

May 17, 2015

Where We Get Our Power

John 17:1-11

After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began. "I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me.

"My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are.

Isn't it exciting to be a congregation of followers of Jesus Christ? We've got a good thing going here and we need to let the rest of the world know how good and how exciting it is.

There was a young high School football star who was being recruited by a coach from a major college. The coach had heard about the young man but had never seen him play. So he asked him some direct questions. "Son," he said, "I understand that you play quarterback for your team. Are you a pretty good passer?"

"Am I a *pretty* good passer?" The boy answered. "Why, I threw the ball 100 times this season and only had one incomplection - and that was only because the receiver fell down before the ball got to him."

The coach was impressed. "I understand that you also played defense," he said, "are you a good tackler?"

"Am I a good tackler?" the boy answered. "Why I'll have you know that in one game this year, I sacked the quarterback five times."

Now the coach was getting really excited. "I understand that you also do the punting for your team. Can you kick the ball pretty well?"

"Can I kick? I'll have you know that I have to hold back on my punts to keep the ball from sailing out of the stadium."

Then the coach says, "Tell me, son, do you have any weaknesses?"

The boy thought for a moment and replied, "Well, I do have the tendency to exaggerate a little."

For the most part I don't think we have the problem of exaggerating a little, if anything most Christians have a tendency to understate just how much God means in our lives, and how much of a privilege it is to be part of the body of Christ.

In our scripture today from John's Gospel, Jesus prays for His followers. Not only those who were His followers at the time of this prayer, but all who would believe in Him including us 2000 years after His prayer. He prays that we would be unified in the work He has called us to. It is truly exciting and a privilege to be the ones included in His prayer. It is thrilling to be entrusted by God with the work of bringing a hurting, empty, beaten world into a relationship with God. He has called us to be His ambassadors, His representatives to bring abundant life to cold, dry bones. As Paul wrote:

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" - 2 Corinthians 5:20

God has offered us the privileged of being part of the building of God's Kingdom in this world. That's pretty incredible stuff! What a great honor God has granted us – the honor of being called God's own people and being entrusted by God to be the vessels He works through. In Christ God offers forgiveness of sins and God has given us the task of telling everyone what He is doing. We are a people who are committed to Christ, to His Body – the church, and to His work in the world. But it is not an easy task. So where do we get the power to sustain us in the work?

First we get power from the world's needs. The world desperately needs what you and I have to offer. In verses 2-3 of our text we read that Jesus gives eternal life. Jesus prays, "And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth."

Whether it's in some far off place, like Nepal, or Haiti or it's the person right next to you the world still needs to know the good news of Jesus Christ. Just this week I heard of a young 22 year old girl who attempted suicide and is in South Oaks Hospital; I heard of a 10 year old who tells of a father who doesn't care about her, who promises to come to her softball games but usually doesn't show up, and doesn't pay child support. Her mother has a boyfriend and she is pregnant with his child. Counseling is being considered for the 10 year old. I got a phone call from someone looking for a place for a young girl to go. She was in tears at work because she is being put out of her house by her mom. Her mom went through her daughter's back pack and found a small amount of marijuana. The girl says mom has been looking for any excuse to get her out. She's looking for someplace to stay but can only afford \$450 a month. I heard from a person, married with your children, but his spouse is talking about separation and it is killing him. He wants to keep his marriage together, but it doesn't seem probable. And that was just Wednesday!

There are many others who are lonely and heartbroken. There are people with physical needs, emotional needs, and spiritual needs. And we are the people whom God has called to meet those needs. The love of God must flow through us to others. When love is flowing we are alive like a river of life, when love is not flowing and we are keeping God's blessings to ourselves, we are like a stagnant lake. We, the people of God, the church, we get power by meeting the world's need.

The second place we get power is in the fellowship we have together. At least the fellowship we ought to have.

Author and pastor Chuck Swindoll tells a powerful story about an old Marine buddy of his who, to Chuck's surprise, came to know Christ after he was discharged. Chuck was surprised because his buddy cursed loudly, fought hard, chased women, drank heavily, loved war and weapons, and hated chapel services.

Sometime later Chuck ran into this old buddy, and after they had talked awhile, his buddy put his hand on Chuck's shoulder and said, "You know, Chuck, the only thing I still miss is that old fellowship I used to have with all the guys down at the tavern. I remember how we used to sit around and let our hair down. I can't find anything like that for Christians. I no longer have a place to admit my faults and talk about my battles - where somebody won't preach at me and frown and quote me a verse.

