

A Question of Power

Are You a Christian?

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We are in the middle of a series asking a most important question, "Are you a Christian," for it is only Christians that go to heaven. Committed Muslims, committed Catholics, Mormons, they don't go to heaven. Atheists don't go to heaven. Agnostics don't go to heaven. It's only those with a vibrant living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that go to heaven, and as we've seen in Scripture in passages like it at the end of Matthew 7, even nominal Christians don't go to heaven, those who name the name of Christ with their lips but know nothing about the power of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. And so Scripture warns us, the Lord Jesus Christ himself warns us that the gate is narrow, the way is narrow, the gate is small that leads to heaven and few are those who find it, and so I feel quite justified in spending time asking and answering this question, "Are you a Christian?" And we started this series with a couple of messages titled "Exposing False Faith and Exposing False Hope" to clarify what we're not asking, and I gave 14 different points that were in the spirit of questions like these: when we ask, are you a Christian, we are not asking whether you believe in God, we're not asking whether you practice religion, whether you attend church, whether you pray, whether you read your Bible, whether you've been baptized, whether you keep the rules, or whether you don't. We're not asking those kinds of questions and spent probably 130 minutes dealing with that, and those messages are available. If you haven't heard them, they're essential to framing the matters of which we speak here this morning. We're asking a different question when we ask, are you a Christian? There's kind of a two or three-fold matter to get to the essence of answering the question, are you a Christian, with accuracy, with wisdom, and with understanding, and the longer that I have spent preparing these messages and the more time that I've spent speaking on these matters from the pulpit, the more deeply burdened my heart has gotten over these issues. I really didn't plan this series. This wasn't part of my long-term preaching calendar at any means and I don't often speak this way, but I am very much conscious, I believe, of the leading of the Holy Spirit in this content and trusting very much of the work of the Spirit in my heart and in yours as we approach these matters, because we're dealing with the ultimate question in the universe as it applies to you individually, and the ultimate question about what happens to you with your inevitable date before the judgment seat of God and the judgment seat of Christ, and so we are doing you good by asking these questions.

We realize that these are uncomfortable questions to get to because you know, in those series of 14 questions that we asked, I realize that I'm saying that the common answers

that are given to that question are the wrong answers to give and no one likes to hear things like that unless the Spirit of God is helping them and softening their heart. I realize that this is not the way to make people feel good about themselves. I don't care if you feel good about yourself. I care about whether your soul is redeemed and you are secure in Christ, and the only way that we become secure in Christ is if somewhere along the line the word of God convicts us and makes us uncomfortable and realize that we are separated from God and in need of a Savior and to have that message applied to our hearts with power by the Holy Spirit or we're wasting our time and eternity will be a wasteland of desolation and destruction for those that are not in Christ. So I make no apologies for the series, for the uncomfortable questions that it asks because I have two things in mind, supremely the glory of God and as a means to the glory of God, the well-being of your eternal soul. That's all I care about. That's the only reason that we are embarking on this series.

So, there's a lot of false faith, a lot of false hope out there, and we've done everything we can within a reasonable amount of time to address those issues and expose it to your thinking. No, we're asking different questions to see if you are a Christian. We're not asking about the things that you do that actually sometimes only contribute to a sense of self-righteousness and a suffocating sense of arrogance among those who answer the question in that way. "I read the Bible. I'm a patriotic American," you know, and all of that stuff. It's just suffocating to be around people like that and we want to deliver you from that by the help of God. So we're asking a different question if you are a Christian. We're not asking a cultural question about whether you're a good conservative American. That has nothing to do with it. You know, the nation of the United States is, you know, less than 5% probably of the world's population, if you think about it that way, and if being a Christian was about being a conservative American, well, what about the other 95% of the people in the world? And so our thinking by politically-minded pastors over many decades and by weak, insipid preaching over decades by other pastors who simply wanted to grow an audience and have the biggest megachurch in their respective cities, has all watered this down and diluted it until most people have no idea what it means to answer the question, are you a Christian?

