

Power

A Sermon by Rev. Mark D. Pendleton

" ... Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you' (Matt. 9:28,29).

One month ago I sat and talked with a college friend on a hill which overlooked an athletic field. We were watching a lacrosse game together. As we talked, his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter toddled up the hill to meet us. She was crying. What was wrong? I didn't know. But what struck me was what she did as she came up the hill. She went to her father, took him by both hands, and began pulling on him. She wanted his attention and his help. As I watched daughter and father, I sensed that something profound was being pictured in their interaction, though at the time I didn't know what it was.

After this service, and each day for the rest of your lives there is going to be a test, and the test will have three questions. Right or wrong is not an issue with this test. No one will see your answers. No one will give you a score. What is at issue is your personal sense of contentment and happiness, and the level of effectiveness you enjoy with people around you. The answers you give will be indicators of how much peace you feel inside, and of the level of effectiveness you enjoy in relationships.

And so, the first question of the test is this: Who is God? And we might ask that question in a different way: Who is the source of power in your life? The second question is: How powerful is your God? And the third question: What will you do?

Once when Jesus was leaving His own city, two blind men followed Him. They cried out, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" So Jesus turned aside into their home. The two blind men approached Him, and Jesus asked them a question: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord" was their reply. "Then He touched their eyes saying, 'According to your faith let it be to you.'"

But this isn't the only story of its kind in the New Testament. There are six others like it. A centurion's boy was healed of paralysis (Matt. 8:5-13). A woman with a flow of blood for twelve years was made well (Matt. 9:20-22). A Canaanite woman's demon-possessed daughter was healed

(Matt. 15:21-28). Jairus' only daughter, who was almost dead, arose and walked; her spirit was restored (Mark 5:22-42). Blind Bartimaeus received his sight (Mark 10:46-52). And a woman who was a sinner was forgiven and saved (Luke 7:36-50).

These are different stories, different people, different problems. What are the common denominators in all of the stories? All of the people in those stories wanted to feel the Lord's healing power, and so all of them came to Jesus. All of them believed that He had the power to heal them.

The centurion came and pleaded with Jesus, and when Jesus said that He would come and heal his boy, the centurion answered, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only speak a word and my boy will be healed."

The woman with the flow of blood came and touched the hem of His garment. "If only I may touch His clothes," she thought to herself, "I shall be made well." Jesus turned to see who had touched Him. The woman was afraid. She trembled. In an instant she had been made well and she knew it. So she came and fell down before Him. She told the whole truth in front of everyone. She told the reason why she had touched Him and how she had been healed immediately.

The Canaanite woman came and cried out to Jesus, "Have mercy, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely demon-possessed!" Jesus didn't answer. And so she came and worshipped Him: "Lord help me."

Jairus, man of prominence, ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at His feet. He begged Jesus earnestly, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her that she may be healed and she will live."

Blind Bartimaeus sat by the road begging. When he heard that Jesus was passing by, he cried out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" When people around Bartimaeus told him to keep quiet, Bartimaeus cried out all the more. Jesus stopped. He commanded that Bartimaeus be called to Him. Bartimaeus threw aside his garment, rose and came to meet Jesus. Jesus asked him a question: "What do you want Me to do for you?" "My great one," he replied, "that I may receive my sight."

And finally, a woman who was a sinner brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil. She stood at Jesus' feet behind Him and wept. She washed

His face with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. She kissed His feet and anointed them with oil.

These are different stories, different people, different problems. And in each case the Lord was able to perform the miracle that was longed for. Why? Because in each case the person came to Him with a conviction that He had the power to heal. And so after each miracle, Jesus had something to say to the person who had been healed. To the centurion He said, "Go your way, and as you have believed, so let it be done for you." To the woman with the issue of blood He said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your affliction." He answered the Canaanite woman, "O woman, great is your faith. Let it be to you as you desire." When the report came from Jairus' house that his daughter was dead, why trouble the teacher any further? Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not be afraid; only believe and she will be made well." To Bartimaeus He said, "Go your way. Your faith has made you well." And finally, to the woman who was a sinner He said, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Seven stories, and each points to a simple truth: Jesus Christ is God, the one and only one who is able to heal. He is the one and only one who heals "every sickness and every disease" (Matt. 9:35).

And so, in the gospel of John, we are encouraged to believe in the Lord: "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'" (John 6:35). "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). "Whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in His name" (John 20:30,31).

In the Lord Jesus Christ we have our life. With Him as our help, we can have personal power in all that we do.

As I was preparing for this sermon, I was reminded of a passage in the book Heaven and Hell in which Swedenborg describes the power the angels have in the spiritual world (HH 229). Any obstruction which presents itself to them, welling up out of hell, the angels are able to

disperse in a moment. And so, as a witness to happenings in the spiritual world, Swedenborg saw mountains which were occupied by evil spirits cast down and overthrown. Rocks which the evil spirits were hiding amongst were split in two. As Swedenborg watched, he saw evil spirits scattered and cast into hell. The angels who were able to do this exercised their power by an effort of will and by a look. It didn't matter how cunning, or how deceptive, or how convincing the evil spirits were. The angels were able to see through their efforts and disperse them in a moment.

