



Methods For Exercising the Power of Christ

The resurrected Christ left us with these final words "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go, (You go) therefore, into all the world and preach the good news to everyone. Teaching what I have commanded. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And, yes, I am with you –always with you (Matthew 28:18-20).

The change from the *Man of Sorrows* before his crucifixion, to the *Lord over all* after his resurrection is very striking. Before his passion he was well known by his disciples; he appeared in only one form --as the Son of Man, clad in the garments of a peasant. When you saw him on the street you knew it was Christ.

After he rose from the dead, he was, on several occasions, unrecognized by those who loved him best. At least once, he is described as having appeared to some of them "under another form." He was, of course, the same person, for they saw his hands and his feet. Thomas even handled him and placed his finger in the print of the nails. Yet, there was a glory there that seemed hidden in his previous life, except for the time that he stood on the Mt. of Transfiguration.

Before his death, his appearances were to the general public. He stood among the Scribes and Pharisees, publicans and sinners, and preached the glad tidings. Now he appeared to his disciples --sometimes to one, at another time to two, and on one occasion to about 500 at once. But always to his disciples, and to them only. (It is hard for the world to see Jesus). It was no small honor to have seen our risen Lord while he remained on earth for 40 days following his resurrection.

Had we seen him in his agony, we should all the more admire his glory. Dwell with your hearts upon Christ crucified, but indulge yourself often with a sight of Christ glorified. Delight to remember that "He is not here; he is risen." He is not here; he is ascended. Let your soul travel often that road that leads from the cross to the throne.

Let's look at two things:

First, our Lord's resurrection power.

Second, the method given to us to exercise the spiritual part of that power, so far as we are concerned.

First, let's look at our Lord's resurrection power. "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

Look at the contrast between the passion week with its suffering and cross, then look at the Easter week with its empty tomb and celebration. He is no longer sufferer, but sovereign; no more victim, but victor; no more servant, but Lord and master. Yet, he received such power because he endured such weakness. The way to the throne was downward. Our Lord first descended that he might ascend. Humility –a forgotten power of the church.

What did Jesus mean by "all power?" As a consequence of his death, Jesus said that he had been given "all power" by the Father. We are to understand this means: the power of self-existence, the power of creating, the power to sustain that which is made, the power of fashioning and destroying, the power to open and to shut, the power to pardon or condemn, the power to give or withhold. "He is head over all things to his church." We might as well try to describe infinity, or map the boundaries of the Universe as to tell what "all power" must mean. "All power" is now given into the hands that were once fastened to a wooden cross.

First, "all power in heaven;" that is, he has the power of God. Jesus has divine power. If he would speak another world into existence, he could do it today. He will be the judge of all people, both the living and the dead. Jesus has the power to judge, the power to create, the power to rule, the power to change people.

Our lord also claimed to have "all power on earth." Some on earth, may perceive that they have power, but when the truth is seen, Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turns it wherever he wills." "Promotion does not come from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But the Lord is the judge: he puts down one, and sets up another" (Psalm 75:6,7).

"The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet" (Nahum 1:7). Whatever power he gives into the hands of people, he reserves the ability to withdraw at a given moment.

Any number of people have tried to get "all power" on earth. Jesus is the only one to succeed. Whenever universal monarchy has seemed within the reach of ambitious people, it has melted away like a snowflake in the heat of summer. Indeed, if people could rule all their fellows, they would still not have all power on earth. There are yet, other forces beyond control --disease, wind, wave, earthquake, storm, pain and death, as well as other ambitious people.

Never despair for the church; rather, be anxious for her and turn your anxiety into prayer and be hopeful; for, "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." The gates of hell may look strong from time to time, but little do they realize that they will not prevail against the church of our Lord, for "all power is given unto him."

Therefore, by faith we can see wickedness defeated, wrong failing, and right prevailing. For all power is given into the hands of our Lord Jesus. As wax melts before fire, so shall evil perish in his presence. Prayer does have an affect on the events of life, because we are praying in the name of an "all powerful" Christ.

So, too, the Lord can renew his work and raise up within the hearts of his people a renewed interest in the gospel. People may be converted. The self-righteous Pharisee may yet come to Christ --Paul did. One may go to the outer-universe of sin and yet, he or she is not beyond the reach and power of love in the risen Christ! Those who now despise the gospel may one day embrace it, as this man Paul.

The very existence of God requires that he be the "all powerful" God. There can be no other kind of God. We can never lose for our service to him. On *Father Dowling's Mysteries*, Tom Bosley, who plays Father Dowling, quoted Pascal's famous wager to an atheist. Pascal reasoned, "If I were to bet on the existence of God and lived my life in love and charity, forgiving, and giving, should I die and there be no God, what have I lost? Nothing! But if I were to bet on there being no God and lived in accordance with that assumption, then die and find that there is a God, I lose everything." Therefore, betting on God is a "no lose" proposition.

