



A PEOPLE OF POWER 2 TIM 1:1-12

This morning I want to start a new series. It wasn't the series I originally planned but I have been drawn towards a series on the kind of people we as God's church are called to be. I am going to do something novel for me and base what I'm going to do over the next few weeks around the short song we sang together "For I'm building a people of power". It's useful because it contains most of the elements of what it means to be church. The first instalment as such is obviously A People of Power.

A people of power. My text verse for this morning is 2 Tim 1:7 *For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.*

Power – what is power? The ability or capability to do something. In fact the word power has a large number of uses and meanings in English – the dictionary lists 26 different ways the word can be used – although the meaning is always broadly to do the same – the ability or capability to do something.

The greatest expression of power in the universe is God. God is omnipotent – all-powerful – He can do anything that He chooses to do in accordance with His own nature. God is all powerful but His power is tempered by His love and His wisdom. God is love, God is wise and that is reflected in who He is and what He does.

How do we see the power of God at work.

1. **In Creation.** A few weeks ago I was down on the front at the sunrise for the Sunrise Service. It was a beautiful morning with the sun rising over a beautiful calm sea. But you don't have to go far along to front to witness the destructive force of the sea and it's going to take a lot of money, boulders, sand and rock to put the beach back when the storms have swept it away. Such is the force of nature and in that nature we see reflected in a small way the power of its Creator
2. **In the resurrection of Jesus.** God doesn't just have power over nature, but He has power over death. Human beings can sometimes counter the forces of nature like in putting some more sea defences in at Felixstowe, although sometimes I feel that they are a little like King Canute. But something we can't do is bring someone back to life who's good and dead – dead many hours, not on life support, broken, speared through, suffered massive blood loss. Yet God did it. Paul said in this passage: He gave us this grace by means of Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, *10 (C) but now it has been revealed to us through the coming of our Saviour, Christ Jesus. He has ended the power of death and through the gospel has revealed immortal life.*
3. **In changed lives.** Where do we see evidence of the power of God most immediately? In the lives of His people. It is the aspect of God's power we see in the lives of His people today. Lives transformed, prayer answered in amazing ways, situations changed, bodies healed of sickness and addiction, even people raised from death. And if we start to reflect on our own Christian lives, I'm sure it's not long before we come to an amazing story of how God has blessed our lives.

Now what is it that we do when we see something that is totally amazing. You know, the sort of thing that astounds. The sort of thing that you don't see every day. I'll tell you what we do. We tell someone. "You'll never guess what I saw today". People did that with Jesus. The Samaritan woman He met at the well at Sychar went back into town amazed that a total stranger knew everything about her marital history, including what she thought was a secret! John 4:29 *"Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?"*

And of course, we are so amazed by Jesus that we can't wait to tell everyone we meet and urge them to follow Him don't we? Not! And I suspect that there are many of us this morning that feel less like the

woman at the well and more like Peter as he ran away after denying Jesus and running away.

Just a minute – we sing “ For I’m building a people of power...” That’s us, But where’s the power in our lives; where’s the power in our words; where’s the power in our actions? Where’s the power that’s changing our lives and causing other lives to be changed?

It gets worse when we see God moving in other people’s lives; we hear great testimonies, hear wonderful stories; bear witness to the fact that the church of Jesus Christ is growing faster in the world today than at any other time in history. Africa, South America, China, Eastern Europe. It just isn’t growing here. Rather than the woman at the well, we are the fleeing disciples it seems.

If that’s you then the passage in 2 Timothy may well help encourage you. We had a look at part of this in an evening service a few weeks ago. This isn’t a re-run but some encouragement from another verse in the same chapter. The letter was written at a time when the church was coming under extreme persecution under Roman Emperor Nero. Paul was in prison expecting martyrdom and the church was discouraged and believers were afraid for their lives. They weren’t exactly going around advertising themselves and Paul writes to his younger protegee to encourage him. Here are some of his words:

For the Spirit that *God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.*

Cast your minds back to just a few weeks ago and we heard about God’s special guarantee – the holy Spirit. All people who follow Jesus have Him in their lives. And what is He? He’s a Spirit of power. He empowers us to be the people of God. Here’s what Paul said to Timothy:

I remember the sincere faith you have, the kind of faith that your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice also had. I am sure that you have it also. 6 (C) For this reason I remind you to keep alive the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you. 7 (C) For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.

Here was a man in danger of bottling out so Paul reminds him of the two generations of his family that had believed and of the gift God supernaturally gave him. Timothy’s gift was unique to him, but the Holy Spirit as we know from a previous week is given to us all – and He’s not a Spirit of fear. Whatever makes us fear is not of the Spirit – but fear comes from us. The Spirit is a Spirit of power. Power. In a few weeks we will celebrate Pentecost. And what do we remember there? How the disciples received power when the Holy Spirit came on them. The Holy Spirit made the apostles bold – very bold. We see the Spirit performing all sorts of miracles through them. But better still we see the Spirit bringing people to Jesus through their words. And we saw people like Paul, Peter, the other apostles, and countless Christians face persecution and death because they spoke out about a Saviour who has power over death – and they did it with Holy Spirit boldness.

