

The Power of the Message

Acts 3:11-4:22

Turn with me if you would to the first chapter of the book of 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 1, beginning in verse 18.

Here as Paul writes to the Church in Corinth, for the most part he is completely downplaying his role in the ministry and at the same time exalting the power of the message of the Gospel. And in particular the **power of the message of the cross!**

1 Corinthians 1

¹⁸ *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved **it is the power of God.*** ¹⁹ *For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." ²⁰ Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

²¹ *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the **foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*** ²² *For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom;* ²³ *but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,* ²⁴ *but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

If we had time to look at this entire passage (both before and after what we just read), we would see how Paul was making two things very clear:

The world does not receive the message of the cross, **to them it is foolishness.** This was true in the First Century and it remains true even today, some two thousand years later.

Then at the beginning of chapter 2, he speaks of the fact that he didn't come with eloquence of speech, "*but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*" (2:4-5)

What I want you to see here is the fact that the **power of the message of the cross comes from the work and power of the Holy Spirit.** As we are going through the **book of Acts**, we're going to see this demonstrated over and over again. This is why you and I need to continually understand how **utterly and completely dependent** we are upon the **empowering work** and **infilling presence** of the Holy Spirit in **every aspect** of our lives.

Slick presentations of the message of the Gospel doesn't change lives – it's the work of the Holy Spirit.

Mood lighting and just the right musical setting doesn't change lives – but, the work of the Holy Spirit does.

Even a clear and distinct declaration of the facts of the Gospel message doesn't persuade lives – it is and has to be the inward working of the Spirit of God, bringing man to a point of regeneration, repentance and full acceptance of that truth.

Slick presentations, mood lighting and music; they may move our emotions, but these only last for a short while.

Even the declaration of all the facts doesn't fully persuade the heart of man.

He may give mental assent to the truth, but the soul's eternal destiny is only changed with:

- The initial wooing of the Holy Spirit,
- And then the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- It's from that drawing power of the Holy Spirit where we are able to come to fully accept the message of the Gospel: which is, the **greatness of OUR need** and the **power of the cross** to meet that need...

It's only as we then surrender our lives to that great plan of God, and only then that our lives can be really and truly changed by the life transforming power of the Holy Spirit, both now and for eternity.

Now, **with that truth in mind – the drawing and convicting work of the Holy Spirit –** we see that in the New Testament, when the Gospel is presented, particularly to a Jewish audience, we often find the message tying in with the history of Israel, the message of the prophets, and the move of God through the ages.

This clearly speaks of the fact that our faith in Christ isn't just in the **singular event** that took place on a hillside outside of the walls of Jerusalem. No, our faith in Christ comes from the fulfillment of promises, prophecies, and covenants down through the millennia, all of them undeniably tied together by the eternal plan of God.

Now without a doubt, the **strongest aspect of God's plan** is found in the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ; and this event **IS** the focal point of the message of the

Gospel; and **without it, there is no Gospel...** no good news. However, in order for it all to make sense, the fullness of the message needs to be understood.

What we find throughout the Word is: the Jew was in a better place to understand the fullness of the plan than the Gentile was. As Paul tells us in Romans 9, it's the Jew...

“⁴ ...to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; ⁵ of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God.”

The Jew had at least a cursory understanding of the Old Testament. The Gentile had no clue. This is one of the reasons we find the need to preach through the entire Word of God – Old Testament and New Testament; to help tie history or His Story all together.

Now, with all of that in mind, by way of introduction: as we are going through the book of Acts, last week we spoke of the lame beggar in chapter 3. He had been laying at the gate of the Temple when Peter and John walked by. He was then healed by the Holy Spirit, through the actions of Peter. We spoke of the fact that later Peter and John would be arrested, **but** we primarily focused on the reality of the healing and the actions of both the man and the people present on the Temple compound following the healing.

This is where we pick things up today – Acts 3, beginning in verse 11

Acts 3

¹¹ Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.

¹² So when Peter saw it, he responded to the people: "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.

Peter quickly brings in their heritage with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob along with the reality of Christ, the Servant of God. Then, because this audience would have been familiar with the events over the **last few months**, he becomes really bold and declares the connection and the responsibility this group had with the *death of Jesus*. Even to the point of **them choosing Barabbas** (the murderer) over Jesus.

No doubt, this was a powerful and convicting message. But Peter brings them back to the point in verse 16

*¹⁶ And His name (the Name of Jesus), through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, **the faith which comes through Him** has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

Rather than driving the sword deeper into their hearts, Peter now speaks with both **compassion and hope** as he shares with them that it was all from the plan of God --

*¹⁷ "Yet now, brethren, I know that **you did it in ignorance**, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.*

Peter wanted them to fully understand that **God was still in control**. The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was **all in God's great plan...** it was the sacrifice of Christ that brought about the availability of the forgiveness of sin for all mankind.

But it wasn't automatic. Man must choose. Even the chosen people, must choose...

¹⁹ "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰ and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

Peter is now moving the message back to what the Jews understood, what they had been trained in since childhood, what they connected with. The evidence of the message of the cross had always been right before their eyes, even from the very foundation of the covenants and promises.

²² "For Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you.' ²³ 'And it shall be that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' ²⁴ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days.

