

Prayer is how you Access Power
Acts 8:5-28, Eph 1:18-20

Friends if you ever read comic books when you were younger, you might remember these advertisements – sea monkeys, x-ray specs and this one here...

There is a couple who are enjoying the beach when some jerk kicks sand all over them, the guy tries to stand up for his girlfriend – but sadly he’s too skinny.

The jerk says “listen I’d smash in your face, but you’re so skinny you’d just dry up and blow away.”

And his girlfriend doesn’t help any when she says “don’t let it bother you little boy”

So, fed up with being pushed around our skinny hero looks for a way to level the playing field and he buys the Charles Atlas workout book which guarantees a “real body” in no time at all.

And what do you know – soon our skinny hero is a muscle bound hulk, and the next time the jerk on the beach kicks sand in his face, our hero give him a knuckle sandwich – causing all the girls on the beach to swoon over him, and his girlfriend says “Gosh Mac, you’re a real man after all!”

Now as cheesy as this is, you have to admit – we’ve all felt this way at some point or another right?

For some reason we’ve felt inferior, insignificant, like we’re not good enough, man enough, woman enough, cool enough... We feel like we’re a nobody, and maybe people have even been so kind as to remind us of that in some way and so we’re looking for some way to level the playing field.

And what we are looking for is power.

Our skinny friend got some muscles and gained physical power to stand up to a bully.

We look for power because it's ingrained in our nature to compensate for a weakness in one area by becoming powerful in some other area.

You might be getting a bit older and greyer and slower – turning 40... turning 50... but that's ok you have some other area where you are powerful, you own a 500hp muscle car, or all sorts of powertools!

Or maybe you don't have a muscle car or power tools but you have position and connections and influence.

Or maybe you don't have those but have good looks, or if you don't have good looks, that's ok – because you're really smart.

Or you may not be very smart but you're good at sports...

Or you may not be good at sports but you're really funny...

Or you can sing, or dance, or draw, or you're really good with computers... whatever - you get the picture.

You see friends we desire power – and there are all sorts of good reasons to need power and energy in our lives – but if we are honest, a part of us desires power because we believe that it makes us “a somebody.”

And that's easy to believe because we respect powerful people, we admire them, we listen to them, we follow them, even if we don't necessarily like them – so we all desire to be powerful and we desire power in some form or another.

And I'm sure that Simon the Sorcerer from our scripture reading in Acts 8 was no different. Here was someone who most likely grew up as a nobody – and discovered some source of power that enabled him to do supernatural things.

And what he did amazed and astounded the people of Samaria and it made him a somebody – he boasted that he was great, and everyone agreed with him, paid attention to him and called him “*the great power of God*” (Acts 8:10)

So because of his power Simon was a somebody!

But... when the Apostle Philip showed up in his town healing the paralyzed and lame and casting out demons in the name of Jesus... well Simon was yesterday's news because Jesus' power was greater than Simon's – it did things that Simon's power couldn't.

Now I want to pause here for a moment here friends, and let it sink in that **the name of Jesus has power...**

Did you know Jesus' name had such power? In theory yes – we know God is all-powerful, we've read that Jesus did miracles; we've heard that the Holy Spirit can do miracles... we listen to sermons about how people can change, how they can be transformed, how they can come to faith in Jesus...

So we know about this power, we talk about this power – but do we live in this power, do we expect to have this power?

It's like this friends, imagine for a moment **we were all ducks.** And on Sunday's we all waddle over to the church to listen to the preacher duck quack about God gave us wings, and we

sing about how ducks can fly, and we read stories from the bible about ducks flying...

And when it's all over – we **walk** out and **waddle** around again for the next week...

The point is friends that it's easy in our relationship with God to become a bit predictable and boring and have no expectations of him. Our relationship deteriorates to simply knowing facts about him, going through the motions, helping out at the church, just being a nice person etc...

But friends the scriptures remind us... the Apostle Paul tells in 1 Cor 4:20 ***"The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk... but of Power!"***

So it's all well and good that we gather here to worship, and we greet each other, we sing, we listen to the scriptures, listen to a sermon – but being a follower of Jesus Christ is more than words – it's about power.