So we ask different questions to see if you're a Christian. We saw the last time I was here on Sunday, we asked this question: do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is only through the gospel of Jesus Christ that anyone can be saved, and so we must start there with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is only revealed in the word of God. The gospel of Jesus Christ is based on historical facts that occurred on this earth in time and space and then those historical facts are interpreted to us by the revealed doctrine of the word of God. So we ask, we make statements like this and ask whether you believe them. God is supremely and intensely holy. His eye cannot look on wickedness or sin with favor. Do you believe that about God? Or have you drifted along with the general sense that God is so loving that he would never judge sin and there could never be a thing like hell and so, you know, it all comes out good for everyone in the end? Completely different realms of existence and understanding about the nature of God. God is holy, "Holy, holy, holy," Scripture says and Scripture says that you are to be holy like he is holy. That's the call of Scripture.

That's the revelation of God. It's so easy to see this if people would just read their Bibles. Scripture goes on and says that all men are sinful. There is none righteous, not even one, and that includes every one of you in the audience here today. Scripture says that you fall short of the glory of God. The question is whether you believe that and whether you enthusiastically affirm it. When we say that, we say, "Well, I'm not perfect," which is another one of those arrogant, suffocating ways to say, "I'm pretty good and back off." No, Scripture says that you are sinful, that you are worthy of eternal judgment because you have broken the eternal law of an eternal God and that requires eternal punishment. The question is whether you believe that, not about other people, not about abortionists, not about progressive democrats, the question is whether you believe that and affirm that about your own self because God's not going to ask you, God's not going to hold you accountable for the sins of other people that you've never committed. He's going to ask you about your sin. He's going to hold you accountable for your sin. That sin brings guilt and condemnation upon you that is righteous and deserved, and the question is whether you believe and affirm that.

And look, if you want to empty a church of self-righteous, suffocating people who are impressed with their own righteousness under a veneer of piety, preach this. Preach this to people and watch them walk out over time. It happens because there's an acceptable degree of confession that we can make, "Well yeah, I did a bad thing one time," while still preserving inside your heart this prevailing sentiment that, "I'm a pretty good person." And so the gospel comes and declares to us all that we are sinful and the question is whether you affirm it like that. Not simply saying, "I don't deserve to go to heaven," which self-righteous people can pretend to say and mean. The question is whether you with a broken heart and with spiritual tears running down your spiritual cheeks saying, "I am so sinful, I deserve to go to hell," because that's the judgment of God revealed in Scripture against all of us.

So the question is whether you personally agree with Scripture about what it says about you personally. See, it's a different spirit, isn't it? It's a different spirit to talk in those terms in that realm than to say, are you a Christian? "Yeah, I read my Bible. Yeah, I believe in Jesus. Yeah, I've been baptized." I'm pointing to everything self-righteous that adds and builds up a credit to your own soul. That's not the spirit of biblical Christianity whatsoever. The gospel says that Jesus Christ died for sinners and rose again to pay for their sin. The resurrection was real. The tomb is empty. His bones are not on earth. And the question is, do you believe that? Do you believe in a substitutionary atonement? That Christ died in the place of sinners who deserved judgment, took the wrath of God that they deserved upon himself so that as a free gift, his righteousness could be imputed to them and give them a righteous standing before God known as justification, all sins pardoned and God accepts us as righteous for the sake of Christ? The question is, do you believe that or do you still cling to the works-based things that you were taught in the past about religious rituals, being a pretty good person, and all of that? Do you really believe that no one comes to the Father except through Christ, that there is no other name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved except for the matchless, glorious, exalted name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and only he and only he can take me to heaven? On a life I did not live, on a death I did not die, I stake my whole eternity. The

question is, do you believe that and really rest your soul and count your eternal well-being upon the truth of those things?

