He should be riding a war horse.

Kings rode war horses, and He's riding an ass.

And talk about foolish:

He has written nothing down. No articles, no books, no instructions or policy manuals.

He has established no organization, institution, no insurance to continue His work in His absence.

He has a crowd waiting and eager to fight, but He refuses to fight.

He says His kingdom is not of this world.

He refuses to fight, although He knows Jerusalem will be destroyed, and in 6 days, He Himself will be condemned, betrayed, abandoned, stripped, flogged, and crucified before a screaming crowd – a crowd that has turned on Him, for He refuses to be a King who uses His power as they desired.

### [ slide – Graphic #1 ]

Check this out.

It's called the Alexamenos Graffito. It is perhaps the oldest depiction of Jesus on the cross.

### [ Graphic #2 ]

And Jesus is depicted with the head of an ass.

We aren't sure whether it was meant to mock Christ or perhaps honor Christ... for to crucify a person is to depict that person as an ass. We powerful Americans seem to forget that ... that Jesus entered Jerusalem on an ass, and that He conquered the world by looking like an ass.

Six years ago this month, I preached two sermons for which I received more hate mail than I ever had before or since. (I'm having Ben post those messages on our website along with this sermon, if you'd like to watch them.)

Both sermons are on this story in the Gospel of Matthew.

The first one was titled, "How to Enter Jerusalem."

In it, I simply recount the History of Jerusalem, relying on Scripture and History Books (like *Jerusalem Besieged*, by Prof. Eric Cline of George Washington University).

I displayed a chart of all the conquerors who had ever entered Jerusalem, pointing out that some of the most violent were men who called themselves "Crusaders" ... and that in other

parts of the world, some refer to Americans as Crusaders, pointing to the fact that the U.S. has given something like 100-and-some-odd-billion dollars to the state of Israel since 1949.

And now, America even fights wars – at least partly – to maintain the security of the nation-state of Israel, and the walled city of Jerusalem. Maybe we enter the city with our money, guns, and F-16s, and we want to control the City of God just like everyone else.

I displayed the chart of all the times Jerusalem had been conquered... something like 50 times over 4,000 years. Jerusalem – the City of Peace – is probably the most violent city on earth.

I said, “perhaps it’s a sign,” a sign of what we do when we try to obtain the City of God with human power. I said, “Here’s the list of conquerors, and yet there’s One they missed. He not only conquered Jerusalem, He entered and conquered all things... and of the increase of His government there is no end.”

He conquered by being conquered.  
His power is the power to lay power down.

I said, “How ironic that in the name of Jesus and His cross, Crusaders would try to do the very thing Jesus refused to do... the very thing for which He was crucified.”  
We must think “Crusade” means “to crucify others” rather than to “allow yourself to be crucified in love.”

There were questions then, and I’m sure there are now... like,  
Should we love Israelites?  
    Absolutely, yes.  
Should we love Palestinians?  
    Absolutely, yes.  
What should Obama do?  
What should Netanyahu do?  
What should Abbas and Hammas do?  
What should the principalities and powers of this world do?

I don’t know.

Well, what would Jesus do if he were President?  
He’d quit.  
He thinks Kings and Presidents have no power... no real power.  
“Well, if we really lived like Jesus,” you say... “We’d die.”  
Yeah, probably so.  
“And the terrorists would win!”  
Would they?

*And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain (seed) of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if*

*it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honor him."*

Now don't be mad at me. I didn't write this stuff.  
The Father... you know, He's the one who raises the dead.  
He even creates a New Jerusalem that comes down from heaven... creates it with His Word.  
Now that's power.

POP QUIZ:

Which of these people is or was most powerful?  
Rank them on a scale of 1 to 10... go ahead and yell it out.

**[ pictures shown of each person on screen as name is said ]**

David Copperfield... that's David Copperfield... he's magic!  
Einstein... his knowledge is nuclear power.  
Angelia Jolie ... with guns! Now that's power.  
Bill Gates ... pretty much owns the world.  
Alexander the Great ... pretty much conquered the world.  
Caesar Augustus ... ruled the world.  
Adolph Hitler ... he changed the world.  
Benjamin Netanyahu ... Prime Minister of Israel.  
Osama Bin Laden ... pretty powerful. You take off your shoes at the airport because of him.  
Barack Obama ... controls the most powerful military the world has ever seen.  
Jesus ... now this is hard.

He's beaten, naked, almost dead, and nailed to wood... that's pretty powerless.  
And it's not an illusion... Philippians 2:7 - "He's emptied himself, and made himself nothing."  
That's a Zero.  
He didn't raise Himself, His Father did.

He's entirely powerless, and yet His power in this moment is utterly off the chart.  
It's "the Power of God."

And any historian not lying through his or her teeth will tell you that this is easily the most influential man in history at the most influential moment... He brought you here this evening.

Napoleon wrote,  
"The people have been gathered to us by fear, they were gathered to Christ by Love.  
Alexander, Caesar, and I have been men of war, but Christ was Prince of Peace.  
The people have been driven to us; they were drawn to him."

Drawn.

Sociologists point out that in any relationship, the one who loves the most exercises the least power, and the one who exercises the least power loves the most.  
Jesus loves the most, and so we crucified Him; yet our lust for power and His willingness to sacrifice power revealed the ultimate power... the power of Love. And God is Love.

The Lord said to Paul, "My power is made perfect in weakness."  
The power of Love.

John Dillinger said, "I find that a kind word with a gun gets more than a kind word."  
That may be true, unless you're trying to get a person's heart... unless you're trying to capture a bride. For that, you need the power of romance.  
Jerusalem is Jesus' Bride, and you are Jesus' Bride.

If I preach the Gospel while pointing a gun at your head, saying, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten so... Believe God loves you or I'll shoot you in the head!" ... you might say, "I believe," but you don't... not in Love.

