

The Power of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, once I get my voice back again, let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you mostly for your word about Jesus, your word of the gospel. Thank you for its power to save. And Father, we pray that as we search the scriptures tonight, that you would refresh our mind on these things and drive us to embrace the gospel. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, friends, I want to begin our talk tonight in a little strange, well, sort of a strange way.

I want to tell you a bit about our experience in Perth. For 11 years, Heather and I lived across the country in that wonderful city of Perth. And I want to begin tonight's talk by giving you a little tour of the Perth Metropolitan phone book.

Now, you'll see why I'm going to do this as we go on. I estimate that in the year in which I did this little survey, there would have been perhaps about a million people living in Perth.

[1 : 16] And so I did this very interesting and incredible exercise of looking for names in a phone book. Now, you might think, what was I doing so idle that I would start reading the phone book?

But nevertheless, it was in those days when you had both residential and business names together in the same book. It doesn't happen any longer, but there it was.

And so what I did was I looked for people or organisations that had the word power as the first word of their name. Now, here's some of the things I found out.

Did you know that in the 90s, in Perth, you could not only stay at the powerhouse boutique Motor Inn, you could also go to power personnel, power shop, power tech, power dental studio, and the power dinghy racing club.

And you could even go to the Power of One Academy and you could get power beer, power buggies, power tools, power exhaust systems, power software support, power sound, and power peripherals.

[2 : 23] And you might engage in all sorts of wonderful activities such as power learning, power accounting, power coaching, power management, power lifting, and power cleaning. And if you needed help with the various ailments of life that you had, you might go to a solicitor called A Power, or you could go to Power and Jolly Power, chartered accountants.

Good name for accountants, isn't it? You could go to Father John Power, or you could go to MJ and JM Power, transport specialists, or even Dr Linda Powers, the chiropractor.

And while we're in the phone book, how many entries do you think that there are for the name Weak? Absolutely none.

That is, it's a very important point to make, there is no Weaklings body shop in Perth. And you cannot buy weak beer, particularly not in Western Australia.

There is no Weak sound, weak management, or weak website design. Friends, I wonder if you can hear what I'm saying. It's a very important point.

[3 : 31] In Perth, in the mid-1990s, there were many, many people who did not mind being called Mr. or Mrs. Power, or naming their company Power This or Power That.

But absolutely none in one million people in Perth had the courage to call themselves Mr. or Mrs. Weak. A quick survey of our phone book, I think, is incredibly revealing.

It shows us something very interesting and something that is very, very human. It shows us that we human beings are on a constant quest to not be on the weak side of things, but be on the strong side of things, the powerful side of things.

We are on a quest for power. We humans hate, absolutely detest weakness. And we cannot, we just do not like feeling vulnerable at all.

And for this reason, we seek power. And we engage in what is, I think, an endless quest for it. We seek it in a variety of places. Now, these might, various of these will appeal to you. Some people seek power in personal appearance.

[4 : 38] I'm well past even thinking that might be possible. That is, some people seek to build powerful bodies. Other people seek power in society. Others seek to have power in positions of responsibility or of just power within society.

They make sure that they develop relationships that will lead to them taking positions of power in government, in institutions, in business, and even in the churches that they belong to. The nations of the world, where they're no different because they're humans in the end themselves, the nations of the world seek power in weapons.

The countries that we belong to buy bigger and better and more powerful weapons, as do most countries around the world where they can. The view is that if you have a larger arsenal and a bigger defence budget, then the more prestige that you have and other nations will shake in fear of you.

Friends, we humans love power. We seek power in possessions. We seek it in status, in money, in titles, in degrees, in knowledge, in relationships.

We human beings just do not like being weak and insecure. We like security and strength. And power gives security. Power gives recognition.

[5 : 55] And power gives influence. Now, let me tell you that we Christians are just, unless you think Christians are different, and they're not, we Christians are just like our society.

We often feel weak and powerless in our Christian lives, and if you've never felt that, then come and talk to me later, because I'd love to find out what your secret is. No, sin masters us, doesn't it?

And we feel ungifted. Or we feel that we're just not able to express our faith like other people do.

