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I've Got the Power

Matthew 10:1-23

November 30, 2003

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I don't want to preach, because it feels like it's not working, like we're losing the culture war. I speak here and people don't understand what I'm saying, and they complain. I can't even make my wife and kids do what I want! I feel like a weak failure . . .

[Out of the congregation a police officer speaks up and comes forward.]

ERIC: Hey, Peter, how are you doing?

PETER: Well, I feel like a weak failure.

ERIC: I think I can help. I'm a Lakewood police officer. I'll give you some power. I'll deputize you: Here's a badge, so you have authority from the city of Lakewood. And I'm going to give you a gun belt and a plastic gun (for now). It will also give you power.

PETER: Wow! Thanks! I feel better.

Matthew 10:

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out, charging them, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay. Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff; for the laborer deserves his food. And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it, and stay with him until you depart. As you enter the house, salute it. And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And if any one will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly, I say

to you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

At the end of chapter nine, Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Now He calls the twelve and gives them authority (“*exousia*” in Greek). It is also translated “power” in some versions. It can also be translated “freedom” or “liberty.” It refers not only to impersonal power such as a gun, but also to the official authority behind the power, like a badge. That authority and power is also a great freedom.

Jesus calls the twelve together and gives them authority and power over “unclean spirits.” Paul writes that we “battle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places.” We *were* in bondage to them, yet at the cross God “disarmed” the principalities and powers. He took away their hold on us and right to us by forgiving our sins. He disarmed them, yet we still battle them, for they fight with temptations, accusations, and lies. At times they may still gain access even to a person’s body. And so I’ve witnessed demonic spirits and even, I believe, Satan himself cast out of people in the name of Jesus. The power of God is utterly astounding! Yet Paul says we battle these powers all the time. They tempt us, accuse us, and lie to us, and maybe even manifest to us.

Sometimes we pray, “Oh God, please help me, help me.” We whine to God, and it seems nothing happens. I suspect the Lord may be saying, “I gave you power and authority. Now *use* it. Point the gun and shoot!”

Imagine if I really was a deputy wearing a badge and a gun, and I found myself harassed by a thief who had no weapons except temptation, accusation, and lies. Imagine if I cried out to the police chief, “Why is this happening? Why oh why? Why won’t you help me?” I imagine the police chief would say, “Peter, point the gun and *shoot!*”

Sometimes we need to do the same. We need to say, “In the name of Jesus, under the authority of His blood, I rebuke you, evil spirit. *Leave.*” If ever an evil spirit won’t leave, don’t panic. It’s hiding behind something, and God wants to reveal it to you. Pray, let us help, and God will reveal it. But you have authority in Christ.

Jesus “gave them authority over unclean spirits . . . and to heal every disease.” It seems that at least for a time, the disciples had power over *every disease*. In Acts 19, God heals people just through Paul’s handkerchiefs. Yet in II Timothy, Paul writes that he left Trophimus ill at Miletus. In II Corinthians, he prays that God would deliver him of a “thorn in his flesh.” He asks God three times, and the Lord says, “My grace is sufficient for you, My power is made perfect in weakness.”

Well, it’s clear we have authority in Christ over evil spirits. And we at least sometimes have power through Christ to heal. I hope we have a church culture where we give each other freedom to at least *try*, freedom even at times to “point and shoot” if you feel led in faith, to say, “In the name of Jesus by His blood, walk, see, speak.” If nothing happens, don’t make someone else feel

guilty, but say, “I guess I missed.” But Jesus gives us authority, even *different* authorities (gifts), and He gives us the freedom to learn how to use them. Like John Dawson said last week, Jesus says here: You can “point and shoot” blessings of peace, and if they don’t stick, they’ll bounce off them and return to you (vs. 13).

So He gives the disciples authority to heal, yet that was a sign of something even greater. He tells them to preach that “the kingdom is at hand.” He deliberately appoints twelve disciples, just as there were twelve tribes of Israel. These apostles are the new Israel, and they’ve got an inheritance to claim and a kingdom land to occupy. He deputizes them, for they must occupy with authority and power.

I recently read of a woman converted from the occult who had been able to “see” spiritual power on people. She said that she had been able to spot Christians a mile off because of the power they carried. She remarked that she thought things would be different if we only knew the power we carried.

Well, Paul says there is an “immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe.” Maybe things would be different if we believed. Maybe we’d win the culture war, preach with great success, and raise families honoring to God. [Singing:] “There is power, power, wonder-working power in the blood of the Lamb.”