We can have that same kind of power in our lives. We can feel the presence of evil spirits as they come to us, out of hell, in the form of harmful desire. We can see through any argument that they pose to our minds.

But when the doctrine for the New Church speaks about the power that angels have in the spiritual world, they also talk about angels' loss of power. Reading from Heaven and Hell: "But it must be understood that angels have no power whatever from themselves, but that all their power is from the Lord; and that they have power only so far as they acknowledge this. Whoever of them believes that he has power from himself instantly becomes so weak as not to be able to resist even a single evil spirit" (HH 230).

Like angels, as soon as we think we have power from ourselves over the influence of evil spirits, we lose that power: "You search the scriptures," Jesus said, "for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they who testify of me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:39,40). "And He said to them, `You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. Therefore I said to you that ... if you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins'" (John 8:23,24).

Seven stories from the New Testament, and each points to a simple truth: Jesus Christ is God, the one and only source of power for angels in the spiritual world and for people in this world. But implicit in that truth is a second, simple truth: He is able. He is able to heal every sickness and every disease. No human problem is too great for Him to overcome. "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

When was the last time you went to the Lord for help? When was the last time you sought Him in prayer and asked Him to help you with

something? When you sought Him, what did you ask? And when you asked, did you believe? Did you really believe that He is able to grant that request? "Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things He says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive, and you will have" (Mark 11:22-24). "All things whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (Mark 11:24).

The last time you sought the Lord for help, did you believe that what you asked for would come to pass? Do you really believe, for example, that the Lord is able to overcome your greatest fault?

The Lord Jesus Christ is God. He is able to heal any sickness and any disease. No human problem is too great for Him to overcome if only we will believe that He can do it.

But let us not forget the third question in the test: What will you do? You see, if we accept the Lord as our God, and if we believe that He has power to heal every sickness and every disease, then we are left with a final logical question: How will we follow through?

Suppose, for example, a teenager is having trouble in school. She trusts her parents for their wisdom and for their advice, and so she comes to them to talk about it. "All my teachers are against me," she says. Her parents listen, they talk with her about her problem, and maybe they suggest one or two options for how she might behave differently, to help nurture her relationships with her teachers. Suppose that teenager doesn't try any of the suggestions that have been given to her by her parents. She goes right on behaving as she has in the past. Can it really be said that she trusts the wisdom of her parents if she doesn't follow through?

If the Lord is God, and if we believe that He has power to heal and save, the natural and logical consequence is that we would follow through on whatever advice He gives us to help with the healing (see AC 10083:6).

In this regard I am reminded of the number of times that I have talked with people about trouble in human relationships. Often in those conversations I have recalled the teaching in the New Testament which says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between

you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matthew 18:15).

How many of us know that truth from the New Testament? How many of us are aware of that piece of advice for helping relationships heal? And yet how many of us, when we think of a teaching like that, will say, "That's too hard to do. That's too hard to follow through on." And a response like that is understandable; there can be a lot of fear surrounding such an approach to our brother: "What will he do?" "Will she even listen to me?" "He will yell at me." "Maybe I'll just let it lie. After all, it doesn't seem important enough to bring up."

There you are, hurting in a personal relationship. You want to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You want to believe He has power to heal and save. The Lord has called to your mind a bit of advice out of His Word one that you sense may help and yet you aren't following through on that advice.

If Jesus Christ is our God, and if we believe that He is able to heal and save, and if He suggests a course of action and we don't follow His lead, can it really be said that we believe in Him? Can we really expect that we will be helped in our struggles? Jesus said, "If you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ belief that He has power to lift us up and save us; belief that He is able to accomplish whatever we long for is the first and most essential element of spiritual life (see AC 10083:5,6). It's the beacon in the night to which every ship will eventually turn. It's the pearl of great price. Without it no one can see and no one can love, and no one can be truly happy or at peace (see AC 10083:6). The Lord Jesus Christ is power, and He alone is peace.

One month ago I sat and talked with a college friend on a hill which overlooked an athletic field. We were watching a lacrosse game together. As we talked, his two-and-a-half-year-old daughter toddled up the hill to meet us. She was crying. What was wrong? I didn't know. But what struck me was what she did as she came up the hill. She didn't even notice that I was there. The only one she saw was her father. Here was one of her parents who could help her. She wasn't going to be distracted by anyone or anything else. She went straight to her father, took him by both hands, and began pulling on him. She wanted his

attention and his help. "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be healed of your affliction." Amen.

Lessons: Matt. 9:27-31, AC 10083