We fail, and we find ourselves fatigued, and we cry out to God, and we say, I do not like this.

I don't like feeling weak. If you don't believe me, a third of the Psalms are Psalms that are essentially saying, I'm feeling very weak. They're lament Psalms. They're saying, I can't control life, and I do not like it.

And will you deal with this, God? We don't like weakness. We do not like vulnerability. And so we seek power. And again, you can see it in the sorts of names that we have for Christian organizations or movements.

[6 : 56] Let me explain. For example, not very far from us here, you can find the Power to Change Christian Fellowship. I kid you not, it is the name of the church not far from here.

And we have power ministries, power healing, power evangelism, and we say our preachers are powerful preachers, and we engage, there are power blocks within church government, and we engage in power politics.

But you can see, you can also see it in the sorts of interests Christians have today. Let me explain. Increasingly today, we are finding that Christians choose churches not on the basis of truth, but on the basis of how exciting and how powerful their ministries are.

So we think we've got to have lots of signs and wonders happening, demonstrations of power, powerful ministry, we must have exciting and interesting preachers, we must have messages that tell us how powerful and successful, or even in many churches today, how rich we can be as Christians.

We think that evangelism is really not a real evangelism, unless it is powerful evangelism, or people will not become Christians unless power is demonstrated through the use of powerful signs and wonders.

[8 : 16] Church government tells us that the goal of any church that is worth its while, that is, that is successful, can only be successful if it has the right techniques. We're told by many that the goal of Christian ministry is success.

Success can be reached, we are told, if only we use the right techniques, build right buildings, put right programs in place. And others say, no, no, no, no, no, that's not the way.

The way to success is, is not all of this sort of stuff, but really is to understand yourself. You need to go along to some counselling, or learn some counselling skill, and tend some sort of course, that will help you understand yourself and others, and that'll make you effective, then you'll be a powerful Christian.

Others say, no, no, that's not right either. What you need is this special other experience. If you have this experience, then you'll be able to preach the gospel, speak in public, master sin. Others say no. Seek success and security in the teachings and practice of one particular preacher or writer. Other Christians seek power within the secular political process, and they want to be Christians there.

[9 : 32] You see, we Christians are just like all the people around us. That is, we seek power, and we do it just as much as our secular friends do. In fact, I suspect many Christians do it more than their secular friends do.

We want security, stability, and power, and we want it from God, and we want God's power. And even other Christians say that, what the church needs is to transform society, and Christians will be powerful and influential in our society when we transform our culture.

Friends, can you see what I'm saying? We Christians, we often talk this way. We talk about power, perhaps not as blatantly as I've done, but we do, and God himself talks about power.

In fact, God actually promises, he'll give power to us. God promises us power, and I want you to turn with me to Romans 1, where he actually does it. So turn with me, in your Bibles, Romans 1. It's a very important passage in a very important book. Now last week, we began to look at chapter 1 and focused on verses 1 to 6. This week, I'm going to focus on 16 and 17.

[10 : 40] Let me read them to you again. And Paul addresses a group of Christians in Rome, and he says this, For I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, or who has faith, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed through faith, for faith, as it is written, the one who is righteous will live by faith. Now friends, pay close attention to what the passage is saying.

It is telling us that God's power is found in a particular place. And that particular place is the gospel. In fact, you could almost say, well you can say, God's power is the gospel.

Now once we've realised God's power is the gospel, we're faced with another problem, aren't we? And what is that? Well, once we've said it is God's power, we need to understand, well what exactly is the gospel? And the great news is that Paul helps us here, and we looked at it last week, in the very same chapter he tells us what the gospel is.

Have a look at it again, Romans 1, 1 to 16, 1 to 6. In verses 1 to 4 he gives a definition of the gospel, and it is one of the most succinct and clear definitions of the gospel you can find in the New Testament.

[11 : 54] Now before we get down to the specifics, I want you to notice something. Have a look at those verses, 1 to 4. And the thing I want you to notice is that the gospel is a message. That is, the gospel is words.

Now you can see that in verse 1 where the word gospel is used. And its default translation is good news. It's something you can say. You can see it in verse 2 where he said, where you can, where it said that the gospel can actually be written down because it has been written down.