The twelve disciples must be thinking, “Wow! This means honor in the synagogues, glory before kings, families strong and secure, because we’ve got the *power!*” Maybe I need to wake up in the morning, look in the mirror, and remind myself that *I’ve got the power!*

[Movie Clip from *Bruce Almighty*: The song “I’ve Got the Power” plays while Bruce Almighty (Jim Carey) walks on water, then into the city and down the street. He points his finger at a fire hydrant, which bursts and sprays water; then he points at a woman walking by, whose skirt starts to rise. At this point a sign appears on the LMCC screen which says “Edited by Management.”]

Matthew 10:16:

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves . . .

Let me remind you that wolves *eat* sheep . . .

. . . so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils [sanhedrins], and flog you in their synagogues [their church or bible study], and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you up, 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; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise

against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes."

Gosh. I've got the power, but this is discouraging . . . or maybe encouraging. You know, I really believe that at times, in the name of Jesus, I've bound Satan himself and cast him out. A few times I've prayed for people who were miraculously healed. I'm beginning to believe there is an "immeasurable greatness of power" in me. Yet I feel like I can barely moderate a Session or staff meeting. In social situations, I often feel like a total putz. So in Jesus' name I can cast out Satan, yet fathering teenagers makes me feel like a stupid moron most of the time.

But now, according to Jesus, I may be right on track.

According to this passage, all of our measurements of success are at least wrong, possibly backwards, and maybe evil. Jesus says, "I give you power and authority. Cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, preach the kingdom, and oh yeah: They *will* (not maybe) deliver you up to governors and kings. They *will* scourge you at bible study, and your families may betray you to death."

Imagine if Session gave me my job review saying:

Peter, we have some grave concerns. We've done some research. In your eleven years with this church, you haven't been arrested *once* (outside of a speeding ticket). This past year, we've received very few complaints. Not *once* were you beaten at bible study, and frankly . . . well . . . it appears all your family likes you. And you call yourself a disciple of Christ?

That might be a more biblical measure of success than what we usually refer to.

Jesus says, "Governments, religious institutions, your families; in fact, all men hate you for my name's sake." And we say, "Why? We've got the power—*good* power."

Well, this world has been under the principalities and powers, thrones and authorities of wickedness, and now there is a new authority. Nations, religious systems, family structures, social facts, and institutions are all threatened, for a new king is born. He's born in a stable, which is a threat to every king in a palace. He's a friend of tax collectors and sinners, and He's crucified on a cross between thieves.

A new authority,
A new power,
A holy, strange power.

In verse 23, Jesus says to His disciples, "Truly . . . you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes." The Son of man is the Messiah from Daniel 7, the

Ancient of days, who will receive an everlasting kingdom. And Jesus says, “Truly, before you make it through all the towns of Israel, the Son of man comes.”

Some people say, “Well, Jesus was speaking of the Second Coming, so obviously He was mistaken.” Well, maybe He *wasn't* mistaken, and *we're* mistaken. Maybe we don't know real power when we see it.

In Matthew 26:64 on the morning of His crucifixion, standing before Caiaphas the High Priest, Jesus says, “I tell you, hereafter [from this time forward] you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” That means He's been seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of Heaven for 2000 years—which means we see, but we don't see, blind like Caiaphas.

In the Revelation, John sees. He sees the throne, and on the throne with God at the right hand of Power he sees a Lamb as if it had been slain. What a holy, strange power! What an awesomely horrifying power if you happen to be a wolf! (It reminds me of that Far Side cartoon where Colonel Sanders goes to the Pearly Gates, and there's a giant chicken.) Remember Jesus says, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.”

John sees the throne, and in chapter fourteen he sees one like a Son of man coming on the clouds of Heaven with a sickle. He's harvesting the earth. As we preached last time, He's harvesting:

faith and mercy,
 bread and wine,
 body broken and blood shed;
 the Body of Christ,
 the Church,
 the Israel of God,
 the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

- The new temple is His body of faith in mercy.
- The old temple is the old temple and the sacrificial system—the law which ran on flesh, condemnation, fear, and shame.

On His cross, Jesus fulfilled the law and cancelled its power. Forty years later (the same amount of time Israel wandered in the wilderness)—forty years later (like another exodus), the Roman empire sacked Jerusalem, defiled the temple, and plowed it into the ground. Then the disciples couldn't preach in the towns of Israel but were forced to flee to the nations—the Gentiles. Many people think that's what Jesus was talking about when He said, “You won't make it through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.” I think that's right.