Second, we need to show the method Christ left us of exercising his spiritual power. He did not say, "All power is given to me in heaven and earth; take, therefore, swords and slay all of my enemies who crucified me." Peter tried that at the arrest of our Lord. After him, the crusaders tried it. Christians tried it in the inquisitions; the conquistadors tried it. I have a feeling that Christians are trying it again. Every time they try it they look ugly and evil. So it is with anyone who tries to "force" the gospel on other people. The gospel does not spread by force --not even the force of parents. We have plenty of agnostics who were force fed the gospel as children. Even children must accept on their own if Christ is to belong to them.

Without thought of revenge, Christ said, begin to preach the good news of the gospel, to those who crucified me first. Do they deserve it? No. So too, it is our job to work with those who do not deserve it. Begin your preaching at Jerusalem, with those who crucified me. At first glance his method appears inadequate. To go, to teach, to make disciples, to baptize these disciples, and to instruct them further in the faith. These are not the instruments people use in their conquests. They use monstrous guns, planes, tanks, bombs and ironclad ships --engines of death doing power. Yet what are these, but proofs of their weakness? Shall they gain the support and admiration of their foe with a bullet? No! The loss will brew in the hearts of children yet unborn. Then, it will explode into another Bosnia, another Somalia, another Ireland, another Lebanon, another Iraq, another Syria, another American Civil War. The guns of our own civil war have stopped. However, the hate, the racism, the bitterness --I guess, not so much. Unfortunately, hate cannot be killed with a bullet. You can "beat them to a pulp" --only to increase their resolve and resistance toward you. That is not "winning."

If men had "all power" they would not need such weapons. We have long known that the gospel is the biggest crime fighter of all times. The only successful rehabilitation going on in prisons today is in the form of various Christian idea, and ideals, and attitudes, and ministries, and a new awareness of God in the hearts of those living there. You see, the force of the gospel is the power of love, not the power of hate. Love will always be a greater power than hate. Hate is an imperfect power, while God's love is a perfect power. Is it not about time for Christians to come back to their real power? Please. If we continue to let people take the goodness out of the gospel, or if we support people who do that, or expect to accomplish our

goal by hired thugs to do dirty work –we will be left with nothing. We should at least refuse to endorse or excuse their rudeness, crudeness, lack of common decency, and downright disrespect for other good people. Please.

In quieter times people use political science, psychology, and sales media methods to spread their influence. Yet, the power of Christ never depends on the majority vote of political power. Political power may be the weakest of all power. It teams up unlikely bedfellows, tainting the good and bad alike. It is fickle; it lies; it postures; it misrepresents, it bullies, it intimidates, it slanders. Do not pin the hopes of the church to the power of religious political strategies. Politics has amply proven its inability to sell truth, to behave well or to prevail for long. It is just as ugly in the church. Come back to our real power. Please.

Mark then, that *teaching* and *preaching* are God's method of applying his power. The *preaching* of the gospel will always be considered foolish by those who perish; yet, we who are Christians consider it to be the power of God. Certainly the clergy must be educated, literate, and fully aware of events and history; but, that is not where the gospel gets its power. If that were true, the Lord would have gathered his twelve disciples from Corinth, Rome, and Athens --that is where the great philosophers were. At the very least, he would have picked the Rabbis near home. Instead, he picked them from the unlettered, but "common sense" and sometimes "not so common sense" fishermen.

The great power of the church, then, is to be exercised through its preaching, teaching, baptizing (unifying them not dividing them. –**we are baptized into the one body of Christ**), and instruction. By, "Instruction in godliness/goodness –not this other. The Greek word is to make disciples and followers of people. We are to continue with it whether many listen or few listen; that is not our's to determine. Our next duty is to give the sign of that discipleship by baptizing them. We must, then, teach them to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded. Finally, we must assure them of his personal presence and dependability. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." "More secure is no one ever than the loved ones of the Savior." The hymn carries a great truth.

Are you beginning with the gospel in your home? Do you treat each other in the gospel sort of way? Are you asking: "Would Jesus do this? Would Jesus say this?" Are you supporting its proclamation in your church --and finally to the remote places of the earth (and, of course, the well traveled places)?

Are you a good teacher in word and life, in conversation and conduct, to children, grandchildren, family, friend, neighbor, or co-worker? How about to enemy? God has granted us these methods of applying the power of the gospel. Let us use them to our best until he returns. May God grant that we carry out these last words of Jesus on earth.

May the Church be a reminder to the world that "He has risen." May it be the reminder that truth cannot be killed and that goodness and kindness are alive and well. May it continue to be true that "Christ lives in you." The more we do our work in the manner of the world –the more we become the world.. May the "resurrection power" of Christ return to the Church! Does Christ live? IN YOU? That's the power of good!