God has caused the gospel to be promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures. In other words, it is a message that can actually be written on a piece of paper or a number of pieces of paper and passed on.

The gospel is a message spoken through prophets, written down in scripture, a message. It's something that comes in words. Now I want you to note that the reason I've stressed this is for this reason.

The gospel is essentially not an experience. And despite what people are increasingly saying today, the gospel is not social justice or social action.

[13 : 01] The gospel is words. It is God's words about someone or God's words about something. That means you can write it down.

I could write it down on a piece of paper. Now I could give it to you and I could say to you, this is the gospel. You can do that because that's what it is.

That is exactly what God has done through his apostle in these verses. He's given five, six verses that say this is the gospel. And I wonder if I can just emphasize this because all around the world today a number of Bible believing Christians are making an incredibly huge mistake.

And Melbourne has lots of them. Melbourne and Australia is the place where it's happening the most. They are beginning to say that the gospel includes social justice within its definition.

They are beginning to say that the gospel is actually about social transformation or social justice or even ecological transformation. Or they are saying that social justice is so integral to the gospel that it's actually in there as part of the gospel.

[14:10] Friends, I do believe very sincerely and biblically that those who preach the gospel will do deeds of justice. Moreover, if they're not doing good deeds of justice you might even question whether or not the thing that they're proclaiming is the gospel.

But that does not mean that social justice is the gospel. Nor does it mean that good deeds is the gospel. Friends, don't be filled.

The gospel is actually words. It's content. It can be written down. It can be passed on to another person. It's a piece of paper. So with that in mind, let's have a look at it more closely. Look at the content of the gospel.

1 to 4. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The gospel concerning his son, who was descended from David according to the flesh, who was declared to be son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

[15:14] So what about the content of the gospel? What is it? Well, the first thing to say is that it is content about not something but somebody. The gospel is about a particular person.

Look at what it says. It's about someone who was promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures and this someone had two stages of their existence, a physical stage where they were born a descendant of David and then a sort of spiritual stage where they were Jesus the Christ, sorry, where the Holy Spirit through the Holy Spirit he entered another stage an alternative existence where he was the son of God in power and Jesus is both of those things.

He's a human being. He is the divine son of God. He is Jesus Christ our Yahweh. This is who Jesus is. It is about the gospel.

It's about somebody. This Jesus, a physical Jesus who was at the same time Jesus Christ our Lord. God. So, can you see what I'm saying so far?

Paul is saying you want power? Well then, God has power. God's power is in the gospel or is the gospel. The gospel is a word about Jesus and the gospel is a message which tells us who he is and what he has done.

[16:31] And that brings us of course to the next question which is this. Well, if the gospel is powerful, what is it powerful for? What does it actually accomplish?

Well now for that you need to go back to verses 16 and 17. They answer this question and they tell us that God's gospel is God's power for salvation.

But of course the question about that is salvation from what? What is it that you are being saved from? Well, what does God save us from? Verse 18 tells us that. It says God is very angry with humanity.

His wrath is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. And into this world the gospel comes and that gospel is God's power that saves us from that anger.

Because the gospel is much more than that. But it is at least that. Now that raises another question. If it's the power of God for salvation how does it actually save?

[17:38] What does it actually do? Well, these verses contain the answer as well. God's gospel is powerful to save for salvation because it is because in it God's righteousness is revealed.

Now friends, when you think of the word righteousness what do you think of? I think generally of moral character. Does that make sense? So you think if a person is righteous they're morally correct.

But that's not the way the Bible talks about righteousness. Righteousness in the Bible is a very different category. It's relational and concrete. It has to do with relationships more than it has to do with morality.

Being righteous doesn't fundamentally mean being morally right or correct. It means being right in terms of relationships. So what's being said is this. God's power is the gospel.

It's powerful to save how? Because it shows us how God has acted to bring people into relationship with himself. The gospel of God saves us because it shows us how God has acted in Jesus to bring people into right relationship with himself.

[18 : 47] You see, that is what it means to be righteous. If you are righteous you are in right relationship with someone. You are righteous with them. It's God's initiative.