That's what the gospel says. In the gospel, God promises eternal life to those who believe in Christ. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." The promise of eternal life that God gives freely, graciously, out of his loving, generous Spirit towards sinners, given without preconditions except to repent and believe in Christ. Do you trust the promise of God for eternal life? Not these foolish, tainted ways of self-righteousness that the 14 questions expose. Do you believe and trust in the promise of God alone for eternal life? That's what we're asking when we ask, are you a Christian? Scripture says repent and believe in the gospel. Have you repented and believed in Christ? Have you decisively with all of your heart turned away from sin and embraced wholeheartedly Christ as your only hope? That's the question. Have you believed the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? Completely different question than asking whether you've walked an aisle, raised your hand, or prayed a prayer.

So first, when we ask, are you a Christian, we're asking whether you believe the gospel like that, and all of these things have been expounded here in recent days so that I don't need to repeat them any further. What we've accomplished, I trust, so far is to establish that when you're answering the question, are you a Christian, you do not start with what you have done, what you do, or what you feel. The question of whether you are a Christian starts with an objective revelation from God, "This is the gospel of Jesus Christ which every man must believe or be eternally lost," and the question is, do you believe that gospel that is outside of you, that existed before you, which will exist after you, which has nothing to do with anything that you've done and everything to do with what Christ has done? Do you believe that gospel, that's the question.

So you don't start by reciting these, I keep coming back to the word suffocating, these suffocating elements of who you are, what you've done, what you do. We're not talking about any of that, and, beloved, a gospel like that makes a separation between people because those who want to be proud of their religion don't want to hear things like that, and things like what we're discussing from God's word, what it does is it exposes people who carry themselves in an inner spirit of self-righteousness, and eventually all of that comes out because the word of God exposes hearts for what they really are. And so the fact that people react against preaching, biblical preaching, says nothing about whether the preaching is right or wrong or anything about anything else. Truth exposes people. And all of that was review, and here's what we've been building toward, and I'm just enormously privileged and excited and eager to say the things that we have in the word of God before us here in the coming bit of time. There's another way, another angle to answer the question that's deeply, deeply united with, do you believe the gospel, but there's another way that this needs to be considered from because to truly be a Christian, to truly believe the gospel of Jesus Christ is more than a matter of knowledge. It's more than a matter of intellectual attainment and intellectual assent, say, "Yes, I know those things, I've heard those things, I affirm those things to be true."

It's more than that. It's more than just a head knowledge of which we speak. To be a Christian means that there's another question that you can enthusiastically answer and we're not used to hearing it framed like this so I'm going to slow down like when I say like this, what I'm about to say, I haven't said it yet. I'm going to slow down to address this question that I'm about to ask and to show you we're going to go and we're going to see, and you're going to see things which many of you, if not most of you, have never noticed in Scripture before, and it will be shocking to you to see how prevalent it is in the statement of the New Testament about the gospel of Jesus Christ. You see, when we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ and when we ask whether you have believed the gospel, we ask whether you are a Christian, we are asking a question of power. That's the title of today's message, "A Question of Power." To be a Christian means that the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ has come to your heart, to your inner man, with certain universal effects that are true of every believer. So let me say this again, to be a Christian means that the power of the gospel has come to you and specifically to your inner man.

