

# The Power of God

Exodus 3:1-12, Mark 12:18-27 (ESV)

April 6, 2003

“Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.” Here are words of grace and gospel: the power of God for life is greater than the power of death; the power of God for life is made known to us and made available to us in and through the word of God; and the power of God for life gives us new life in the resurrection.

First, the power of God for life is greater than the power of death. This is the good news that was incomprehensible, unacceptable, and repulsive to the enemies of Jesus Christ. His critics and detractors were believers, but they were believers in the ultimate power of death. They would have regarded themselves as hard minded realists. “Look around,” they would say. “All living things come to their end, and then they are no more. Death is final, and the power of death is ultimate.” So we see again that the enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ are never neutral but are always agents of an alien faith, a competing faith, an evil faith, an alternative world view. The enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ are always ministers of some other lord, some other master, some pretender to divinity.

Since Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, the enemies of the gospel are on the side of lostness, confusion, falsehood, mendacity, decline, decay, and death. Since Jesus is light and life, the enemies of the gospel are darkness and death. Since Jesus brings healing and life, his enemies are agents of disease and death. They attack still today. But Christ challenges their wicked faith, does battle with their enemy lords, and takes on their worst attacks. He proclaims again the gospel of the goodness and the power of God: the power of God for life is greater than the power of death. This is one of the problems of the enemies of God: they know nothing of the power of God. But this is a source of great joy and comfort for the friends of God, the children of God, the knowing recipients of the grace and mercy of God, the ones who have found great forgiveness, the ones whose tears have been wiped away: all of these know much about the power of God and much about the goodness of the power of God.

Second, the power of God for life which is greater than the power of death is made known to us and made available to us in and through the word of God. This is the good news that was incomprehensible, unacceptable, and repulsive to the enemies of Jesus Christ. The pseudo-sophisticated, purportedly well educated, supposedly pious religious leaders who led the attack on Jesus did not know their own scriptures. They did not know what we call the Old Testament. They did not know the books of Moses, the books of the Law, the first books of the Bible. We can see Jesus shaking his head, sadly, in disbelief. “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”

These two ignorances go hand in hand. Failure to know the scriptures results in not knowing the power of God. Denying the power of God indicates a dearth of knowledge of the scriptures. So Jesus held the solutions to these together: the power of God is made known to us and made available to us in and through the scriptures. If you ignore the content of the Bible and the preaching of the gospel, you will know nothing, believe nothing, and have nothing. Read your Bible, study your Bible, pray over your Bible, learn your Bible, eat and drink your Bible, consume your Bible, come and hear the Bible read and preached, and you will begin to know something about the presence, the reality, the grace, the love, the forgiveness, the healing, the renewal, and the power of God. So Jesus took it upon himself to teach the people of Moses the scriptures of Moses about the God of Moses and about the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Third, the power of God for life which is greater than the power of death and which is made known to us and made available to us in and through the word of God also gives us new life in the resurrection. This is the good news that was incomprehensible, unacceptable, and repulsive to the enemies of Jesus Christ. The Sadducees who questioned Jesus about the seven brothers and one wife had no interest in an answer. The purpose of their question was to ridicule Jesus and to reduce the concept of resurrection to the absurd. Why is it that the enemies of God cannot stand the gospel of the resurrection? Why are the critics of Christ so deranged as to prefer the prospects of eternal death instead of rejoicing in the announcement of life? What makes people so angry that they cannot stand to listen to this good news?

The power of God for life which is greater than the power of death and which is made known to us and made available to us in and through the word of God also gives us new life in the resurrection. This turns the whole world upside down! Death is not final. Evil is not absolute. Sin does not win. Life does not lose. Faith does not fade. Hope does not fail. Love never ends. Jesus dismissed the absurdity presented to him. “For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” This means that marriage is a part of the

order of creation only, given by God for life on earth but not for life in heaven, the order of salvation. We acknowledge this when we realize that the death of either spouse ends a marriage. At the same time, Jesus indicates, not that we will become angels, but that we will be like angels, apparently in immortality and in being in direct relation to God and to each other, not in subunits of families.

