The God of Power

Knowing God
By Pastor James Mansfield

Bible Text: Matthew 28; Philippians 3:7-12
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On this Easter Sunday morning I want to direct your attention to the historic account of Christ's resurrection and with particular reference to the power of God.

We have been looking at the subject of knowing God in recent Sunday mornings and I want us to think this morning particularly of the God of power. We have thought about his existence. We have talked thought about the God of creation. We have thought the trinity. And I want to move on and think about the God of power.

God reveals himself in many names. We don't appreciate them all or understand them all in that they come out, perhaps, more through the Hebrew and Greek language. But one of them is El Shaddai. That means the almighty God, the God of power. When God uses that title he is emphasizing his greatness and his power. We can see his power in many ways. When we studied the God of creation it says he created by the word of his power. And that is a very dramatic example of power, isn't it? God spoke the Word and there was the world. God spoke the Word and there were the animals and all the things that he created in the various days of the week. And Paul writes to the church at Colosse and he says, "By these things, by Christ all these things consist." And the word there means hold together. And if you were to take away that which scientists can't quite explain—they can't explain why molecules and atoms stay together—if you were to take that what we might call cosmic glue away, in theory, everything would fall to pieces. And the Bible says it is Christ who holds everything together. It is his power. All power is derived from God.

The world says that we started from a big bang. Well, we didn't start from a big bang, but we did start from God who has more power than any big bang.

We will not fully understand all the power of God, no more than we can understand his greatness in any area. It takes us to our edge of thinking. In Job it says:

"...the thunder of his power who can understand?"[1]

[1] Job 26:14.

And that is it. We often think of thunder as being something quite dramatic and God like and, indeed, in the Bible God does pick out the thought of thunder and that particular instance uses it to say, "Well, who can understand those things. We can't."

God's power is more than an attribute, it is not just something about God. It's about who he is - he is the God of power. But when we think of power we think, well, we need power to drive an engine or we need power to lift something. God's power is not just in a materialistic sense of moving things and doing things. His power is such that it is over plans and decrees and over the things in daily life. His power is that extensive.

The power that people have such as our queen, is limited by legislation, et cetera. She probably doesn't say all the things she would like to say. When the bills from parliament come before her, she has to sign them and when she signs them that turns the bill into an act of parliament and nothing is enacted until she signs it. One wonders whether she really wants to sign all of them – but she does. She signs them all whether she wants to or not because her power is limited. A dictator has, perhaps, far more power than our queen, but his power is only there because he has a big army outside. His power is only there by virtue of his position.

When we consider the power of our God, it is not there because he has a big army. It is not there because of something he has done. He is the God of power. The power that God has, it resides in his person not in anything outside of himself. His power is without limit. The only limit, if we can say that, is that which he limits himself by his own laws and decrees.

The passage we read where the women were walking to the tomb, they were of heavy heart. As I said to the younger ones, they probably didn't have much sleep. They had lost the Lord Jesus Christ who died. They couldn't understand all of that, but they saw him die. They knew he died. The knew where he had been laid in the tomb. They knew where the tomb was and they were going and they knew what they wanted to do. They were bringing spices with them.

But their concern was how to roll away the stone. Someone had told them that this stone was there or maybe they had visited the night before and had seen it. However when they got to the tomb we find the stone has already been rolled away. And it says in our reading there was a great earthquake for the angel descended and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it. That is a lovely little extra phrase. It doesn't have to be there, but it is there for a reason. There is a sense of defiance. There is a sense of victory. They sat on the stone. A stone could not conceal the Lord Jesus Christ. And the angel told the women that he is not here. He is risen as he said.

Those women had come wondering where the power would come from to move a stone. And when they got there, they found the power of God had risen Christ from the dead.

Now they took little notice of the stone... it was now just a seat for an angel.

One could only imagine the transformation in their hearts. They came with despondency. They came with grief. They came with their spices and sorrow. The sorrow that sticks in your gut - they were choked up with it. And then they find the tomb is empty. There is an angelic being speaking to them that Christ is risen and the Scripture says they left with fear and great joy.

Scripture often brings those together. It was fear because they had met an angelic being. It was fear because this was something tremendous that had had happened. But they went with great joy. And it says they ran to bring his disciples word.

Now we shall see here that there was, indeed, power in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but there is also power in the resurrection of Christ for his people and that is really the thought that I want you to try to latch hold of this morning. And that is why Paul writes in Philippians 3:10:

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection."[2]

Paul has given everything up for Christ. He said, I count everything else as refuge."

We know from Scripture that God had picked up Paul to preach the Word. People had been converted, churches founded and many miracles had been done through Paul and yet he could say, "I need to know him. I need to know the power of his resurrection. To know him and the power of his resurrection was not a one off experience but something Paul longed to know more of. Paul's religion was not a dead theology, not just a theory in the mind, but a living faith based on a personal relationship with the risen Savior."