It's God's action. And of course that brings us to another question doesn't it? If God is the one who initiates righteousness then who's it for?

Who actually inherits this righteousness? Who is saved? Well, look at the text. It's for everyone.

Can you see that? Paul puts the qualifiers for Jew and Gentile together. It's for everyone.

But then do you notice what he says? He says, who has faith? That is, it's for everyone who believes. Can you hear what Paul is saying? The gospel is God's word about Jesus.

Powerful because it brings us into right relationship. It's only though for those who accept it. And it only wards off God's anger if you do accept it. It is something, friends, that suggests something, doesn't it?

[19 : 44] It is something I myself have experienced. It is something that if you are a Christian you have experienced it. That is, you have experienced how God said to you at one particular point, because of what Jesus has done, you are now right with me.

There is no longer being on the wrong side of me. You are on the right side of me because of what Jesus has done. Now for the rest of this talk I want to go back to where we started and I want to talk about the implications of this for us.

I want to do three things. I want you to help you avoid counterfeit power and I want to urge you to be not ashamed of the true gospel and I want to give you an example of how to live with the true gospel.

So let's think about it. The number of counterfeit sources of power in the Christian world today are absolutely enormous. Let me give you just a few.

In the 1990s and there is still a bit of it around today there was power evangelism which said that the source of God's power is found in signs and wonders and powerful deeds found in spectacular events in mighty deeds in spiritual demonstrations.

[20 : 58] Friends let me tell you these things are made look strong and mighty but they are not the gospel in themselves. God's power is seen in his word about Jesus and if you want to open yourself up to the power of God then open your life up to the gospel.

The gospel is the most powerful thing that you will ever meet. It leaves signs and wonders for dead. God's power is found in the powerful word about Jesus.

Let me tell you a story and I've probably told you this story before but it's so good I'll tell it to you again. Chinese man we met who's 39 years old he was 37 years old he walked into our church once and he walked in he had been he was a translator from Mandarin to English and he was as fluent in English as he was in Mandarin he'd won and you know remember the population of China he had won awards in China for his translation work and his wife had been converted and he walked into our lounge room to a gathering where I have just of dinner and he oozed confidence he oozed I am the world is at my feet I am I know what I'm about I am doing well I will succeed in life I've come to Australia to join some large company who will employ me as a translator and I will do well and I thought to myself not a chance of the gospel for him and it was a sinful thought and about 12 months later after he'd sort of just sat in on the edge of Bible study groups that

Heather was running and he'd then gradually come to church this proud confident man who had the world at his feet came to me after church or at supper in church one day and he said Andrew I've got something to tell you he said what is it and before he began speaking the tears just streamed down his face he said Andrew I want to tell you I've become a Christian he said this is the most incredible thing that has ever happened to me and he said I am 37 years old why has no one told me this before that now friends the gospel can do that to people the gospel can transform a man who is so confident in his own ability that needs nothing in the world that has the world at his feet can turn him to tears as he remembers the great news of Jesus that's a powerful gospel isn't it and where is the power seen not in signs and wonders no it was seen in him listening to the word of God that's what transformed him nothing spectacular just some friends sharing the gospel with him God wages spiritual war through the gospel his word about Jesus is the sword of the spirit it is the thing that will demolish strongholds of evil the preaching of the gospel is the best spiritual warfare you can engage in it is the gospel which will convert it is the word about Jesus which will bring people into the kingdom it is the solid preaching of the news about God's saving activity that will force people to bow before their maker have tears streaming down their face and to say why hasn't this been said before but friends perhaps that's not you perhaps you're someone who thinks that

being Christian is all about hearing and responding to powerful charismatic gifted preachers they know God they can bring you into relationship with God and again friends God says no in this passage God tells us that the word about Jesus does this it doesn't matter who wields it that word is just as powerful when you read it to yourself in your bedroom at home as when you listen to it on the lips of a powerful internet preacher it is as powerful when one of our wonderful godly ladies from the Ada