But please see this: The Romans didn't really destroy the temple. It was destroyed as Jesus cried, “Father, forgive them” and “It is finished.” It was destroyed as the curtain in the temple ripped

from top to bottom. Never ever was a greater power released upon creation than at that moment. And almost everyone missed it. And no one at the time completely perceived it. On that cross, God “disarmed the principalities and powers and exposed them, triumphing over them in Christ.”

The principalities and powers of this world are like wolves—carnivores. The systems of this world run on conquest, consumption, competition, and survival of the fittest. It’s all about taking and glorifying self. They’re wolves, but at the cross the wolves ate the wrong sheep. And God revealed the greatest power: His heart—*Jesus*, from the bosom of the Father; *Jesus*, the plan for the fullness of time. On the cross, God pointed the gun and pulled the trigger (or had Satan pull the trigger) that exposed all the lies and revealed the truth—*Jesus*.

- There is no greater power than the power of a righteous man willing to be crucified for the iniquity of another.
- There is no greater power than mercy, forgiveness, “khehsed.”
- There is no greater power than love, and God is love, and Jesus is God poured out in love—sacrificial love—covenant love.
- There is no great power than the cross of Christ.
- There is no greater power than the power to lay power down.

[Peter lays his gun down on the stage.]

My friend Eric is a great cop. I know this about him, for he not only has the power of Lakewood; he has the power to lay power down. Eric loves people.

John 10:17: Jesus said, “I have power [exousia] to lay down my life.”

Matthew 9:6: Jesus just said, “The Son of man has authority [exousia] to forgive.”

Now Jesus says to His disciples, “I give you authority [exousia] to say, ‘In the name of Jesus, game over. You’re forgiven’”; that is, faith to proclaim the mercy of God. (The kingdom is at hand.)

When you wield that power, you are a threat to the game, to the powers of this world, to the culture of this world. You are a threat to governments, religious systems, family structures; for this world maintains control through pride, shame, anxiety, and condemnation—through law. But in Christ you’re free (exousia).

So it’s no wonder that the institutions of this world and the human nature in every person will hate the Christ in you. For evil hates grace and is offended by sacrificial love—the cross.

I’ve been fascinated by this whole debate over the ten commandments in our nation’s courts. Obviously our laws are founded on the ten commandments, God ordains human governments for a purpose, and it’s stupid to act like we invented the law. But there is something very strange about Christians making a big deal about keeping the ten commandments in civil courts. The ten commandments are the stipulations of the old covenant. On judgment day, I will not mention them at all, for Jesus revealed in His Sermon on the Mount that I’ve broken every one of those

commands and deserve Hell. And He said, “The measure you give is the measure you get.” So I’m not gonna mention them.

But now, what if we fought to have the symbol of the New Covenant, not just the Old Covenant in our courts? What if at the entrance of every courtroom there was a cross? A communion table? And perhaps Romans 11:32: “God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all”—a *huge harvest of mercy*?

Now, I know what you’re thinking. “That’s *nuts*. It would undo the power of the law! It would be totally unsafe! People would get killed—crucified—on the street. You might as well pick up a cross yourself. It would be the end of civilization as we know it!” That’s right. But the kingdom is not civilization as we know it. The kingdom is not of this world. It lies on the other side of a cross.

We worry about losing the culture war. We never *won* the culture war! *Jesus* won the culture war at His cross. His kingdom is “at hand” but not of this world. It lies on the other side of a cross.

So my advice is to vote for legislators who want to keep the ten commandments in civil courts (a la Romans 13), but don’t act like that’s “Christian.” No worldly government can truly be Christian. Don’t be seduced by the powers.

1. Don’t confuse any worldly government with the kingdom.
 2. And don’t confuse our religious institutions with the kingdom. The kingdom is among us, but it’s not the same as what the IRS calls Lookout Mountain Community Church. And God’s kingdom of faith in mercy is always a threat to our religious institutions of power.
 3. Don’t confuse your family with the kingdom. I truly love the ministry of Focus on the Family, but sometimes I fear we’ve turned the family into an idol. Jesus said, “Children will deliver up parents to death.” But if you make family your focus, you make family your idol. You’ll obey your idol. We are always enslaved to our idols and therefore *hate* our idols and cannot love them.
3. To love your family, you must die to your family and focus on Jesus. Love Jesus, and Jesus will love your family through you.
 2. To love the institutional Church, you must die to the institutional Church and love Jesus. And Jesus will love the Church through you.
 1. To love your country you must die to your country and love Jesus. And Jesus will love your country through you.

Die to them . . .