The emphasis here is not so much to know about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but to know the power which flows from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You see, we can be aware of the resurrection. We can believe the resurrection. We can be as sure of the resurrection of Christ as anything else that we are sure of. We might defend it from Scripture and we might say nothing will shake me from the fact that I believe Jesus rose from the dead. But the question is: Do we know the power that flows from the resurrection of the dead?

The word power there in the Greek is such that we get the word dynamite and dynamo. A dynamo produces power, doesn't it? Dynamite gives us tremendous power. But the word here is not simply a state of being in power, but it is a state of power at work. There is a difference.

The Lawson children were in London recently and went to he science museum. I remember going there as a child and seeing a huge steam engine with a massive fly wheel and if memory serves me right, the piston from that wheel reached down into the floor below. And when you look at that you say, "What power there is in that great mechanism." But then I remember at a certain time they powered it up and it began to move and this vast wheel, weighing many tons began to move. And the piston began to

[2] Philippians 3:10.

move. And all of the sudden that which I saw as a big powerful static machine became power in motion. That is the sort of Word we have here. Paul says that we might know the powering motion of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That was meant to be an introduction, but let's just move on. I want to set before you four areas in which we see the power of the resurrection.

1 The power to save.

We need to be just clear on that for a moment, don't we?

We use the word converted, we talk about becoming a Christian and being born again or being saved. We use those words in an interchangeable way. It means that we have become a real Christian, not by signing a piece of paper, but we have become a Christian because we have that confirmation in our souls having had that desire to leave and hate our sin and we cast our dependence on the saving work of Christ and we have that assurance that he saved us, that we belong to him.

For some people that is something they, perhaps, can't put their finger on when it happens, but they know they are born again. They know they are the Lord's. And for many they can remember a time when they came to the Lord and said, "Lord, just save me. Forgive my sin," and whatever words we use. There is no set words. We just come and we ask the Lord to save us. And the Bible says he has never turned anyone away who genuinely comes before him.

We know the word 'saved' in an every day sense, don't we? If there is a shipwreck they say, "How many were saved and how many were lost?" In other words, they were snatched from the sea. Someone was on a cliff face and they were saved. They were rescued. They were taken off by a helicopter or people come along to save them.

And so it is for us. It is we are saved from sin, judgment and hell by the grace of God. We are cleansed and forgiven. We can't do that ourselves. And neither can anyone else – the power to save comes from God, because he sent his only begotten son into the world - God in the flesh came and lived for us and died for us. He became the sacrifice for his people. He arose from the dead showing that, indeed, the work was done. Romans four says he was raised again for our justification, that is, raised again to show that we are right in the sight of God. The resurrection is a great seal of approval that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus, that we are made free from sin. And on top of that, we are declared righteous. As our preacher said on Friday, we are not only forgiven and given a clear bank balance, our debt has been paid, but we are given a great big credit. The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. And we have the righteousness of God as our credit.

And so, once we are saved we are then empowered to live a holy life and to live a life of service. That is a good place to stop, isn't it? How much service have we done this week? How many people have we told in our own community about the Savior? What

activities we have been engaged in concerning where we are placed by God in this locality. Paul refers to the power of the gospel in Ephesians one. He says:

"And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power."[3]

Whenever we read of the gospel and its application to the unsaved or if we are saved looking at what happened to us, the Holy Spirit uses those sorts of words. Exceeding, great power. The working of his mighty power. And if you are a Christian then you have experienced that, the mighty power of God that comes from the resurrection of Christ has been seen in your life and that power belongs to God alone.

2 Power to transform our bodies.

Philippians three verse 21 Paul writes about our bodies being changed. He says:

"who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."[4]

And the word working there is another word for power and where we get the word energy from. According to the working thereby, the power thereby, to change us physically. We also have confirmation in Romans eight where we read this lovely verse. It says:

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies."[5]

The power that rose Jesus from the dead, he says, is going to raise you up, your mortal bodies. He is talking about the believer's physical resurrection. What power rose Jesus from the dead? He scripture says that the Spirit of God rose him from the dead, it also says God the Father rose him from the dead and we can go to the verse where Jesus said, "I have power to lay down my life. I have power to take it again." The power that rose Jesus from the dead was the power of the whole trinity working together to raise Jesus from the dead. And it is the same power that will raise us on that resurrection morning.

None of us know how long we have here on earth, do we? Give a quick look around any grave yard. One of the things that always amazes me is how young so many of those were when they died. And, perhaps, how old some of them were also. We don't know how many days we have allotted, but we do know we are to be ready to depart. And we know that when we die if we are in Christ and our souls go to be with the Lord, our bodies lay in the grave. Job said 'I know that my redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the later day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another …' He had that glorious revelation of resurrection. He knew that he was going to be

[3] Ephesians 1:19.
[4] Philippians 3:21.
[5] Romans 8:11.

raised again in a physical body and at the time he lived there was no revelation that we have that there was to be a resurrection. God had given him that revelation. And he gives it to us through Job in his writings there.