When I say the power of the gospel, what do I mean? This power of which we speak is a living spiritual dynamic that is present in the good news of Jesus Christ. The power of the gospel is a living spiritual dynamic in the good news of Jesus Christ. It's alive. It's strong. It's powerful. It's mighty. It is able to change men. And so it's not simply a matter of a theological lecture, being impressed with the erudition of the man who has a doctorate label to his name. No, it's something much more real, much more personal, much more thorough in addressing the entirety of who you are and the entirety of your being. This question of power that we're addressing, and we're going to go through a lot of Scripture, this is all just introduction to kind of disengage your minds from what was concerning you when you walked in and to bring to your heart the surpassing concern that should matter more than anything else in all of life to you. This question of power is alluding to this reality: the power of the gospel is the unlimited ability of God to deliver men from sin and Satan and to change them into the image of Jesus Christ. The power of the gospel is nothing less than the unlimited ability of God to deliver men from sin and Satan and to change them into the image of Jesus Christ. There's power in the blood. There's power in the gospel. And it is a power of the most intimate personal kind to revolutionize the very nature of the man who is truly saved. It's a power that can be discerned and understood in light of revelation, but, beloved, when God saves a man or a boy, saves a woman or a girl, there is always power from him that goes forth upon that person. Always. Without fail. And that power produces a multifaceted effect in every person that God saves. A multifaceted effect in everyone that God saves and we're going to see that multifaceted effect next week. For now, I just want you to see, I've got such a simple agenda for this morning, a simple objective for you that I want to achieve and for you to associate the gospel with power based on the testimony of the New Testament. That's how simple this is today. Can't wait to get to it.

So it's a question of power and when we ask the question, are you a Christian? There's a sense in which we're asking this question: do you know the power of the gospel? The gospel presents to us an issue of power. The question that we ask ourselves, am I a Christian, is to ask whether I know the power of this gospel of which Scripture speaks. Let's take a breath. I needed that. And let me just freely acknowledge the fact that I

understand that you're probably not used to that question. You're not used to the gospel being presented to you as an issue of power and asking whether you've come under the power of the gospel or not, but we're going to see, trust me, that we are going to see in the next half hour how unavoidable this issue of power is in the biblical presentation of the gospel. The question is whether you yourself, forget everybody else in the room, I am asking you face-to-face whether you, yourself, know this power of the gospel by direct, living, personal experience, whether you know this in your heart in a way that has made itself known, and I can't do anything less than discuss it in these terms because the New Testament invariably insists on the power of the gospel. And so let me just say it one more time, when we talk about the power of the gospel, we're talking about the unlimited ability of God to deliver men from sin and Satan and to change them into the image of Jesus Christ. The power of the gospel is about the power of God, not the power of man. I'll say that again: the power of the gospel is about the power of God, not about the power of man. Boy, will that be so clear by the time we're done here today. The power of the gospel, the power of salvation is a divine deliverance from the dominating, blinding effect of sin and Satan upon your soul to open your mind to truth and to change of your inner man with lasting, persevering permanence so that you are being progressively changed into the image of Jesus Christ. That's the power of the gospel, to take a sinner, declare him righteous on the merits of Christ, and then to change him over time into conformity with the one who died and rose again on his behalf.

Now, just a couple of quick clarifications before we get into this and turn to Scripture. The power of the gospel is not at all about what you do to please God. It's not about your works. It's not about your religion. It's not about your introspective searchings of your heart. It's not about any of that. It's not about what you do to please God. Okay, we've got to separate that from this discussion. Let me go further and just kind of in 60 seconds attack prevalent means of ministry philosophy prevalent today. The power of the gospel is not about speaking in tongues. The power of the gospel is not about feelings of worship. The power of the gospel is not in music, no matter how big a conference someone might generate in Nashville; music alone is not the power of the gospel. The power of the gospel is not measured or necessarily indicated by large crowds going to periodic conferences or going to places of worship that need police control to get the traffic in and out. You can generate large crowds by having big basketball games, big football games, big soccer games. You can get a crowd for a lot of reasons. The mere presence of a large number of men and women at an event says nothing about what the power is at work that brought them together. Man, this stuff is so obvious and yet, because...let me back up just a second, because men so love themselves, they want the power of the gospel to be about themselves and what they do so that they can claim at least some of the credit. So, but the power of the gospel is not about tongues, feelings, music, or large crowds. The power of the gospel is about what God does to sinners to save and to deliver them.