He’s a Spirit of power and He enables us to serve and follow Jesus, and use the gifts that we have to that end. And amazing things can happen and do happen and should happen in our lives and in this church.

So why aren’t I like that? Good question? Have you asked? Have you seriously asked God to fill you with His Spirit? Have you really asked Him to work in power? Do you actually believe this can happen?

Jesus said in Luke 11:13 *As bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!*” He was speaking as part of a discourse about prayer. It’s a comment that’s a promise. On the most mundane level, we as failing sinful people always want the best for our children: but how much more is it true that our Father in heaven who is perfect gives us the most superb gift that we could have – the Holy Spirit.

So do you want to be filled with the Spirit? Well, have you tried asking. A really good place to ask is at one of the most precious places for a Christian: around the Lord’s table. In a few moments, you’ll have that opportunity.

But we need to understand what we are asking for. Lots of Christians want to know the Spirit of God

working powerfully in their lives today. They know that spiritually they feel dry; they know they should feel that enthusiasm for their faith, but things in life worry and things in life press on them. They want to know more of the presence and power of the Spirit in their lives. They want to have a life and a ministry that really exalts Jesus, that brings others close to Him. They want to move in the gifts of the Spirit. Maybe that's you.

Then you need to understand this verse: *7 (C) For the Spirit that God has given us does not make us timid; instead, his Spirit fills us with power, love, and self-control.* And by His grace, God wants us to have more of the Spirit and He's not a Spirit of fear, but He's a Spirit of power. But you notice that He's also a Spirit of love and a Spirit of self-control.

In this world, everyone likes the idea of having the power to do things beyond their dreams and expectations. The only problem is that human beings aren't very good with power. If you have been watching the news from Zimbabwe in the past week you'll have seen the fate unfolding of a man who had yielded absolute power in Zimbabwe for a quarter of a century – Robert Mugabe. His power may have started out bringing peace and harmony to his country, but it has ended in him being a despot who has ruined the country as he has hung on to power. The nineteenth century political Lord Acton said this: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

But God is different. Contrast this with men. He does not use His omnipotence to bully but He uses it for His loving and wise purposes. When the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead, it was to the end of finishing the loving purpose of God in our redemption.

One of the main problems that Christians can have with the things of the Spirit is that they can want to see the power and desire sign gifts and get involved with things of the Spirit but their lives and their desires are dishonouring to God. Let me give you an example from a well-known speaker and writer George Verwer.

A few years ago, a dear emotional Christian woman told me about people who were having experiences in the Spirit. I asked, "When the Holy Spirit works in such a mighty way, shouldn't that produce a moral revolution? Shouldn't the man who has such experiences afterwards be filled with love and joy and peace? Shouldn't he forsake all that he has, as we are told the early Christians did in the book of Acts? Shouldn't he lay down his life for others?"

The lady aid to me, "Sometimes the Holy Spirit comes just to give us joy and a wonderful experience and blessing." I said to her, "You mean that sometimes the Holy Spirit comes apart from His Holiness?" She began to ponder that.

I tell you, the Holy Spirit does not come apart from His Holiness. The emphasis is not on Spirit but on Holy, and He cannot come without His moral character. It is for this reason that we measure a person's experience with the Spirit (although we prefer to say the Spirit's experience with the person), on the basis of his moral quality.

That's why the Holy Spirit isn't just a Spirit of power, but of love and of self control. He's a Spirit of power because he enables us to fulfil the ministry God has called us to – and can do it powerfully. But at the same time He is a Spirit of love and enables us to serve Jesus and serve others in that self-denying way that Jesus did. Think of that person you most dislike – maybe it's someone in this church. If you want the Spirit of power, you've got to want to love that person unconditionally as Jesus did and does – be prepared to forgive and be reconcile. If you do, then you're ready for power if not – examine yourself carefully. He's a Spirit of power, of love and of self-control.

And He's a spirit of self-control. This word self control in the Greek means sober-minded, well-balanced in judgement. Albert Barnes put it like this *the state referred to here is that in which the mind is well balanced, and under right influences; in which it sees things in their just proportions and relations; in which it is not feverish and excited, but when everything is in its proper place.* People of good judgement are people of God-judgement! Wise people – like God is wise! And the Spirit imparts this. Examine yourself on this one. If you're still into sin, bad habits, poor relationships, things that displease God – the you need to examine yourself and let the Spirit deal with these. He's a Spirit of power, love AND self-control.

There are lots of Christians that want to see the power of God in their lives. That's good – but it's easy to want the power without the responsibility. If you want to be filled with the Spirit and experience God's power then remember that He's a Spirit of love and well-balanced in judgement – of good and balanced judgement. He's the *Holy* Spirit. We are true people of power when we are at the same time people of love and godly judgement.

So as we come around the table this morning, let's take the opportunity to ask God to fill us with His Spirit. But to be filled with the spirit isn't about the power to see and do amazing things, but it's about the ability to love as Jesus loves – as God loves – and act with the wisdom of God. The Spirit imparts these things – all of them when we ask. And that's what's truly life- changing. And that's also what truly makes us a people of power – not just raw miraculous power, but the power to love and the ability to be wise and use the grace God has given us wisely.

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