What does it say? It says on that particular time that those who have died in Christ will be raised with a new body. It says, "We which are alive and remain shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye and we shall be raised together to meet the Lord in the air."

How will that be? The dead in Christ shall be raised. How are they going to do that? They are dead. It is the power of God. The same power that rose Jesus from the dead, it says, will quicken your mortal bodies. And if we are alive when the Lord comes, we will be changed.

You say, "We are not dead."

No, but we are not ready for heaven. So we are going to be changed. And Paul says in his letter to the church at Philippi he says, "It is going to be like the resurrection body of the Savior."

Oh, my friends, what a day that is going to be to us. One hymn writer says, "We will gaze upon our vacant grave."

I don't know, hymns are not divinely inspired, are they? They are not the same as Scripture. I am not so sure when the resurrection comes if I have died I am going to bother to look at my vacant grave. That said, if you want to have a look, that is fine. We want to look at the Savior, don't we?

But my, you know, if I thought about it I might want a quick look to remind myself of the power that there is in the resurrection Savior.

3 Power to overcome.

Paul said:

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."[6]

And that word strengtheneth is the same root word that we have for power in our text. It is the dynamite word. Paul is saying, "I can do all things through Christ who empowers me." This is the power needed, isn't it, for the life of the Christian.

Sometimes we holiday on one of the Canary Islands, and if you walk a mile or two along the beach you come to the end of the airport. The planes come in right across the water and you can almost touch them as they come in to land. But it also means when they take off, they taxi to the edge of the beach - they turn around and prepare to surge down the

[6] Philippians 4:13.

runway. You can hear the noise of their engines and then get the all clear to take off and that noise that you thought was pretty loud becomes even louder. They power up, the brakes release and this great object begins to move, at first quite slowly but then it surges down the runway and as you watch it in the distance it takes to the air. How could it be that this mighty machine weighing many tons all of the sudden lifts off? Because it has been empowered. It needs power to defy the laws of gravity, to do what doesn't really make sense, to get off the ground.

But, my friends, as Christians we need the power of God to propel us through life, that we might defy the power of the gravity of this world, that we might be enabled to keep away from its sin and its depravity.

You know, the fear is that many of us are standing at the end of the runway. You know, the engines are fired. We belong to the Lord. But there doesn't seem to be a lot of power. Or perhaps, as I have said to some people, sometimes when I have finished preaching when they ask, "How did you get on?" I reply, "I am not sure I got off the runway." In other words, I might have run along with my sermon and flapped me wings a bit, but didn't really seem to take off. But when we know the Spirit of God is at the controls, when we have been pleading with the Lord in prayer, when we have been seeking him in our service and we are endeavoring to be right with him, so often the Lord will enable us to take off.

We take off, then, when we find the Spirit of God controlling us, perhaps leading us particularly to people who need help, perhaps one after another. Perhaps we can remember times in our lives when we have had a few weeks when we have been able to speak to someone and they have come along to a meeting when someone has accepted an invite, when someone did want to know about the gospel. Without his power we succumb to sin and that keeps us grounded. There is no way we are going to get off the ground if we are dwelling in sin - we will not achieve anything lasting for the Lord.

You know, it is good, as Christians to face the facts of our own frequent failures and when we see that we are not really doing a lot for the Lord, not loving him as we once did, not so enthusiastic as we once were. When we are not pleading with the Lord as we once did. Sadly some people's solution is to just drop off attending or go to another fellowship. No, we have to come back to the Lord. We have to come back to the cross and admit our failures asking the Lord to help us and to empower us and to acknowledge that we do not know the power that we should know.

So power to save, power to change our mortal bodies, power to overcome.

4 The power of the gospel.

In Romans one we read, Paul writes:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation."[7]

[7] Romans 1:16.

This is the dynamite of God unto salvation. The gospel is God's, isn't it, from its planning, its execution, its application and the power of it must be his also. And that is what we need to pray for, isn't it, as Christians? That we might know more in our lives and also to see it in the lives of others.

We are pleased to see children come to our meetings and then, we see a few parents coming to different things from time to time. And that is great. Some of them would never have heard some of the things we are able to share with them. Sometimes a parent will come in at the end of our Friday meeting and hear one or two things and see the literature they take home, et cetera. That is all new to them and it is a good thing and we mustn't despise the day of small things. But, my friends, we need the day of power, don't we, when those people will begin to know their hearts touched and say, "This is something I need. I have a misunderstanding of what it is to be a Christian. I need to know what these things are about; I need to know the Lord Jesus Christ."

