

“YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER”
Psalm 47:1-9, Ephesians 1:15-23, Acts 1:1-11
May 20 & 21, 2023

Last Monday, I had the chance to cut the grass at my house for the first time this year. I had considered doing a “No Mow May” thing this year because I was so busy, but the day came that was just perfect to cut the grass. So I got the lawn mower out and, after chasing a couple of baby bunnies around the yard, sufficiently cut the grass. But I wasn’t finished yet. I went into my shed and got out the weed eater to do the trimming.

I filled it with fuel, primed it 5 times like it says to, and choked the engine, and then began to pull the starter cord to get it going. I pulled and I pulled and I pulled and I pulled. My right arm got tired of pulling, so I used my left arm to pull some more. Nothing happened. I pressed the primer some more, thinking that since it was the first time of the year that I had used it, it needed a little more fuel to get started. Still nothing. Well, after both arms were sufficiently tired at pulling the cord, I tried a different tactic.

I took off the cover of the choke, thinking there might be something that was preventing air from getting into the carburetor. Everything was clean, so I went into my garage and got a spark plug wrench and took out the spark plug, thinking that maybe over the winter it had gone bad, or that it needed to be cleaned or re-gapped. After doing the necessary cleaning of the spark plug, I put it back into the engine and put the wire back onto it and pulled some more. NOTHING! Then, I took the plug out again, put it back onto the wire and pulled the cord a few more times to see if the plug was sparking. Dead!

Only then did I go back into the garage to look at the operator’s manual to see what I might be doing wrong. As I perused the pages of the manual, I saw what I was supposed to do, all of which I had done correctly, but nothing was happening. THEN I SAW IT. There, in the illustration of the weed eater, I noticed the reason that I wasn’t getting any spark or any life to my machine. I had not slid the STOP switch forward, enabling the machine to operate fully. It was still in the STOP position.

I could have pulled that cord until I wore it out and still nothing would have happened. I could

have changed the spark plug, put new fuel into the tank, and a whole realm of other things, but until I put that switch into the ON position, there was not going to be any life in that machine. The STOP switch prevented any power to the machine. Oh, the power was available, but I had to put the switch in the right position in order to let the machine do its work. And, yes, as soon as the STOP switch was in the ON position, one pull was all I needed to get the weed eater going.

Well, folks, we're a lot like that weed eater. We have the awesome power of God available to us, right in our hands and at our fingertips. We are capable of doing great things that the Lord has given to us, but until we move our STOP switch into the ON position, we're not going to be able to do much of anything. Oh, we can be busy all day, but what we are able to accomplish is limited to our own strength. We have to open our hearts to the Lord, enable Him to empower us with His Holy Spirit through our faith in Jesus Christ before we can accomplish what the Lord has called us to do.

You see, the STOP switch in our lives is this big word called SIN. When sin reigns in our hearts and lives, when we are deliberately going against God's laws and commandments, that sin STOPS our relationship with God and prevents all of God's empowerment from enabling us to do His work through us. We can strive and pursue things of the Lord, but nothing will happen, because sin prevents any of God's power from coming into our lives to make us effective in what we do. There are so many spiritually dead people in our world trying desperately to do something good for the Lord, but because sin reigns in their lives, they are like a weed eater with the STOP switch in the OFF position.

But God desires that we open our hearts and lives to Him, repenting of our sin through our confession to Jesus Christ, and then decidedly pursue all of His Ways. Only then can we become vibrant, effective and abundant Christians. Only then can we become a vibrant, effective and abundant Church for the Lord Jesus.

We heard that message in Psalm 47 today where we're told, "*The Lord Most High is awesome, the great King over all the earth. He subdued nations under us, peoples under our feet. He chose our inheritance for us, the pride of Jacob, whom He loved. God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the Lord*

amid the shouting of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to Him a psalm of praise” (47:2-7). What is it that God CANNOT do? He is the Almighty, the Most High God, powerful beyond imagination. But there is one thing that God cannot do, and that is to do evil. God is perfect, and cannot tolerate any sin or evil in His presence. So if we stand before God with all our sins hanging out before Him, He says, “Depart from Me!” And only by claiming the Salvation of our sins, through the blood of Jesus Christ shed for us on the cross, can we find our sin washed away, become forgiven, and open up that STOP switch in our lives to be put into the ON position so that God can work in us and through us. Repentance has to happen regularly so that we keep our hearts and lives open to the work of the Lord our God.

You see, God delights to give us His power to do His work here on the earth. He wants to empower us to do His work, but until we deal with the sin in our lives, until we place our whole lives in the hands of Jesus Christ our Lord, that sin will prevent us from finding ANY of God’s abundant power in our lives and in our church.