So Jesus Christ, the lord of life, took on his attackers, dismissed their absurdities, taught them their scriptures, and affirmed the truth and reality of the resurrection. He used a grammatical argument based on the tense of a verb to affirm the resurrection of the patriarchs. That is, God did not say to Moses that he *used* to be the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, some four- or five-hundred years earlier when they had been alive on earth. Instead, God said to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Jesus understood this to mean that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive, well, and with God in heaven at the moment he was speaking to Moses. Jesus knew his scripture. Jesus knew the power of God. And Jesus knew that the power of God for life gives us new life in the resurrection, new life forever beyond the power of sin and death, new and eternal life, new life in reconciliation and constant fellowship with God and therefore with each other.

Now, how does this gospel of scripture, power, and life apply to us? Jesus asked his detractors, "Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? The first thing we need to do is to read, learn, consume, absorb, inwardly digest, and thoroughly appropriate the scriptures. It would be good to read the Bible every day, and some people read all the way through it each year, but we never exhaust what there is to learn from it. In fact, the more we read and study it, the more we are shaped and formed by it, the more we encounter Christ and hear the word of God speaking to us, the more we continue to learn from it. It is sad that some people never get to read the Bible or hear it preached. But it is tragic that some people think that they no longer need to read the Bible, to study the scriptures, or to hear the word of God read or preached. Do not fall for that nonsense.

One issue in the life of the church across the nation and around the world has to do with the nature of, the authority of, and therefore the place of the scriptures in the church today. Shall we listen to the word of God as revealed to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and recorded in the scriptures, or shall we listen to, follow, and obey some other word, some other teachings, some other guide, or some other lord? Some say that the scriptures are old-fashioned, out of date, and culture bound, the literary production of an ancient near eastern culture, having no authority over us. What they mean by this is that they are eager to pursue the customs and conventions of our own society, even when they run against the

plain teaching of scriptures. Let us all instead reaffirm for ourselves and for this church the historic faith of the Christian church and of the Protestant, Reformed, and Presbyterian churches in the authority of the scriptures as the word of God. This, in turn, would commit us to learning, believing, and obeying them. Let it *not* be said of us, “You know not the scriptures.”

A second application of this gospel of scripture, power, and life to us would be for us to appropriate from the scripture an appreciation of the reality of the power of God. The power of God gathers us together here as the people of God. And the power of God also sends us forth into the world as the people of God. We are just as much the people of God when we are dispersed in the world, at work or at home, at school or at play, as we are while we are here. And there in the world we have a mission to accomplish: proclaiming the gospel, loving the unloved, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, clothing the naked, healing the sick, befriending the friendless, strengthening the weak, seeking justice, and upholding righteousness. As an elder here is fond of reminding us, we worship the God who can and does do the impossible even in and through us. We are to live our lives in that confidence and expectation. Our mission need not be limited to what we can do on our own. Our mission need not be limited to what we can afford. God can and does do the impossible. Let it *not* be said of us, “You know not the power of God.”

A third application of this gospel of scripture, power, and life to us yet today would be for us to believe in and act upon the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the promise of our own. The power of God to create new life on the other side of death can take away our fear of dying. At the same time, the power of God to create new life on the other side of death can take away our fear of living. This life is a good and wonderful gift from God, but it is not absolute or final. We can and will mess up this life, but we will not and cannot mess it up beyond the power of God to forgive and to repair. Part of what the gospel of the resurrection does is to assure us that our lives and the lives of our loved ones are of value to God, enduring value, permanent value, so that God can and will make us alive again, with him forever. And working back from that, part of what this gospel of resurrection does is to give us courage for living here and now. Death is not final. Sin is not final. Evil is not final. The power of the love of God is greater than the combined powers of all the forces that assault us.

The promise of our resurrection is based on our reconciliation to God. Therefore the promise also urges us toward reconciliation to each other. God promises to raise us to new life in order to keep us in fellowship with himself and therefore with each other. The relationships we are forming now in the church are a part of eternity. The United States of America will pass away. The sun and the earth will pass away. But you and I shall exist for ever in the presence of God and

therefore with each other. The relationships we are forming with each other now are for eternity. This gives us a powerful incentive to get it right sooner instead of later, to learn to share with each other now the love of God that will carry us through eternity, to reach out to all who are estranged, lost, or wandering and welcome them back into the life, worship, mission, and fellowship of the church. Let it *not* be said of us, “You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Here are words of grace and gospel: the power of God for life is greater than the power of death; the power of God for life is made known to us and made available to us in and through the word of God; and the power of God for life gives us new life in the resurrection. “Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.”

*To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.*

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