

Releasing Power

Breakthrough Praying:

Luke 4:1-2, 14
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What kind of power is available to us? What kind of power is normal for a believer? A week ago, we confronted our view of normal. We found that our beliefs about what is normal are conditioned by our experience of things or lack of experience. If I used the term “locker room talk,” how many of you would think of praise and worship? If your experience was like mine, you’d think of profanity, vulgarity, obscenities, course jesting and boasting; but is that normal, healthy, the way we were designed? The average life expectancy in the Congo is about 15 years. Is that normal, healthy, the way we were designed?

Jesus talked about a norm most of us have never witnessed. Listen to what he said when he explained a healing that his disciples failed at:

I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. (Matthew 17:20, NIV)

When his disciples asked him about a fig tree he cursed, Jesus responded:

I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and it will be done. (Matthew 21:21, NIV)

In his parallel account of that conversation, Mark records these words from Jesus:

Have faith in God... I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mark 11:22-24, NIV)

The apostle with Jesus once asked him directly to increase their faith. He responded:

If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, “Be uprooted and planted in the sea,” and it will obey you. (Luke 17:6, NIV)

Speaking about his ascension and the norm for all believers, Jesus said:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.
(John 14:12, NIV)

This is the norm, the health, the powerful way of living that Jesus expects for his followers. With fits and starts, we observe this kind of power working among the believers as we read the book of Acts. To those believers the Apostle Paul wrote:

I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT)

Paul understood that there was a great and awesome power for everyone who believes. He recognized that believers did not comprehend it. He prayed that they would begin to understand. It was that power that broke the bondage of death. It was that power that provided Jesus divine authority. Yet this authority was not independent of God. It was appropriately related, for Jesus sat “at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms.” That’s exactly the kind of authority and power for us who believe. It is not independent of God. It is related and submitted to God. Jesus identified this power with the Holy Spirit and said to his disciples:

I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. (Luke 24:49, NIV)

Now, it is possible to receive the Spirit and then grieve the Spirit. It is possible to be filled with the Spirit and then quench or douse the Spirit’s work within you. God doesn’t take us over. God rules when we submit. He accomplishes his will through us when we believe. How

many people have you seen who've had great potential, but never realized it because they lacked the belief in what they were given? I've seen countless numbers settle for so much less than what they were capable of. The reason they never realized their potential or fulfilled their purpose was that they gave up when things got hard. They give up believing. Marriages dissolve. Athletic accomplishment is aborted. Business dreams are abandoned. If that unbelief happens at a level of life that most agree is possible and that most of us have observed on occasion, then no wonder most of us have difficulty believing the promises of Jesus and the relevancy of his actions.

Consider Jesus' life. He worked as a common carpenter. He studied the Hebrew Scriptures, but accomplished nothing astounding until he visited John the Baptist at the Jordan River. At his baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him. He was the Anointed One. In Greek we'd say, "The Christ." In Hebrew, "The Messiah!" The Spirit's first work in him was to lead him away to pray and fast. He received the Spirit. He was clothed with power. He had to learn how these clothes function.

Jim Carey starred in a goofy movie called *The Mask*. When he'd don the mask, his personality and ability would change. Yet it wasn't a total change. His mischievous and romantic side was accentuated. When the Spirit came on Jesus, Jesus did not lose his will; instead, the Spirit filled Jesus' heart with God's love and passion. Jesus made the decisions, but the Spirit gave him wisdom. For 40 days, Jesus prayed and fasted. He fully submitted his body to the will of his father, only drinking water. As he went through this hardship, he faced the temptations of Satan and unmasked his deception. After that period of struggle, Jesus left to minister undefiled by sin, unhindered by unbelief. This is what the Bible says:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. (Luke 4:16, NIV)

Jesus left the Jordan *anointed by the Spirit*, but after prayer and fasting he returned to Galilee in the *power of the Spirit*. He now was conversant with the Holy Spirit. He understood God's will. He could cut through Satan's deception. He saw a whole different normal.

Speaking of normal, people's faith in God seemed so pathetic and pathological to Jesus. Thus, he kept highlighting faith wherever he found it. Even more, he acted in power. He healed the deaf, the sick and the blind. He cleansed lepers. He raised dead people. His preparation was prayer and fasting; and as we mentioned last week, he attributed the healing of a mute and deaf boy, tormented by a demon, to breakthrough praying that included fasting. Yes, Jesus was anointed by the Spirit; but after fasting and prayer, he returned in the power of the Spirit.

When we discussed last week how upset Jesus was over his disciples' failure to heal, we pondered little what fed Jesus' anger. Understand that the disciples were empowered to overcome Satan; but instead, they were overcome. Jesus was so disappointed because the power was there, but their faith wasn't. How many times have we've felt powerless despite Christ's word? How many times have we been overcome? Have we shifted responsibility to God when we are the ones commissioned to bring people to faith and freedom? If we have the Spirit, why don't we have the power?

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, believed fasting was key. As I read through his journals, I found his regard for fasting growing. One day he wrote:

There is something remarkable in the manner wherein God revived his work in these parts. A few months ago the... people... were exceeding lifeless. Samuel Meggot, perceiving this, advised the society to observe every Friday with fasting and prayer. The very first Friday they met together, God broke in upon them in a wonderful manner; and his work has been increasing among them ever since. The neighboring societies heard of this, agreed to follow the same rule, and soon experienced the same blessing. Is not the neglect of this plain duty (I mean, fasting, ranked by our Lord with almsgiving and prayer) one general occasion of deadness among Christians? Can any one willingly neglect it, and be guiltless? (June 7, 1763)

Wesley saw power released in fasting. He was healed himself as people prayed and fasted for him. He noted in Jesus' teaching on fasting the words, "When you fast," not "If you fast." He understood that Jesus expects us to fast.

Ron Phillips led a large Southern Baptist Church that at one time averaged 1200 in worship. Despite the numbers, he realized that his church was spiritually weak. They held a three day evangelistic conference, and a total of 12 people came forward to make a spiritual decisions. The next Saturday, 154 members attended an all day conference on fasting. One hundred twenty-three covenanted to fast and pray for revival. A few months later, they held a weeklong outreach. This time 998 people made spiritual decisions. That week worship attendance jumped by 401, and the Sunday School increased by 257. Offering that month increased by \$500,000 over what it had been only a year before. In response to their prayer and fasting, God poured his love and grace through them. They began to powerfully touch people's lives in their community. Attendance reached 3500, so now they had to make decisions about their buildings. To get God's discernment and favor, Ron called his people to join him in a 40-day fast. He knew that most couldn't fast completely for 40 days, so he suggested that some give up one or two meals a day and pray, others might abstain from meat, television, sporting events, or fast every other day and fill vacated times with prayer. Some might give up desserts, snacks and sweets. Others might join the pastoral staff on a 40-day juice fast. When it was done, they had not merely received discernment. They began living at a whole different level of faith.

Do you hunger to see what God can do in you and through you? Do you hunger to know more adequately the love and power of God? Do you realize that what is normal for you, according to Jesus, is much greater than what you've experienced so far? Then remember his words: "Ask, and it will be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be open to you."