So it's a question of power, specifically of God's power, and we need to know whether what I'm saying is true here or not and so let's go into it, three points for today. First of all, I just want to remind you of the person of the power. That's the first point for today's message, which is titled "A Question of Power." The first point is to just remind you ever

so briefly of the person of the power. The person of the power. When we talk about the power of the gospel, we talk about the power of God in the gospel, we're not talking about persuasive argument that makes you change your opinion about different issues related to Scripture or the things of God. We're not talking about that. It's an incidental effect of the real power of the gospel. You see, beloved, the Bible consistently depicts the Holy Spirit as the operative influence of the gospel, the omnipotent third person of the Trinity who existed before time, who was sent from the Father and from the Son to the world, the one who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment, the one whose ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God is the operative influence of the gospel, not anything about man. So you can just write down a couple of Scripture references here. In John 15 verse 26, Jesus is speaking and he says, "when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me." The Spirit of God will bear witness about Christ. The gospel is the gospel of Jesus Christ and when the gospel of Jesus Christ is truly preached, the Spirit of God attends that message through the speaker and in the hearts of those who hear so that the gospel comes with power to the human heart. It's a personal power from God himself, a personal living God that is operating. There is a person that mediates and distributes and effects this power of which we speak. Jesus said in Acts chapter 1 verse 8, he told the disciples, wait in Galilee until the Spirit of power comes upon you. And then in Acts chapter 2, the Spirit came and he was manifest by miraculous signs limited to that attesting moment that something supernatural, of supernatural power had taken place. Acts 1 verse 8, Acts chapter 2, we read about the Spirit coming with power and what happened when the Spirit came with power? Peter preached with power to the conversion of thousands of souls, and you see that power extended throughout the rest of the book of Acts.

Well, beloved, the Spirit comes upon all who truly believe; that powerful Holy Spirit is present in the conversion of everyone who ever believes from the moment of their conversion. It's not that you believe and then later maybe you get the Spirit, maybe you don't. The Spirit comes and when a person is converted the Spirit indwells him instantly from that moment of regeneration and that moment of conversion. Romans 8 verse 9 is more than sufficient to establish that fact. Romans 8 verse 9 says, "You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone," this is Romans 8:9, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." Romans 8:9, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." And beloved, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. He is the omnipotent Spirit of the omnipotent God, and he indwells everyone who truly believes. If you do not have the Holy Spirit, you are not a Christian. That's what the Bible plainly says.

And so without answering the question yet, how do you know if you have the Spirit, what does the Spirit effect in those who believe, we're simply seeing that there is power in the gospel and that power is the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit himself so that it is immediately taken out of the realm of the abilities of sinful man and placed in the realm of the omnipotence of a holy God so that we naturally ask different questions when we ask, are you a Christian? Do you believe the gospel? Do you have the indwelling Holy Spirit? We're asking much different questions. Then, "Yeah, I believe in God," and

people say it when they're half asleep and with no conviction, no urgency. "I don't want to engage this question. I read my Bible. I pray. I go to church. Don't bother me with whether I'm a Christian or not."