And when the power of God is evident among us, he convicts and he converts. You know, all of us who stand in this pulpit endeavor to honor God in setting out the gospel and yet even if we get that absolutely perfect, and I am not suggesting we do, but we do the best we can. But if we were to get it perfect, we still need the power of God. Without the power of God it is but words - true words and good words, but we need the power of God. And the resurrection is our seal of God's acceptance that the saving work of Christ is done. God is saying by the resurrection, "The work is done. My only begotten Son has done what he came to the earth to do. He is now risen from the dead. He is going to ascend back into heaven. The power has been displayed and now the power of that resurrection is going to flow across the world in saving men and women and boys and girls."

The danger is we begin to not believe the Word and we begin to think, well, the power isn't in God and through the preaching of the Word. And so people being to do something else that might get people into a church and may even get people thinking they are believers. My friends, we need the power of God that people may know what it is to be a believer. And the other extreme, of course, is to stand back and say, "We will wait for God to move, then, seeing he is sovereign and seeing the power is his." And we sink back in orthodoxy. No, we have to follow the scriptures - we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel. To be out there in our community living the christian life pleading with God to come and make his power known in the things that we are doing.

That is faith in action. That is the power that Paul wrote about. It is the power that these women found on the resurrection morning.

So there we are, then. We have power to save, power to change our mortal bodies, power to overcome, the power of the gospel. It is all relevant to the power of the resurrection.

Let's make some application. First of all, let's be very honest and ask what power do we know in our own lives? Some avoid answering that question by looking at others and

saying, “Oh, look what power that person has got or that church has got or look what they are doing or whatever.” It is not really about the church. It is about us as individuals, isn’t it? Because it is us as individuals that make up the local fellowship.

There is a power of the Spirit of the world. We know that. There is a power of ungodliness. And that power there wants to hold us in the grip of sin, wants to blind people to the gospel truth, wants to harm us in body and soul, wants to leave the world in chaos, wants to take people to a lost eternity. That is the power of the world, the power of the evil one. But God’s power broke that. He broke the powers of death which none e’er broke before. And here in the gospel is all that is needed to be saved from sin and death. Here is all that is needed to live close to the Lord, to be free from sin, to walk in holiness. And whilst the world continues a pace the call is much the same as in Noah’s day, come into the ark. Anyone who is not a believer, anyone who is unsure, it is come to Christ. For there is judgment coming. There is a time of flood coming, as it were, not a water flood, but there are judgments to come upon the earth. We need to come to Christ before that time. We have an all sufficient Savior and there is power to save the most wicked person. There is power to save you. There is power to save as many as will come in repentance and in faith.

But remember, there are some things that God will not do. He will not ignore sin. He will not override his own justice. He will not break a promise. And, my friends, we depend on those things. But may we know his power in our lives.

And just finally here, may those who love the Savior seek to know more of his power? It has been said it is difficult to live in the smoke if you have been used to the fire. That was said by those who had lived in times of revival. We are not blessed with revival at the moment. May the Lord so do it, but we have to live in the day in which we have been brought.

You know, the power of God is not just a larger congregation. The power of God is not even in seeing outside people coming in. The power of God is something felt and eventually seen in the growth of holiness of God’s people, in the growth of our knowledge of the things of God, because as those things happen we then begin to see God moving and working and we begin to see genuine conversions. God is sovereign in his power. But he tends, as it were, to give power and blessing to those who get to grips with him in prayer, to those who come and say, “We will not let him go until we know a blessing,” not just a flicker of hope, but the power of God unto salvation. That is one reason why we have the prayer time next Saturday at Lincoln, that we might get to grips with God. We say we want revival. We say we want blessing. Then there is an opportunity.

If we have such determination to know the power of God, that itself is a motivation in prayer. We say, “Oh, it is so difficult. Look at the world today and look at our land and look at all these different things.”

Yes, we are meant to look at all of that, but then we come back to say, “Is anything too

hard for the Lord? Do we not limit God if we get to that point of despondency?" No. We might be at a difficult time but we have been brought to the kingdom for such a time as this that we might serve him here with fervency, with every fiber in our body that we might know the power of God, the power of his resurrection. We mustn't limit God's power by the smallness of our faith.

Well, can we say our faith is small? The Lord said if we have the faith the size of a mustard seed we could say to a mountain, "Get thee hence." I guess in Lincolnshire there is not a lot of cause for moving mountains, but that is the example that he gave. God is willing and able to help us when we cry out to him who can do more than we can ask or even think.

So may the Lord give us, then, a fresh and permanent determination to seek to know him and the power of his resurrection and that that determination might be translated into our reaching into our community and coming together before the Lord. May it be so for his name's sake. Amen.