It wasn't one month later that in his reading Chuck came across this profound paragraph and I quote: "The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit that there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His church. It's an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality - but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets, and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because most people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers. With all my heart," this writer concludes, "I believe that Christ wants His church to be unshockable, a fellowship where people can come in and say, 'I'm sunk, I'm beat, I've had it.' Alcoholics Anonymous has this quality - our churches too often miss it."

"Now before you take up arms to shoot some wag that would compare your church to the corner bar," Chuck Swindoll continues, "stop and ask yourself some tough questions, like I had to do. Make a list of some possible embarrassing situations people many not know how to handle.

"A woman discovers her husband is a practicing homosexual. Where in the church can she find help where she's secure with her secret? Your mate talks about separation or divorce. To whom do you tell it? Your daughter is pregnant and she's run away - for the third time. She's no longer listening to you. Who do you tell that to?

"You lost your job, and it was your fault. You blew it, so there's shame mixed with unemployment. Who do you tell that to? Financially, you were unwise, and you're in deep trouble. Or a man's wife is an alcoholic. Or something as horrible as getting back the biopsy from the surgeon, and it reveals cancer, and the prognosis isn't good. Or you had an emotional breakdown. To whom do you tell it?

"We're the only outfit I know that shoots its wounded." Chuck concludes. "We can become the most severe, condemning, judgmental, guilt-giving people on the face of planet Earth, and we claim it's in the name of Jesus Christ. And all the while, we don't

even know we're doing it. That's the pathetic part of it all." (End of quote [a very long quote]).

That's a pretty powerful indictment of the church at its worse. But it's not the kind of fellowship we are seeking, because it's not the kind of fellowship Christ blesses. And Chuck Swindoll has never been to our M.E.N. (Men's Encouragement Network) on Monday nights. And perhaps it's the same with the women's In-Touch home fellowship (I don't know because I don't attend the women's group, just the men's group), and in every aspect of our church where we are seeking to be a fellowship that draws people with real problems and surrounds them with Christ's love. Where we lift up one another then seek to lift up those outside our doors. We welcome all people, not that we water down God's truth, but we share it with grace. For when a church is full of grace and truth it's powerful. We are not perfect but we are seeking to be that kind of fellowship for the second place the church gets its power is from our fellowship in Christ.

in verse 11 Jesus prays, "now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are." It's interesting that Jesus prays for our protection, but doesn't ask that we be kept from trouble, He doesn't pray for our safety, Jesus knows that pain is unavoidable in this world. There was no way to avoid that. So rather than pray that we avoid trouble, He prays for our UNITY. Now, why would He pray that? Because there is strength in unity, there is power in unity. When you have people in the church you can turn to in times of trouble you can bear almost any pain and turmoil in your life. The church is at its best when it is providing that kind of support and oneness.

And third, (also seen in this verse 11) the church gets its power from the knowledge that God is with us through the power of His Holy Spirit.

"now protect them by the power of your name."

I was sitting at my desk trying to think of an illustration for this point. I was trying to think of an illustration about how many times we do ministry and don't think it is doing any good or making a difference only to find out years down the road that it did make a difference. I came up with one thing and then I changed my mind. Then I started to type something else, but I wasn't happy with it either.

Then "out of nowhere" someone I haven't seen in some time sent me a message through Facebook. You can imagine my surprise when I heard the tone signal on my smart phone, touched the screen and read this:

"I gave someone advice today based on something you told me and taught one Sunday - it benefited him greatly. (I) Just wanted you to know that you "made an apostle" and I'm carrying what you taught forward... ([see] someone was/is listening)."

I looked at what he wrote with wonder and awe, and got chills – it was a goose-bump-blessing- moment, for it was exactly the type of illustration I was looking for.

Now, understand that what he is talking about is in reference to something I said in a sermon maybe 15 to 20 years ago. I don't even remember saying it. But it is highly possible that when I had preached that message that day I went home wondering if anyone got it. I went home wondering if it made a difference. I know that because many times we preachers feel that way. But here is what I realized; On that Sunday as I sought to minister it was not I who had words of advice that this man was able to pass on recently. It was the Holy Spirit. And not only did the Holy Spirit show me that, He even sent me the illustration for it. And it was the Holy Spirit that brought it to the memory of my friend who was sharing it with his friend 20 years later. And it was the Holy Spirit that had him tell me about it. Wow!

But, that is what Christ promised us, isn't it? (Matthew 28:20) "And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

It's not easy ministering to others, but He will give us the power to overcome our weaknesses and to accomplish the task to which He has assigned us. Where do we get our power? From the world's need, from our fellowship together, and from the presence of the One who goes with us.

Jesus prayed that the Father would secure and unify His followers - us! That prayer has been answered in a great and marvelous way – even though the church today is certainly not all that He means for it to be. But we are still meeting the world's needs. And He is still with us.