It's a question of power, and that power is expressed by the person of the Holy Spirit and so what we have here, beloved, is this: in the gospel, when true conversion takes place through the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit acts upon a person, acts on that person on behalf of Jesus Christ to save them with power. And so, to ask the question, are you a Christian, means that we're asking with different language, has the Spirit of God come upon you? Has he come upon you with power? You see, it's a question of power that we are discussing and that power is resident in the person of the Holy Spirit. That's point number one. Point number two. When we say it's a question of power, we're saying that the gospel message comes with power. The question of power is answered by the message with the power, in other words. Point number two, the message with the power. There's a person that is involved in mediating the power. This power comes through the message that has power and now I want you to turn to the book of Romans chapter 1. Romans chapter 1. God exercises this power through the preached gospel of Jesus Christ. God exercises this power through the preached gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, beloved, as you're turning to Romans, let me just remind you of a very much overview sense of the book of Romans. The book of Romans is the most systematic presentation of the gospel in the Bible. Paul opens with some greetings. He talks about the wrath of God, how no one can save themselves by works, the law condemns everyone. He says that there is propitiation in Christ, there's justification by faith. He illustrates it from the Old Testament. He goes on and answers objections but comes to the conclusion in Romans 8 verse 1, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," and then he works out other implications in the rest of the book. Now, beloved, those things should be familiar to you, but let me just remind you of how Paul starts when he gets to his argument proper, let me remind you of what he says about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans chapter 1. Let's start in verse 15. The Apostle Paul says, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." See, this is what we've been talking about all along here. Are you a Christian? We said you start with the question, do you believe the gospel, and so we're picking up, we're picking up the argument right where Paul starts the argument. So in verse 16, Paul goes on to say, he explains why he's eager to preach the gospel, and he says in verse 16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Paul says, "Let's talk about the gospel," and he immediately says the gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. The word power, the Greek word *dunamis* there, and it's the same word in all of these passages that we're going to look at, there is a divine might, a divine strength, a divine ability that is unleashed in the true power and the preaching of the gospel when it comes to believing hearts. The power of the gospel. Before Paul says anything else about the detailed content of the gospel, he covers it with a label that says, "Everything I'm about to tell you throughout the book of Romans here is a manifestation of the power of God." And so, how can we possibly answer the question of whether we're a Christian apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ? And how can we talk about the gospel of Jesus Christ without introducing this issue of

the power of God that is upon, notice, look at it there in verse 16, everyone who believes? This is not a power that comes on some and bypasses others. This power of God in salvation is upon everyone who believes. So of course it's right and proper to say, do you believe the gospel, and to quickly follow that up with a statement, "We're asking about matters of power here."

Turn to the next book of the Bible, 1 Corinthians chapter 1. 1 Corinthians chapter 1. Again, this second point is labeled the message with the power. And beloved, my dear, dear friends, whom I long that every one of you would be with me in heaven one day, without exception, this gospel is about the power of God. It is not about human stature. It's not about human eloquence. It's certainly not about stupid stage effects that are paid to production companies to manipulate the mood through different levels of lighting, different levels of sound and different kinds of fog that's injected into the room. You can go to rock concerts and get all that stuff better done, more influencing upon your emotions. That's not the power of the gospel. You see, beloved, this power of which I speak from the word of God, I am not making any of this up, this power of the gospel, this power of God, this power of the Holy Spirit of which we speak, it is not by human stature. It is not by human ability. It does not come through human eloquence. It does not come through stage effects. It certainly does not come through stupid men and stupid women standing on a platform telling stupid jokes around quasi-biblical themes to make people laugh and feel comfortable. That is not the power of the gospel. The power of the gospel is something else.

Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians, verse 17. It's interesting how he, in Romans and in 1 Corinthians, he alludes to the gospel and then talks about the power of it. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, Paul says, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power." Not with human wisdom. Not with human eloquence. Not with human rhetoric. Paul says, "I don't rely on that, I don't put that forward because I don't want to hide, cloak, and veil the power of the gospel." Look at verse 18. He says, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved," what is it, "it is the power of God." Those who are being saved see in the gospel, know within their hearts in the gospel based on the testimony of God, this is the power of God that is at work.

And so he goes on and he makes it very plain that he's not talking about things that the world will approve and embrace. He's talking about something different. This is not about worldly stuff that worldly men can easily embrace because it was presented to them with just the right spoonful of sugar to make the medicine go down. Paul says in verse 21, "in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ," what? What does it say? "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." Everyone who believes, those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, they find in Christ, in the gospel, the power of God exercised upon their souls.

