



Power and Powerlessness

Romans 5:6-11

BLANK THEN PYLONS

I'VE GOT THE POWER is one of those songs everybody can remember. It's one of those great songs that people use to build up their self-confidence – I've got the power!! It is recognisable because it is widely used in adverts. Here's one from the 1980s

STAR TREK

I'VE GOT THE POWER – who is the song by?

JOCELYN BROWN – not the most well-known singer. I think this was probably her most famous hit. It was first released in 1986 but actually was made famous by another group called Snap and by the power sell-off in Britain in 1991. So has Jocelyn Brown got the power. No. It was reported recently that Jocelyn Brown is suing her record company because even though the song is famous and used over 500 times in ads, she has hardly received a penny. so

SHE HASN'T GOT THE POWER

I'VE GOT THE POWER? We live in a world where we like to be empowered and have power. It's a fundamental part of our society and we gear ourselves to it. It's all about making sure our children have a good education to take power over their lives. It's about taking stock of your life, live it to the full, overcome difficulties, have confidence, reach your potential.

TALE POWER OVER YOURSELF

There's nothing wrong with wanting to live life to the full, having aspirations or overcoming difficulties except that life sometimes seems more of a struggle than a pleasure doesn't it? For many people life's hard and then you die! Of course, for people with a lot of money (more money than sense?) they can employ the services of a life coach who will teach and encourage them to get the most out of life.

CARTOON SLIDES (4)

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

I've called my sermon this morning Power and Powerlessness. We don't like being powerless or feeling powerless to do what we would really like to do or be what we'd like to be. Yet many of us find ourselves in positions where we feel or are actually powerless to change our situation. Maybe that's now. What sorts of thing might those be?

I'VE GOT THE POWER?

Power to change my behaviour?
Power over addictions and compulsions?
Power over my relationships and hurts?
Power over my health?
Power over my financial situation?

POWER OVER MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? The biggest area where people feel powerless, and that includes Christians is in relation to God. We don't seem to have control (if that's the right word) over our relationship with God. We shouldn't find that surprising. Most of you will know the verse on the screen:

Everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence. Like it or not, sin separates people from God and if we are not feeling connected to Him or know we're not connected to Him, then the first port of call is looking at our own lives and reflect on those things that dishonour Him or are just wrong. We look at His perfection, His standards, His holiness – and we know we fall short of Him. And there's nothing we can do about that – we are powerless.

I've got the power – NOT! Whether we're Christians or not this morning there may be whole issues in our lives that we feel totally powerless to change; and even those we think we can deal with often end in a mess don't they?

In fact what I'd say about powerlessness is that MOST PEOPLE ACCEPT OR RATIONALISE POWERLESSNESS. What I mean by that is that when we identify something that we have no control over in our lives, it is a human reaction to just roll over and give up "If *at first you don't succeed – give up*". And we do it even if someone comes up to us and says that something can be done about our behaviour, or our compulsions or addictions, relationships, or financial situation. In fact we often either accept our powerlessness as a bad deal or we rationalise it by making excuses for things in our lives that we know destroy us, or destroy our relationships with others or with God. "I can't do much about that". "Well, everybody does it". "It's how things are these days". "It isn't my fault". "God can't do anything about that". "God won't do anything about that". Have you asked Him? Or do we just blame God for not doing His job. It's astonishing the excuses we make to ourselves for our behaviour. And so often it's all denial. I'm powerless and nothing can be done about it – even though of course, plenty can be done about it.

As we look through the Bible we see a picture of God who specialises in speaking power into powerless situations. He's a God who can turn minuses to pluses, disasters to blessings, weakness to strength. We see that in the great stories about God's people – the crossing of the Red Sea, victory over enemies, the blind made to see, the dead made to rise. And we say "that was then – but now?" For most part being a Christian in the 21st century for many doesn't involve a powerful creator God who can make a dynamic difference to the lives of people. It's easy to rationalise our powerlessness by making God powerless too.