. . . and then you can love them . . .

. . . but then you’re not controlled by them, codependent on them . . .

. . . so then they may be very offended at your freedom (exousia) . . .

. . . so then you may be reviled by your family,

scourged at the bible study, and delivered up to governors and kings.

You may be crucified. But it's then you may point God's gun and *fire!* It's then you wield the greatest authority: power to harvest faith in mercy.

1. You do know that the Church (the true Church) is growing by far the fastest in places of persecution, for in those places, the Church is least seduced by the kingdoms of this world, and in those places, faith in mercy—covenant love—is most gloriously displayed.
2. You do know it's when people at church tick you off and sue you and slander you and utter all manner of evil against you that you may wield the greatest power, the power to love the Church as Jesus did. But if you seize power in fear, that's precisely when you lose the greatest power.

So Satan will whisper in your ear, "You're a loser. You're weak. You're a failure. So seize power." But Paul says when you're weak you're strong. It's when you're getting crucified that you have the greatest power.

On March 1, 1546, George Wishart was being executed, condemned by the throne of England and the Church in Rome. When his state-appointed executioner hesitated, Wishart came to him, kissed him, and said, "Lo, here is a token that I forgive thee." Then Wishart was burned at the stake.

George Wishart had a convert named John Knox. John Knox founded the Presbyterian Church. I don't believe you'd be here this day except that George Wishart kissed his executioner and said, "I forgive thee." And he wouldn't have done that unless Jesus cried, "Father, forgive them."

The greatest power is the power to lay power down.

3. You do know it's when brother delivers up brother to death that that brother may then wield the greatest power. It's when children deliver up their father to death that that father may wield the greatest power. It's when a bride beats her groom and nails him to a cross that that groom may wield the greatest power, the power to capture her heart with love.

Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw [romance] all men to myself." That's power.

Jesus said, "Children will rise against parents and have them put to death." At the cross of Christ, the children of God put their parent to death.

Jesus said, "Brother will deliver up brother to death."

- We are His little brothers, and we delivered Him up to death.
- We delivered Him to the Sanhedrin.
- We scourged Him in the assembly.
- We dragged Him before Governor Pilate and King Herod.
- We slaughtered the Lamb with our sin.

And there He conquered us—the wolves!

Jesus even said in verse twenty-one that the father [singular] will deliver his child [singular] to death. On the cross, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He took our place and suffered the wrath of God with perfect faith and absolute mercy. There He defeated the principalities and powers, and exposed their lie. For, in fact, love is stronger than death.

And now through us in this world, He’s exhibiting His victory to the principalities and powers, for we *are* His Body. And through us in this world, He’s harvesting His new creation. He said, “The harvest is plentiful.”

So then Jesus appoints the twelve. I’m sure they would have said they loved their nation, religion, and family. It defined them. But Jesus calls them to die to their nation, temple, and family, yet they harvest a *new* nation, temple, and family—a city.

Years later, John (one of the twelve) has a vision: the New Jerusalem, city of God. It has the twelve names of the twelve tribes, and on its foundation, the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They *are* God’s nation, God’s temple, God’s family, and God’s city.

We think we use our faith and mercy to build God’s city. But God uses our city to harvest faith and mercy. We are His city.

You have no idea how valuable you are. Yet right now you live in a fallen world where the Evil One lies to you. Some of you feel like you’re being crucified by your society, maybe your church, possibly your family (wife, husband, children, parents). The Evil One tells you you’re weak and you’ve failed. *I’m* telling you, point the gun and pull the trigger. In Christ you have power to lay power down—the power to love. You can’t win with human power, manipulation, and control. But the cross is the power of God unto salvation and makes all things new. Point the gun, pull the trigger, and say, “In the name of Jesus and under the authority of His blood, I forgive you. You are forgiven. Exousia! We’re both free!”

You see, Jesus really does give astounding authority and amazing power. And it’s one power—His love, His life, His blood. It’s the one power deeper than all powers, and the judgment upon the powers of this whole world. The very blood that drives out demons and conquers Satan is the very same blood that atones for your sin. It burns the Evil One like fire. But to us it tastes like wine.

Jesus says, “I give you authority.”

So on the night He was betrayed, He took bread and broke it saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Take and eat of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.” In the same way after the supper, having given thanks He took the cup and said, “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me.”

If you want Jesus—and this is who He is, we invite you to come to the communion table and worship. For there really is “power, power, wonder-working power, in the blood of the Lamb.” And He gives it to you. In Jesus’ name, amen.