Look at chapter 2, verse 3. By the way, beloved, you have no idea how much I'm omitting in this message this morning. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2 verse 3, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling." Does that sound like a prescription to build a large megachurch, a weak, trembling preacher? "My speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom," plausible in the sense that it appealed to human thinking, human philosophy; my speech and my message weren't anything like that. My speech and my message, Paul says, were "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

Are you starting to see a theme here? The gospel is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. Romans 1. The message of the cross is the power of God, 1 Corinthians 1, 18. Verse 24, "what we preach is the power of God and the wisdom of God." Verse 5, "your faith must not rest on the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." These are fundamental introductory statements to the apostolic presentation of what the gospel is and what the gospel does. It's a message with power.

So, if we're going to rightly answer the question, are you a Christian, we have to start with, do you believe the gospel, and has this gospel come to you with power? Otherwise, we're evading the real issues. We're playing the fiddle while the city of Rome burns down. We're dancing to a violin while destruction is all about us. I'm not willing to play that game with your souls and you should not gamble with your soul by being enticed by such foolish games no matter who bids you to go elsewhere. Paul later says in Romans 10 verse 17 that faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, by the gospel. The gospel is preached, the Spirit works. As we sing in the hymn, "I know not how the Spirit moves, creating faith in him." So when we ask the question, do you believe the gospel, are you a Christian, beloved, we're asking if you know something about this power. Not asking if you can answer questions on a theological exam. This is a question that the newest believer could answer. Say, "You know, there is something different in my heart than what there was before." And so the question is, has the Holy Spirit through the gospel made Christ known to you? It's a question of power mediated through the preached gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, let's go to our third point for this morning and talk about the substance of the power. The substance of the power. And by the time we're done, you'll see that all I've done is I've just kind of flown through at a high altitude through most of the New Testament. We haven't talked about anything from the gospel... Well, actually we did even mention the gospel of John in what we started. We're just flying through, book by book, going through the books in sequence so that you see that this is not an isolated verse out of context that I'm building and making a big deal out of, you're seeing that it's not limited to one passage, that this is something that is said repeatedly throughout the Bible about the gospel and the experience of true salvation.

So let's look at the substance of the power. We went to Romans, we went to 1 Corinthians, we saw the gospel of John, the book of Acts earlier. What is the substance of this power? Well, this is a power that is not of human strength. It's not of human authority and it is exactly contrary to human pride, and often it's contrary even to human comfort.

Contrary to human strength, contrary to human authority, contrary to human pride, often contrary to human comfort even. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 12. 2 Corinthians chapter 12 in verse 7. Paul, who was the apostolic receptor of great visions from God and was taken to the third heaven. God worked in Paul that he would know the power of God rather than human pride and so in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7, as we consider the substance of this power, Paul says, "to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me." Said, "God, I don't want this. I don't want this, God. I don't want this. Please take it away." "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power,'" same word that we've been looking at all along, "is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore," Paul says, he says, "That's what God said to me. He said, 'My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore,'" he goes on in verse 9, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The power of Christ made known in his weakness. This kind of power is made known not in human eloquence, but in the proclamation of Christ crucified. This power of which we speak is not made known in human triumph so much as it is in human weakness, so that we see that the power is not from us, but it is from God.

And as you go on reading in Scripture, you start to see that this power of which we speak is something that far transcends the abilities of the natural human mind. It's something that is more than human ability can effect. Look at Ephesians chapter 1, verse 16. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 16. You can no more exercise this power on your own than you can raise the dead. If you want to go over to Mount Moriah Cemetery with me, show me your power to raise the dead, I'll believe that you have within you the power of the gospel. It's just five minutes away. I'll go. I know none of you will take me up on it.

Paul says in verse 16 of Ephesians 1, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers," and what is it that he's praying, "I'm praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might." Paul says, "I am praying for you to understand something spiritual that you cannot understand in your own intellectual capacities." He says, "I'm asking that the Spirit of God would illuminate your mind so that you could understand something that is not within the sphere of human wisdom, and part of that that I want you to understand is how immeasurably great the power of God is toward us who believe." Everyone who believes is on the receiving end of the operation of this immeasurably great power. So when I ask, are you a Christian, I have very good biblical grounds to say, do you know something of the immeasurably great power of God having operated on your life? Paul says, "I'm praying that you would know that. It's a power that is true of everyone who believes, that has truly been exercised upon everyone who believes," better stated.