Now in the New Testament the word for Power is “Dunamis” and if that sounds a little bit like Dynamite – you’re right, that’s where we get the that word from. Dynamite is raw power packaged up... just waiting to be released, just waiting burst out, to explode on the scene.

And if the Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power... dunamis... - it makes me think what would it look for us to experience Jesus’ words in Matt 16:18 where he said *“upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not stand against it”*

Jesus’ church goes on the offensive against the kingdom of darkness

And Paul says *“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the*

knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Cor 10:3-5)

So the Christian life is not about being a nice person who doesn’t make waves or rock the boat – it’s about dunamis – power! Power makes waves and rocks the boat.

So, while it is absolutely true that God works in mysterious ways behinds the scene – His divine power is not always quiet and subtle and mysterious – it can be spectacular and explosive and confrontational.

You know friends, every so often we should **read the bible as an action movie**. Read it to look for and be impressed with God’s power - His dunamis.

Its start with creation – flinging the sun, moon and stars into place, setting boundaries for the sea, think of the ten plagues – locust, frogs, darkness, rivers of blood etc... culminating in leading Israel out of slavery in Egypt, parting the Red Sea, having the walls of Jericho collapse.

And in the Judges and Prophets you have the strength of Samson, and the miracles of Elijah – raising a widow’s son from the dead.

And in the New Testament Jesus is casting out demons... legions of demons, calming storms, feeding thousands of people, turning water into wine, healing lepers, paralytics, the deaf and the blind – God’s power...

And when Christ sends the Holy Spirit at Pentecost there is a windstorm and the building is shaking... and the early church continues Jesus’ ministry in His power.

The disciples cast out demons, heal the sick, raise the dead, turn people away from false religions, and baptize them into the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...

Friends -I hope your heart rate is increasing just hearing about all this action, all these displays of God’s power!

I hope you are attracted to God’s power – that you recognize it as something that can do wonderful things for you and the people around you, and that you want it.

Friends – since we naturally desire and look for power to compensate for our weakness **why not desire and seek God’s power!**

That’s why we have to give some credit to Simon the Sorcerer - because although he was ignorant about the Kingdom of God and he thought he could buy the God’s power with money –at least he recognized Jesus’ power was superior to his own and he desired to have God’s power and use it.

Simon’s desire for God’s power wasn’t the problem – it was how he wanted to acquire it. Offering money to pay Peter for the ability to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit upon people revealed that Simon had only witnessed Jesus’ amazing power – but he hadn’t experienced it personally.

The only thing Simon really knows is that another group of people have showed up in his town who are more powerful than him, and everyone is impressed by them, gives them respect, follows them around etc... instead of him.

Simon is a nobody now; a has-been... so as he figures “if you can’t beat ‘em might as well join ‘em.”

So he follows Philip around trying to figure out **how he can get in on the source of this amazing power**, and use it to do what he was doing before – impress people, gain respect, exert influence, profit from it etc... He even gets baptized...

Now again – we need to pause here. Normally when baptism is administered, it’s the sign that the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us, enabling us to believe and claim the promise of the Holy Spirit working in our lives and in the lives of our children as we raise them in the Lord.

But this isn’t the case here. Instead Peter and John are sent by the leaders in Jerusalem to pray for the Samaritan believers

so they can receive the Holy Spirit – why? Did Philip make a mistake and mess up the baptism liturgy?

No – this was an opportunity for God to show Samaritans and Jews that centuries of bitter ethnic and religious rivalry were going to be overcome in Jesus Christ by having the same Spirit which they received in Jerusalem poured out upon the Samaritans.

Remember when Jesus was talking with the Samaritan women? She says to him *“Sir, I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” (John 4:19-20)*

Bitter religious ethnic rivalry... and when the gospel comes to Samaria through Philip there is the very real danger that the Samaritans would believe but just set up their own separate church, independent from Jerusalem where the church had been born when Jesus had poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

So by sending Peter and John to Samaria, the Jerusalem Church is validating Philip's mission work, affirming that Samaritans are legitimately supposed to be part of their Church – they won't reject them because of their ethnicity – that's over and done with now.

