

2010 Living Our Legacy Our Human Legacy 4: “We are Empowered”

*God's Way is not a matter of mere talk; it's an **empowered** life.* 1 Cor. 4:20

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We discussed in sermon one of this series that part of our human legacy is; that we are spiritual human beings. Being created and loved by God, who is Spirit, means by default then, that part of our Spiritual heritage is, we are also spiritual human beings. But there is more to this, and thus another sermon devoted to it entirely.

The third part of the trinity is the Holy Spirit. He is the oft ignored, oft misunderstood, and sometimes even abused part of the God-head. He is not an “it”, he is understood as a person much the same way that God and Jesus are understood as persons. His role is rather all-encompassing, acting as the physical, emotional, and spiritual representation of God with us who are human. The interaction between humans and God is facilitated primarily by means of, and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit is vast. He is cast as the one who convicts us of sin, who calls us to repentance, who comforts those in need. He is our advocate, and ambassador, translating our prayers and even groanings to God. He reveals to us truth, he guides and directs our paths, and he helps us be more fully, who God has created us to be. But the overriding description of the person and work of the Holy Spirit is **POWER**. The Spirit comes with power, and the Spirit gives us power.

Power, itself, is a misunderstood concept in our world, and unfortunately in our lives. We view power as a precious commodity to be sought after through election, or acquisition, or sometimes illegitimate means.

Powerful people are given prestige and esteem in our society, and most of us yearn to have more of it in our given contexts. But power is not always such a good thing; it can and has been perverted and distorted for all sorts of evil ends. Even in innocent lives, power used inappropriately or immorally, is a dangerous thing. It's not bad to have or use power, as long as we understand its source, and its intended means.

There are two words in the Greek language that define power: dunamis; which is the word from which we get our English words dynamic or dynamite. It connotes explosive power. It is the word used throughout the book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit comes on the people as a mighty wind. It is the word used to describe the work of the Spirit in raising people from the dead, healing illnesses and diseases, casting out demons and evil spirits all happen by the Power (dunamis) of the Holy Spirit.

But there is another lesser known word for power in the Greek language: exousia. This word has more of a sense of enduring or staying or overcoming power. Not so explosive, but more long lasting, underlying, even inspirational. It's used in John 1:12 *But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right (power – exousia) to become children of God.* Not as a one time dramatic powerful act, but for a lifetime, we are given power, by the same Spirit to become and remain, and be sustained as a child of God. It is this second type of empowerment I want to concern us with today.

The Holy Spirit does give us dunamis power, but I believe more importantly; part of our human legacy is that we have been given exousia power that reveals itself in some more subtle, and maybe more meaningful ways than the explosive, flash in the pain, dunamis. Part of our Human Legacy is that we have been empowered. We may not make much of a dynamic splash at first glance, but by observing and obeying these exousia examples, I believe we'll equally if not better, fulfill our human destiny and legacy.

1. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE POWER TO BE **SELFLESS**

*Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a **selfless**, obedient life and then died a **selfless**, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion. Philippians 2:4-6*

Almost from day one of our existence as humans on this planet, we are taught to look out for, to care for, to hold in highest esteem...ourselves. From having it your way, right away, to being an army of one; we are taught to think less of others, and more of ourselves. "How can I take care of others, until or unless I first take care of me?" "Me time", what a joke. I understand the issues of self-care, and a certain need for "me" time, but I wonder if Jesus did? He didn't seem to ascribe to the hierarchy of needs; with base ones being necessarily fulfilled before more altruistic ones could be considered... no, he just said...love your enemies and your friends, go the second mile, turn the other cheek, forgive without limits, think less of yourself, and more of others...and he modeled it too.

Self-lessness is a gift from God, specifically God's Spirit, and specifically an exousia kind of gift. The world marginalizes and ridicules anyone who willfully puts himself or his or her needs below another...but Jesus exalts such behavior, action and attitudes. Part of our Spiritual Human Legacy is that we are empowered to choose selflessness, to think of ourselves in the same way Jesus thought of himself. He knew he was God, we know we belong to God; and yet, in each case it simply means; thinking less of ourselves and more of others. It is a humbling prospect and an awesome one too.

It begins in the homes of followers of Jesus. Husbands treating wives with respect and wives loving husbands unconditionally. Children honoring parents, and being honored for doing so. It carries into the work place; modeling selflessness by treating the lowest custodian with equal honor as the CEO. It occurs to me that people in your office will notice if you treat everyone with respect that comes not from a human source, but from a divine one. This selflessness would go along way in the church of said followers of Jesus. There would be less gossip, less backbiting, less in fighting, less power struggles, less personal preference demands, less petty squabbles over insignificant issues, and much more authentic ministry in Christ's name, to one another, and to the world. Wouldn't you love to be part of that kind of church? Then be that kind of person! Choose to receive this selflessness as a gift from God's Spirit, it is a gift of power...it just looks and feels and acts different.

2. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE POWER TO SERVE

*When the other ten heard of this conversation, they lost their tempers with James and John. Jesus got them together to settle things down. "You've observed how godless rulers throw their weight around," he said, "and when people get a little **power** how quickly it goes to their heads. It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done: He came to **serve**, not to be **served**—and then to give away his life in exchange for many who are held hostage."*
Mark 10:40-42

Obviously choosing to accept this gift of being empowered to serve is similar to, our choosing to accept the gift of being empowered to selflessness. Along with selflessness, serving is not often considered a mark of power in this fallen world in which we live. In fact, in our world today a man or woman is esteemed if they no longer are forced to dirty themselves with menial tasks of life. A powerful person is to be served not to serve. Ruling, controlling, manipulating the lives of others – these are the marks of one who is considered powerful.

Not so with Jesus. On his last night with his disciples, Jesus demonstrated his radical attitude toward power, and serving. He removed his clothes, wrapped himself in a towel, and began washing his followers' feet! Surely he had better things to do! Someone else could assume this lowly servant role! Quite to the contrary Jesus insisted that one of the highest privileges we inherit (part of our legacy) is the honor of serving another. There seems nothing more important than that.

I'm here to tell you this doesn't happen 'naturally'. Again, this world in which we live places such high value on status and privilege and pride; that we are too often just like the disciples; fighting about who's the best, living to convince ourselves and others that we are better than others. To choose to willfully serve another is not born naturally in us, nor confirmed through our culture for us, or modeled by any but Jesus' followers to us! It is the Holy Spirit of God who empowers us with the will and ability to selflessly choose to serve another.

So serve one another today, this week. Be on the look out for large and small ways to make someone else's life just a bit easier. Call someone madam or sir. Smile at a stranger, hold the door for someone you love, and someone you don't know. Buy the gal's coffee behind you at Starbucks, pick up someone's trash, and don't look for a medal, just do the right thing. Bend down and hug a child, kiss someone on the cheek, ask someone question after question, and never give a thought to talking about yourself. These are sample ways to serve others. They are part of our human legacy. We are empowered to serve.

3. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE POWER TO SUFFER

*I gave up all that inferior stuff so I could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection **power**, be a partner in his **suffering**, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, I wanted to do it.*
Philippians 3:10

This one might seem most odd and incongruous within our culture. We are not into suffering, especially willfully chosen suffering. I'm not advocating self-mortification or flatuation like practiced in some religious circles...that doesn't make sense to me. What I'm advocating is that there are times in our lives when we have to suffer, and instead of dreading them, or running from them, or denying or ignoring them...we might benefit from embracing the opportunity to suffer. If we choose to accept suffering as an empowering gift, we might find a new level of identification with Jesus.

Several years ago, the well-known German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke was asked during a visit to America what he considered the greatest problem in the US. He surprised many with his unexpected reply. "The biggest problem," he said, "is an inadequate view of suffering." He went on to explain that, in his view, the American dream of perpetual progress had led many to believe that any and all problems could and should be solved quickly, and with a minimum of effort or discomfort. Unfortunately, he insisted, this is simply not the case. There are, and always will be, certain burdens in life that cannot be quickly or easily eliminated. In Thielicke's words, "These burdens obviously pitch the American into such helpless embarrassment that he either capitulates to them, or represses them, or glosses over them.

Unfortunately, the German pastor's words have as much relevance for many Christian's view of life as for our society at large. In the popular Christian mindset and some Christian circles of our age, it is assumed that power always leads to pleasure. Adversity and suffering are certain signs of weakness. Given this attitude, the Holy Spirit's power is measured by his ability to make life easy for the believer. Health, wealth and success are the true signs of the Spirit's blessings. Adversity and suffering, on the other hand are thought to be the companions of spiritual weakness.

For many the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to enable a believer to escape adversity, but not strong enough to sustain him in it.

Such an attitude is far removed from the teachings of the New Testament. Nowhere does Jesus promise his followers an easy life. Quite to the contrary, Jesus insisted that the path of discipleship is straight and narrow and the way hard. Rather than rejecting adversity as a sign of spiritual weakness, the early Christians rejoiced that they were counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the "Name". Paul even taught that suffering was an expected part of the Spirit-led life (Romans 8:14-27).

None of us like suffering, and I'm not advocating we run after it...but when it comes...not if...when it comes...let's not run from it either! God's grace is made perfect in our weakness, and we are at our weakest when we are suffering. God's grace is sufficient, to relieve us from our suffering or sustain us through it. So, if you find yourself suffering or struggling right now...embrace it as a gift from the Spirit. Not a dynamite gift, but a gift that will mature you, if you endure it.

Part of our human legacy. We have been given the Spirit with all his amazing dynamic gifts. We have also been given these strange, exousia, longer lasting, more enduring, and more precious opportunities to choose: selflessness, serving, even suffering. Accepting and even embracing them is a Powerful choice.

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