Then go to chapter 3, verse 20, and I trust that you're making mental note of the recurrent theme of power throughout this, this spiritual dynamic that is at work. Verse 20, Paul says, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think," this is far beyond human ability or understanding, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." He makes it known according to the power that is at work in us, according to the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, this is an outside external power, not something that is intrinsic to you that you were born with. It's not a matter of human ability, human giftedness, human talent. It's not that. You can see a similar prayer in Colossians 1. We'll skip over that for the sake of time.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. 1 Thessalonians chapter 1. Paul, writing to these believers, takes them back to the time when God saved them through the preaching of the gospel. You know, at some point when you're preaching on this theme, it looks like you're piling on. You know, I've already, look, let's be honest with each other, I've already made the point. I've already proved the case here. There's no other verdict that can be given upon this issue of power than true according to the Scriptures. The reason that we continue to pile on is because the accumulated weight of it makes you sense it and recognize it even more so that in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 verse 4, Paul says, "we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you," he's writing to believers, every one of them and said, "How do you know that, Paul?" "Because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction." Paul says, "I know that you were converted because I know what was happening in me as I preached. There was the Spirit of God upon me. There was conviction. There was full power, which is to be expected. And so when you responded in that environment, I know that your faith was true. I know that God has chosen you because he appointed you for that time, brought you under the power of the gospel, and the Spirit worked in you through the preached word to bring about that very result that I now see." Didn't make him perfect. He had a lot of things to correct them on later. Their doctrine was off. Their practice was off. But he speaks about the gospel coming to them with power.

The gospel with power. Are you a Christian? Do you believe the gospel? Has the power of the gospel come upon you and abided with you since the time you say that you believed?

One more, two more actually, one more apostle. 1 Peter chapter 1, as you're turning there past the book of Hebrews, past the book of James. 1 Peter chapter 1. Peter says this, he says in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again," notice that an outside power has worked on believers to bring about a spiritual result causing us to be born again, an outside power from God. God caused us to be born again. We did not produce our own new birth. "He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." Here it is beloved, verse 5, every

believer, "who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Do you know something of power? It's a question of power.

And then in 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 3. 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 3 Peter says, "His divine power has granted to us," us who believe, he has granted to us "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." We've said that this power of God is his unlimited ability to deliver men from sin and Satan, from the environment of the world, to change them into the image of Christ. That is what is true of every actual believer.

Are you a Christian? Do you believe the gospel? Has the power of the gospel come upon you in your inner man so that there is a deliverance, there is a loosing from the world, from sin, from Satan, and a heart growing in desire for Christ, believing in his word with an eye set on the inheritance to be given to us in heaven, rather than a nauseating love for this world and the things that it offers? That's what we're asking.

Now, so beloved you see from Scripture, from this survey and again, I've left a lot out that I could have included, it's a question of power. Over and over and over again, the Bible says gospel, power. Gospel, power of God. Preaching of Christ power. Now, what exactly does God do when he exercises his power on a sinner and brings them to saving faith in Christ? There are uniform effects that we see in different degrees, things that are true of every actual believer, but let me just repeat: it's not about tongues. It's not about charismatic phenomena. It's not about feelings. It's not about music. It's not about large crowds. It's something else, something far more profound, something that can be known and recognized, but not by human eyes and by human ability. It's what God does to save sinners and to deliver them. So we're going to continue this next week, okay? For now, take to heart that we are asking a question about power and whether it has been applied to your life individually and personally with evident biblical effects. Are you a Christian? Do you believe the gospel? It's a question of power. May the Holy Spirit search each one according to his wisdom and his omnipotent might.

Bow with me in prayer.

"Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forever. Amen."

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