And through receiving the Holy Spirit from Peter and John, the Samaritan believers are submitting to their Jerusalem's leadership and acknowledging they belong to the true Church in Jerusalem because they have received the same Spirit that was first poured out there.

Which fulfills what Jesus said in response to the Samaritan woman *"Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit,*

and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."
(John 4:21-24)

So, getting back to the story of Simon, when he sees people receiving the Holy Spirit from Peter and John, he thinks maybe he can buy his way in to receiving this power and use it as he used his other power. But that doesn't work.

Instead his request reveals to Peter that he doesn't understand what this is all about, and as Peter points out to him, he is still captive to sin - because as we said before – he only observed Jesus' power, he hadn't experienced it, and he hadn't received it.

So that leaves us with the question – how can Simon receive and experience the power of the God, **how do we access and experience that power** in our own lives?

Well friends – the answer is prayer.

We've been focusing on prayer over the past month.

We've learned about different aspects of prayer, praying in Jesus name and praying in the Spirit and what that means and that's very important because it helps us to grow in prayer, but friends - prayer is not an end in itself!

Rather prayer is a means by which we connect to the Triune God and experience his power at work in our lives.

So after Peter's stinging but truthful rebuke, the Simon realizes he needs to ask Peter and John to pray for him, so he asks them to do so.

Friends prayer is the conduit for God's power – and the better we are at prayer, the more we understand about it – the greater the capacity the conduit has to unleash God's dunamis in our lives – it's like switching from copper wire to fibre optics, from dial-up to High Speed DSL!

Friends – we access God's power through prayer – prayer is how we access the Power!

Now, I've often wondered what Peter might have said when he prayed for Simon – the text doesn't tell us – but if I think if there's a prayer that would have fit perfectly, it's Paul's prayer from Ephesians 1: 18-20.

And friends it's the perfect prayer for us as we end this series on prayer, because it's a prayer that asks... that all we've learned, would work towards allowing us to experience God's power.

Can you say Amen to that? So – here's the prayer...

He prays that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened!
Friends, may God step into our lives so that we can see, and feel and know all that He is capable of doing in our church and in our community – Amen?

And why does Paul ask for this enlightenment for us? So that we might know – we might experience three things;

First, that we may know the hope of our calling.

Remember its because we feel insignificant, like we don't count, we don't matter, like we just can be pushed around... because we feel powerless that we desire other sources of power in our lives – and sometimes they are very destructive sources of power, guns, drugs, alcohol, violence..

But the hope of our calling is that God chose you and saved you in Christ – so you are significant, you do matter, you are not powerless – especially in the face of sin!

So we don't need to look for power elsewhere to feel good about ourselves, we can accept ourselves as we are – because God chose us as we were. The scriptures tell us that while we were still sinners – Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)

But it doesn't stop there – we also need to know the riches of our glorious inheritance. In other words, while God loves us for who we are – He also loves us too much to leave us that way.

We are works in progress and we may not look like a whole lot right now. But the riches of our glorious inheritance are that one day when Christ returns we will be made new!

Sin will no longer twist our human nature, instead we will be made like Jesus Christ in his perfected human nature which is always a faithful, loyal covenant partner that loves and serves God in all of life.

And that's why we need to know his incomparably great power.

So, just as its not prayer for prayer's sake, and it's also not power for power's sake – it's prayer for power for the sake of bringing us back to life.

That's why Paul describes God's power as the same power by which He raised Christ from the dead and put him in authority over all things in this universe!

Friends, no other power that exists can bring people back from the dead, or change the human heart so that it will choose to love and serve and obey God.

And Paul is praying that we not just observe this power, but that we will know it – experience it, and use it in our lives and in our church and in our surrounding community.

Friends there are so many people in our church and community who need God’s power in their lives – you don’t have to try too hard to think of someone.

People need God’s healing power, his protective power, his sustaining power, his guiding power...

And our calling as believers and as the body of Christ is to access this power and bring it into their lives through prayer!

That’s just amazing isn’t it... so let’s do it friends! Let’s pray for more of God’s Power!

I invite you to stand and let the words of our next song be your prayer in response to the message this morning

please stand...