The Apostle Paul stated that well to the followers of Jesus that were in Ephesus. He says, “*I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people, and His incomparably great power for us who believe...*” (Ephesians 1:18-19a). As we open our eyes to see that Sin is what prevents us from the power of God, we have the opportunity to repent of that sin and find God’s power living and working through us.

Here’s how Paul states it. “*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been*

saved...through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:1-6, 8b-10).

Sin prevents us from being able to do the work that God has prepared for us to do. It is that STOP switch that keeps us spiritually dead and ineffective. And we can see it in the lives of any person or church that blatantly step away from following God's laws and commands and put their love solely on satisfying themselves with the ways and things of the world. The power of God is no longer given to them through the Holy Spirit, and as a result, there is no longer any growth, no life, and no power in that person or church. They wither away because sin stops the Holy Spirit from working, thus God's work cannot be accomplished, and His hand of blessing and abundance is removed from them.

However, when a person or a church fully embrace the Ways of God in them, when they diligently pursue the work of the Lord, sin is repented of, and that STOP switch is put into the ON position, and the Holy Spirit flows into their lives and His power is given to them to do the great work of the Lord.

Listen to the way that Jesus explains it in His last instructions to the disciples. This is Acts 1:1-11. (READ Acts 1:1-11)

The disciples of Jesus had put their faith and trust in Him as the risen Savior and Lord. They dedicated their lives to following Him. They learned about the Kingdom of God and fully gave themselves into fulfilling the work that Jesus had started. They gave up the things of this world, including sin, and devoted themselves to following the teachings of God found in all the Scriptures. And Jesus tells them, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

They were not able to accomplish the work of the Lord without God's Holy Spirit in them. Once they were filled with the Spirit, they would be able to do all of the works of Jesus, even so much as to heal the sick, raise the dead and cast out demons in His Name. It was only possible through the Holy

Spirit living and working through them. And then, they would be able to go into all the world to take the great Good News of Salvation through Jesus Christ to everyone who would believe in Him and follow His ways. It would be possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But what does that look like for us? Can we, too, just like the disciples, become empowered by the gifts and fruit of the Holy Spirit? Can we also receive the same kind of marching orders that Jesus gave to those around Him on His ascension day? Can we, too, become witnesses of Jesus so that the whole world might come to know Him as Savior and Lord? The answer is a resounding YES to all of these questions.

As Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to His disciples, so He promises the Holy Spirit to each one of us as we profess our faith and trust in Jesus as Savior, and let Him become Lord of our lives. Through the Holy Spirit, we can do all of the works of Jesus in order to bless the lives of those who seek to follow Him. We can even do His miracles of healing in order to show the wonders of Jesus in us as we proclaim Him as Savior and Lord of our lives for others to see. All of the gifts of the Spirit are ours to use for the glory of Jesus Christ.

But when we let the Holy Spirit work in and through us, He will do His work in a variety of ways that bring glory to Jesus through us. The Holy Spirit empowers us to be a witness for Jesus in the most unique and interesting ways. Let me explain what I mean.

“I’ll call this young man Aaron, not his real name. Late one spring he was praying about having a significant ministry the following summer. He asked God for a position to open up on some church staff or Christian organization. Nothing happened. Summer arrived, still nothing. Days turned into weeks, and Aaron finally faced reality - he needed any job he could find. He checked the want ads of the newspaper and the only thing that seemed to be a possibility was driving a bus in southside Chicago - nothing to brag about, but it would help with tuition in the fall. After learning the route, he was on his own - a rookie driver in a dangerous section of the city. It wasn’t long before Aaron realized just how dangerous his job really was.

“A small gang of tough kids spotted the young driver, and began to take advantage of him. For several mornings in row they got on, walked right past him without paying, ignored his warnings, and rode until they decided to get off...all the while making smart remarks to him and others on the bus. Finally, he decided it had gone on long enough.

“The next morning, after the gang got on as usual, Aaron saw a policeman on the next corner, so he pulled over and reported the offense. The officer told them to pay or get off. They paid, but unfortunately, the policeman got off. And *they* stayed on. When the bus turned another corner or two, the gang assaulted the young driver.

“When he came to, blood was all over his shirt, two teeth were missing, both eyes were swollen, his money was gone, and the bus was empty. After returning to the terminal and being given the weekend off, our friend went to his little apartment, sank onto his bed and stared at the ceiling in disbelief. Resentful thoughts swarmed his mind. Confusion, anger, and disillusionment added fuel to the fire of his physical pain. He spent a fitful night wrestling with the Lord.