But it isn't like that. Let's go to that verse that we read this morning VERSE *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

POWER TO CHANGE At the root of human powerlessness is sin. It's the human tendency to do things without God, to do things that displease Him, ignore Him, go our own way, follow our own desires and feelings – and then blame Him when our lives mess up. But if all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, then ultimately none of us have any hope however good a life we may or may not have. It's the ultimate powerlessness.

Yet in Jesus, God has dealt with the root of human powerlessness by dealing with sin. Dealing with human powerlessness starts when we deal with the issue of sin in our lives. It starts when we accept our powerlessness over sin, trust Christ, find forgiveness of our sins and follow Jesus.

But having our sins dealt with isn't the only aspect of how God brings change in our lives. Being a Christian is about how God changes us so that the things in our lives that we think we have no power over, are things God can change.

SPEAKERS CORNER The story is told of a political speaker at Speakers Corner in London who was trying to espouse the benefits of Socialism. He saw a tramp shuffling by and pointed to him and said "socialism will put a new suit of clothes on that man!" A heckler from the crowd shouted out "but God can put a new man in that suit of clothes!"

POWER TO CHANGE VERSE When we accepted Christ God gave us power to change. Here's a verse from 2 Corinthians *"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 2 Corinthians 12:9 (New Living Translation)*

I find this passage an interesting one. What we learn from scripture is that God does not exempt His people from the problems and pressures of life. Quite the reverse, added to the battles of life, we get the spiritual battle

that following Jesus entails. He doesn't do that to be unkind to us, but to build us up and bless us through trusting Him for the power to deal with situations in which we are weak and powerless. And it starts when we accept our weakness. Paul was given by God what he called a "thorn in my flesh". We don't know what it was but his solution to it was to accept his powerlessness and weakness and as he did so God gave him this message - *"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.* God can change situations (usually in ways we never thought of) and give us the power to live through difficult situations. It's a question of trust. Personal testimony.

NEW NATURE Let's look at another verse *Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God - truly righteous and holy.* When we accepted Christ we were changed, given the Holy Spirit, given a new nature so that we can be like God. Time and time again I've seen people's lives completely changed by Jesus. If you are a Christian and you're struggling with anger, hurt, doing the right thing, or some sort of compulsion, or just having attitudes that you know are wrong, then we have the power to do something about it because God works within us to do that.

How does that change happen. Again when we accept our weakness and seriously ask God to change us, surrendering those things which we have no power over to Him. Personal testimony.

I CAN DO ALL THINGS Let's look at one last verse: *I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.* Phil 4:11-13 (New Living Translation)

God wants us to be content with every situation we have. He gives us the wherewithal to deal with life. He gives us the power to cope with difficulty. He gives us power to change our habits, compulsions, hurts, behaviours. And here's this hopeful verse *For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.* "Yeah, and the rest. That was Paul not me!" Paul was imprisoned and awaiting trial when he wrote those verses. We have a God who can empower our minds to make us free even when we are imprisoned by situations in life we have no control over ourselves. He can make that change in our lives. He can bring hope where we feel hopeless, powerless. Matt 19:26 Jesus said, *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* Let me summarise this morning with an acrostic based on Hope. HOPE

HIGHER POWER If we feel hopeless, powerless then we need to understand that things needn't be like that. Jesus died to bring us forgiveness, life, hope, power. God has power through trusting Christ and through the Holy Spirit within us to change things.

OPEN TO CHANGE But it starts by us ceasing to accept or rationalise our powerlessness, and start trusting God and letting His power work in us and through us. I can't tell you the number of times I've preached on versions of this. You may have heard even more sermons on this subject. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Heard all that before". But change starts as we admit our weakness and find the **POWER TO CHANGE.**

EXPECT TO CHANGE If we are at that point this morning and we realise that we are powerless but God does give that power to change, then we need to ask God to make that change in us. We need to admit the problem, finish the excuses and trust in God and allow the Holy Spirit to bring that change in us.

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

Challenge and prayer.