Do you realize that the church has always grown fastest in places where it is illegal for Christians to wield power, or even exist? Places like the Roman Empire or China...  
You see, stripped of power, we expose Love, and that's real power.

But now, you don't have to be martyred to preach Jesus.  
You only have to be willing to look like an ass... to look a bit foolish.

Paul writes, "The Word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... for the foolishness of God is wiser than men.  
Weakness of God is stronger than men."

You know, Jesus is a seed.  
He's **the** Seed, and the Word we proclaim is a seed... so it feels foolish to proclaim it.  
When a farmer plants a seed, he surrenders control.  
When you share Christ, you surrender control.  
You tell someone Jesus loves them and died for them, but you can't make them believe, and you can't make the seed grow, and you can't make their life bear fruit.

Jesus is not a magic word for you to control.  
Actually, He's the Word to which you surrender control, and that's power, real power.

I don't know how to say this, but Jesus isn't a magic word.  
Jesus is **the** magic word.  
Not for you to control or crucify, but for you to be controlled by and created by.  
Jesus is the "inner synthesis" in all things.  
Jesus is the meaning of all things.

In Chesterton's words,

Jesus is the reason trees grow fruit,  
Jesus is the reason water runs downhill,  
Jesus is the reason that the sun shines.  
He is light and life.

They aren't just things to be used for our own purposes; each is a message to be read, and each means, "I love you."

Jesus Christ is the Word of God, and the Power of God, and on the cross, the meaning of God's Word is revealed. On the cross, the letter is opened.

It all means, "I love you."

And when you believe it, you are made in His image, by the Word of God, and the Power of God.

All human power is stolen power, but he who loves is born of God and knows God, and he who speaks love wields unstoppable power, even if he or she feels like an ass.

The Word of God invades Jerusalem on an ass.

The Word of God romances His Bride in weakness.

What I'm trying to say is that if you simply believe God's love and speak God's love to those around you, you have far, far more power than all the kings of this earth put together. Even if ... especially if you feel like an ass.

John writes that he didn't understand this, on the day Jesus rode the ass into Jerusalem. John had been nicknamed, "Son of Thunder," by Jesus.

He loved power, but didn't understand the nature of God's thunder... what caused the boom.

But as an old man exiled on the island of Patmos, he understood.

John received a vision, and titled it, "The Revelation of Jesus."

In the last 150 years, some powerful preachers have turned it into "The Revelation of the End Times," like a book of magic words to predict the future and wield power.

Words to be used, yet words that lack an "inner synthesis" ... words that no longer mean "Jesus Christ and Him crucified"

... as if the power of the cross has failed, and now we need to resort to other powers

... as if Jesus gives up on "loving His enemies, and comes back just to fry their asses

... as if that means we can hate our enemies, build walls, and bomb people,

all in the name of Jesus.

But it's not "The Revelation of the End Times."

Read it.

It's the Revelation of Jesus.

If you disagree, check out my book on the Revelation, "Eternity Now."

You can get it downstairs or on Amazon.

Read it, and then let's have coffee.

See, the Revelation was first sent to 7 small churches in Asia Minor.  
John says it's for them and whoever reads it.  
At the time, those churches were persecuted.  
They had very little power, and they stood against Rome and the kings of the earth.  
They testified to Jesus, but must've felt like fools.

In Chapter 19, right after the angel mentions, "The testimony of Jesus," John sees Heaven opened, and a rider on a white horse. He's faithful and true. In righteousness He judges and makes war. A sword issues from His mouth. Who is He? He is the Word of God, writes John... The Word that these 7 little churches are asked to speak. His robe is dipped in blood, for He tramples the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God: blood that's wine, and wine that's blood.

The winepress is a cross.

He is "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

An angel calls to the ride to eat the flesh of "Kings," and get this: the flesh of "all men" ... as if this Word will cut the flesh from every person.

The Word conquers and judges and then the New Jerusalem appears, like a bride adorned for her husband. And the voice on the throne cries from the throne, "Behold, I make all things new." And the kings of the earth – the ones who were slain – they bring their glory into the New Jerusalem.

Pay attention.

John tells those 7 little churches that He saw the Rider. And in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, John writes, "He is coming." Not "will be coming." Jesus said to Caiaphas, "From now one you will see the son of man coming..." John saw the Rider on a war horse in His vision, and the same rider on a donkey in Jerusalem 60 years before. He's describing the same thing, somehow.

Do you understand?

The Word of God is the Rider on the white horse.

Whenever you speak the Word, that Rider rides, and the Word does not return void.

You may feel like an ass and look like an ass from the perspective of earth, but from the perspective of Heaven, you are a war horse... or better, you ride a war horse with Jesus.

You see?

You're really not an ass.

Unless of course you make Jesus all about you.

But you're not an ass... for Jesus makes you all about Him.

He completes you with Himself, and you become the Body of Christ and His Bride.

Well, those 7 little churches conquered the Roman Empire, and the Word is still riding today.

According to the U.S. Center for World Missions:

By 1430, there was 1 believer for every 94 persons on the planet,

By 1790, there was 1 for every 49,

By 1940, it was 1 for every 32,  
By 1970, it was 1 for every 19,  
By 1980, 1 for every 10,  
And by 2000, 1 for every 8.

The Word is spreading... but not so much in places like America.  
It is most powerful where it wields the least power.  
It is most powerful when and where you surrender power and just love your neighbor in weakness.

In the next verse (John 12:27), Jesus says:

*"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, this voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."*

That is absolute and endless power.

*He said this to show by what death he was to die.*

And that is no power.  
It's the power to surrender power,  
It's the power of Love.  
And this is the romance of God.

**[ communion ]**