[25 : 32] Congregation who's never done a public speaking thing in her whole life comes and shares the gospel with you and you are converted it is as powerful then it's God's word that is powerful it's not who wields it that is powerful it is God's word that does the trick God's word about Jesus accomplishes all these things friends don't go for counterfeits friends Paul has told us a very deep truth here this is what the gospel is this is what the gospel does now since these things are true what do you reckon a gospel preacher might look like you know the the genuine article what would they look like Billy Graham perhaps let me tell you what I think they might look like because we've actually got a description of one 1st Corinthians turn in your Bibles to 1st Corinthians chapter 1 and let's read verse 18 and then I'll read 22 to 25

I think your point about Billy Graham is a good one because I think he would believe this and would demonstrate this but this is what a gospel preacher looks like for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved is the power of God a gospel preacher would be someone who says this looks I know what this looks like to outsiders it looks pathetic but it's God's power to save in verse 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and miraculous signs Greeks look for wisdom but we preach Christ crucified a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles but to those whom God has called both Jew and Greek Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God for the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength can you hear what he's saying he's saying I am going into the world with something that to the two groups of people in the world is a non-viable proposition to one group of people it's foolishness to the other group of people it's just you know it's a stumbling block it is a non-viable thing to the two main groups of society but I'm going to take it and you know what it is it's the power of God to salvation because it will do all that God says it will do friends let me tell you that

Christianity in Australia as in many places around the world is in a hopeless mess it is in very deep trouble there are false teachers in our pulpits across the world there are false gospels being preached in our churches and in our public places there are people who are leading people astray all over the world in churches this very night in Melbourne and everywhere else around the world so in these days of falsehood and danger where do we go what do we do well let me say our hopeful success is not found in power evangelism power growth power within power preachers power leaders internet preachers transformed structures in society power politics it's not found in any of those things our only hope is in true power and true power is found in the hope of the gospel friends I fear that we here in

Australia have lost our confidence in the gospel we think unless it's in on the mouth of particular people that unless it is accompanied by particular things it will not do what God has said it will do many Christians have misplaced God's power because they've lost confidence in the gospel they're wanting something that's more personally powerful friends don't lose confidence in the gospel don't be ashamed of the gospel do not think that it's not as up to date as it should be do not think it's not relevant it is very relevant and very powerful and God stakes his reputation on it and if it doesn't do what God says it will do then it is not then he is not God let me just close our time together by reflecting on who we are last week I said that I wanted us to adopt the term gospel centered I've come to prefer this term over evangelical I've come to prefer it because the term evangelical has I think lost its cutting edge you now have to put other things in front of it in order to explain exactly what it is I want us here at Holy Trinity to be gospel centered I want us to be this because that's who we are you see we are gospel people we are not ashamed of the gospel no on the contrary we are confident in the gospel we're committed to preaching the gospel we're committed to preserving the gospel we're committed to practicing the gospel we are gospel centered people and we are this because the gospel about Jesus is the center of God's purposes for his world and will be the means by which he accomplishes everything in the world that he has set out to achieve which is the salvation of the world and its submission under the headship of Christ and that will happen by the gospel so we might as well get on with it and be confident and be not ashamed of it

[31 : 19] I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it's the power of God to salvation for all who believe to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith friends let's not be ashamed of the gospel let's pray father please help us to not go down blind alleys to not lose our confidence in the gospel father please help us to be confident in all that you have given us in Christ father please help us to be confident in his death in the death burial resurrection ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ please help us to be confident in the message that tells us about these things and how they bring us into right relationship with you and father we pray this in

Jesus name amen now I think before the singers get up I might just see if there are any questions to ask tonight I keep forgetting to do this but if there are any questions I'm willing to take some no you weren't prepared for that I'll give you another 10 seconds 15 seconds yes yes yes from faith to faith generally many of their translations say it means it could mean a whole host of things many people seem to opt for you know from faith to faith means by faith from beginning to end so totally by faith however some people also think that it could have to do with the faithfulness of Jesus and what that what impact that has on our own faith and it's quite a complicated thing but the but I think in the end the best default understanding of this is that it is totally by faith okay any other question question about the implications no all right well I'm going to try and have question time in the future as well so if you have questions as we go and then if I don't give you time for questions you can pop up and say hang on you said you'd give us question time any more or is that it good let me pray father again we thank you for all that you give us in Christ and we pray this in his name amen thanks