“How can this be? Where’s God in all of this? I genuinely want to serve Him. I prayed for a ministry. I was willing to serve Him anywhere, doing anything, and this is the thanks I get!

“On Monday morning Aaron decided to press charges. With the help of the officer who had encountered the gang and several who were willing to testify as witnesses against the thugs, most of them were rounded up and taken to the local county jail. Within a few days there was a hearing before the judge.

“In walked Aaron and his attorney, plus the angry gang members who glared across the room in his direction. Suddenly he was seized with a whole new series of thoughts. Not bitter ones, but compassionate ones! His heart went out to the guys who had attacked him. Under the Spirit’s control he no longer hated them - he pitied them. They needed help, not more hate. What could he do or say?

“Suddenly, after there was a plea of guilty, Aaron (to the surprise of his attorney and everybody else in the courtroom) stood to his feet and requested permission to speak.

“Your honor, I would like you to total up all the days of punishment against these men - all the time sentenced against them - and I request that you allow me to go to jail in their place.”

“The judge didn’t know whether to spit or wind his watch. Both attorneys were stunned. As Aaron looked over at the gang members (who’s mouths and eyes looked like saucers), he smiled and said quietly, ‘It’s because I forgive you.’

“The dumbfounded judge, when he reached a level of composure, said rather firmly: ‘Young man, you’re out of order. This sort of thing has never been done before!’ To which the young man replied with genius insight:

“Oh, yes, it has, your honor...yes, it has. It happened over nineteen centuries ago when a man from Galilee paid the penalty that all mankind deserved.’

“And then, for the next three or four minutes, without interruption, he explained how Jesus Christ died on our behalf, thereby proving God’s love and forgiveness.

“Aaron was not granted his request, but he he visited the gang members in jail, led most of them to faith in Christ, and began a significant ministry to many others in southside Chicago.”¹ All because he diligently sought the Lord to guide Him into a ministry that would glorify Jesus. He received the power of the Holy Spirit that enabled him to witness his faith, and thereby opened up the door to a brand new ministry to folks on the south side of Chicago.

God has work for us to do, my friends, but we cannot accomplish it if we are living according to the ways of the world. God will only open up the work and the power of the Holy Spirit to those who diligently seek Him to do His will. Why would God use the power of the Holy Spirit to contradict His Wil and His Ways? No He won’t do that. But if we let the light of Jesus Christ purge the darkness of our sin from our lives, God is very glad to empower us with His Holy Spirit to do the work that He has prepared for us to do.

It may be a ministry of the church. It might be a ministry to the folks caught up in gangs. It

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 542-3)

could be to college age folks who are struggling to see the relevance of having faith in Jesus Christ. It could be reaching out to folks trapped in a dangerous cycle of sin, such as pornography or drug and alcohol abuse. It could be to help relocate and house and establish approved immigrants. It could be reaching out to those that we work with. It could be working to get a new denomination established. It could be helping veterans deal with life issues as they struggle with PTSD. It could be working in our jail or prison sharing the Gospel of Jesus with those who are serving time in incarceration. There are so many ways that we can work for Jesus and let the Holy Spirit empower us for the glory of the Lord our God.

The work of the Holy Spirit calls each one of us to open our lives to accomplish the work that God has given to us. But it's up to us to move the STOP switch into the ON position so that His power can move in and through us. It demands our obedience to all of the Scriptures of the Bible. It demands repentance of our sin and the washing of regeneration. It requires living our faith in Jesus Christ, no matter what situation we might find ourselves in. It often demands that we give radical grace and forgiveness to those who are opposed to us. But when we live by the power of the Holy Spirit, God will guide us, and bless us, and empower us to do His great work. It's the only way we can adequately serve the Lord in our world today. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Jesus' gift of love given to us through His death on the cross. Thank You for the forgiveness of our sins as we claim Jesus as our Savior. Guide each of us to make Jesus Lord of our lives, doing all we can to stay true to the teachings of the Bible. May Your Holy Spirit move into us as we confess Jesus as Savior and Lord so that through His power, we might do the work You have called us to do. Give us opportunities to witness our faith and love to those around us. Help us to remain faithful to You, even when things might turn upside-down in our lives, so that through those things, we may be Your witnesses of the love of Jesus in us. Thank You for Your promise of power and authority given to us by Your Holy Spirit. Enable us to live in ways that bring honor and glory to You, every day. This we pray in the Name of Jesus Christ, our risen Savior and Lord. AMEN.