So, he laid out the truth of who Jesus is and now he's going to speak encouragement to them. **His encouragement is for them to repent.** He reminds them, and affirms them in their position in God's plan... He also points them to back to God's Servant, Jesus...

²⁵ "You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' ²⁶ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities."

I believe that this would have been the point where Peter would have called them to a time of decision, but the enemy broke in and tried to destroy the plan and purposes of God.

Interruptions and distractions, yes the enemy still does that today!!

Acts 4

¹ Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, ² being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

The enemy tried to destroy the work of the Spirit, but the message had already been delivered. So, even with Peter and John now in custody,

The initial wooing of the Holy Spirit had started, then the conviction of the Holy Spirit began to sink into their hearts. That drawing power of the Holy Spirit was already having His effect on the people. And we find many came to fully accept the message of the Gospel: they understood the **greatness of their guilt and need**, as well as the **power of the cross** to meet that need...

⁴ *However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*

They had clearly heard the message, they had seen the demonstration of the power, the Holy Spirit had moved in their lives and now they were able to **tie all of this together** into what they've known since childhood.

Even though the enemy of the Gospel tried to interrupt the work of the Spirit of God, the Spirit still had His way in the lives of these men. They came to the point of surrendering their lives to that greater plan of God, and their lives were changed by the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit, both now and for eternity.

Three thousand on the day of Pentecost, and now Luke tells us *the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*

Another two thousand came to faith in Christ as a direct result of Peter and John taking a bold step of faith and telling a man lame for over 40 years, lame since his mother's womb, *"Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."*

They stepped out boldly in faith and a lame man walked, and two thousand more came to faith in Christ. But God's wasn't finished yet. This one bold step of faith was going to open up a much greater platform for the Gospel. ***What the enemy had sought to do for evil, God meant it for good.*** Peter and John are now going to be able to testify freely and directly before the highest authorities in all of Israel.

Peter and John had been taken into custody later in the afternoon and there wasn't time to gather the full court together, so, they kept them overnight.

Acts 4

⁵ *And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes,* ⁶ *as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.*

I can just imagine Peter recounting this whole event to Luke:

“Luke, you won’t believe it..., the size of the court..., all the powerful guys that were there..., it was amazing, Luke. God had brought all these guys together at one time, simply to share with them one more time, the hope that is in the Gospel, even for those guys..., rulers, elders, and scribes,⁶ as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and a lot of them from the family of the high priest..., all of them were gathered together.

And John and I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with them all, Luke! The Holy Spirit just took over. It was so powerful!!

The enemy thought he was in control, but God was the one who had set the stage:

⁷ And when they (the rulers) had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?"⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel:

⁹ "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well,¹⁰ let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole.

¹¹ "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.'¹² "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

*¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.¹⁴ And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, **they could say nothing against it.***

*“Luke, I’m telling you man, all I did was share Jesus with them, and the Holy Spirit took the wind right out of their sails. Literally, He took their breath away... they were speechless!!” **“They could say nothing against it.***

We looked at this just a short while last week, but we needed to **back up and cover all** that was going on and why Peter and John were here on trial. Now that you know what took place, you can see **the predicament** these rulers are in right now.

There really was **nothing they could do**. This previously lame man was standing right there in front of them walking and leaping, completely whole.

Now, we **speculated last week** about the possibility that **Peter and John** had walked by this man many times before, but it was only on this day that God chose to move in such a way.

We **speculated** about the possibility that even **Christ**, Himself had walked by the man, but He would have known the greater plan of God to bring healing to the man, at just the right time.

Now, permit me to **speculate one more time**: I think every one of these **religious rulers** had seen this man for years, had walked by him for years and knew, and for years there was **nothing they had that could help the man**.

...**None of their riches** could bring about this man's physical or spiritual wholeness.

...**All of their religious training did nothing** to help the man in his situation.

...**None of their Temple authority or ecclesiastical power** could do anything to help this man.

So day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, literally decade after decade they walked by this man with nothing to offer except a few alms now and then.

Now he stands before them whole – physically and spiritually. *And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, **they could say nothing against it***. So...

Acts 4

¹⁵ ...when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶ saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them that from now on they speak to no man in this name."

“Oh yes, this makes sense. We can’t deny the message, so let’s try to silence the messengers.” Somehow the world continues with that game plan. But it didn’t work then, nor should it work now.

¹⁸ And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

²¹ So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way of punishing them, because of the people, since they all glorified God for what had been done. ²² For the man was over forty years old on whom this miracle of healing had been performed.

We are going to get **more into this section next week**, but let me leave you with a couple of thoughts:

I fully understand that Peter and John were led by the Holy Spirit to reach out to this man. So with that recognition, as we close, consider these questions:

- *Are you living your daily life in such a way that the Holy Spirit has your attention and you are not only able to hear His voice, but you are willingly obedient to His directives?*
- *Is your faith in Christ of such a depth that you are willing to take bold steps of faith when the Spirit says, “Step out now”? (Think, what would have happened if Peter and John weren’t quiet there that day?)*
- *Is your commitment to Jesus Christ so strong that you would be willing to stand up, and proclaim Christ, whatever the cost? (Not in some obnoxious way, but in wisdom, to simply be bold in your affirmation of faith.)*
- *Many declare they are willing to die for Christ, but **are you willing to live for Christ?***

Remember: *...the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved **it is the power of God.*** (1Cor1:18)