[Song: “O Come, All Ye Faithful”]

[Prayer]

Father, you let us adore you. That’s why you sent Jesus to the world, your heart from the bosom of the Father. And we pray that this Christmas we would answer your call and we would adore Him, that we would look in the manger and see the Almighty King of kings and Lord of lords in swaddling clothes lying in a food trough. What an incredible power! In the midst of the throne is all power, a Lamb as if He had been slain. Lord God, help us to believe your power, the power of the cross unto salvation. In Jesus’ name, amen.

That movie clip was from a movie called *Bruce Almighty*. (It’s not recommended by the American Sunday School Foundation, but it is an amazing movie.) In the movie, God gives Bruce His power. But the great irony of the movie is that when Bruce is almighty, he’s actually *least* mighty. For he can’t get what he truly wants, which is his girlfriend’s heart, his bride. The whole movie is an argument for why God would empty Himself, take the form of a slave, be found in human form, and humble Himself to death on a cross.

At the start of the movie, Bruce won’t give blood. At the end, he does. In Jesus, God emptied Himself and gave us His life’s blood—authority.

If you’ve been to the table in faith, may you look in the mirror of His Word and say, “I’ve got the power!”

The power to forgive,
 The power to love,
 The power to set captives free,
 The power that spoke creation
 into existence from the
 foundation of the world.

Believe the Gospel. Amen.

Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power [exousia] over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food. Now whatever city or town you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there till you go out. And when you go into a household, greet it. If the household is worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city! Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household! Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. . . . He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

-Matthew 10:1-26a, 40

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority [exousia] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

-Matthew 28:18-20

"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power [exousia] to lay it down, and I have power [exousia] to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

-John 10:17-18

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

-Philippians 2:5-8

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

-I Corinthians 1:18

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 . . . Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power [exousia]. . . . And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers [exousia], He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. -Colossians 1:24; 2:8-10, 13-15

By the cross . . . Christ abolished the slavery which, as a result of sin, lay over our existence as a menace and an accusation. On the cross He “disarmed” the Powers, “made a public example of them and thereby triumphed over them.” . . .

He “made a public example of them.” It is precisely in the crucifixion that the true nature of the Powers has come to light. Previously they were accepted as the most basic and ultimate realities, as the gods of the world. Never had it been perceived, nor could it have been perceived, that this belief was founded on deception. . . . The Pharisees, personifying piety, crucified Him in the name of piety. Pilate, representing Roman justice and law, shows what these are worth when called upon to do justice to the Truth Himself. Obviously, “none of the rulers of this age,” who let themselves be worshipped as divinities, understood God’s wisdom, “for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Cor. 2:8). Now they are unmasked as false gods by their encounter with Very God; they are made a public spectacle. Thus Christ has “triumphed over them.” The unmasking is actually already their defeat. . . .

The very presence of the church in a world ruled by the Powers is a superlatively positive and aggressive fact. . . . All resistance and every attack against the gods of this age will be unfruitful, unless the church herself is resistance and attack, unless she demonstrates in her life and fellowship how men can live freed from the Powers.

-Hendrik Berkhof, from The Politics of Jesus by John Yoder

The cross is not a sign of the church’s quiet, suffering submission to the powers-that-be, but rather the church’s revolutionary participation in the victory of Christ over those powers. The cross is not a symbol for general human suffering and oppression. Rather, the cross is a sign of what happens when one takes God’s account of reality more seriously than Caesar’s. The cross stands as God’s (and our) eternal no to the powers of death, as well as God’s eternal yes to

humanity, God's remarkable determination not to leave us to our own devices. The overriding political task of the church is to be the community of the cross.

-Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon, Resident Aliens

Thus ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.

-Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer

I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

-II Corinthians 12:9b

Ellul points out this lesson, one that the church around the world needs to remember:

"Collaboration with power, whether Communist or not, is always ruinous for the church. If the church exists, if it is to have legitimacy in the eyes of the people, it must always stand erect as a counter-power to political power."

-Chuck Colson, Kingdoms in Conflict

Jesus shows us that there is no need for us to know whether our ministry and sacrifice are meaningful. The reverse is true. Through His battle in Gethsemane He proved: The mightier the fruit of our ministry, the more sacrificial the way will be and the less meaningful our path will appear. The greater our ministry, the more frequent the enemy's accusation that we are wrongfully committed by going this way. But if we follow Jesus without attending to the voice of the enemy and remain obedient to God until the end, we will bear much fruit.

-Basilea Schlink, Behold His Love

And in the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

-Revelation 21:10-14

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