

## — Power In The Word — Preaching's Sure Foundation

*Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

Jesus said to wait there in Jerusalem until the power came. He didn't want them to run off and try to launch ministry in anything less than the dynamite of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever waited for the power of God? Do you minister in the power of God? Sometimes the frequency of preaching out runs the time to wait on God because there are so many other things you have to do. It's pretty disappointing to begin sharing the Word and realize you're dry.

Preaching has taken some different turns lately. The invitation has always been fairly controversial but it's less common all the time. It seems to be replaced by a lengthy pastoral prayer that recaps the sermon and asks God to do things in lives. The preaching itself is predominately topical. Everything is a series. There are different kinds of topical preaching. Some topical sermons are completely made up by the preacher who picks a theme, thinks up points to go with it and then plugs some scripture in that in some way relates to his points. There is also a textual-topical sermon that starts with a verse or verses and takes its outline from the text. The points are often supported by much other scripture.

There are still many preachers who do some level of exposition, going verse by verse through a book or even through the whole Bible. The theme, outline, sub-points and details are all derived from the text at hand and limited outside texts are included. Do you have strong convictions or opinions about preaching styles? Do you have preferences? I think textual-topical is helpful in staying fresh. I've never found it that feasible to "be in Romans for eleven years" as I've heard some men say. However, expository is nice because you never have to wonder what you'll preach about next.

Well, however you slice that pie, the real question comes back to the matter of power. Are you handling the Word of God in the power of God, or does your ministry rest somewhere else?

First century ministry had to have been daunting. No cultural basis of faith — barely any religious foundations; after all until Jesus came the world hadn't heard from God in four hundred years. So with no Bible, just a few unknown fisherman and a tax man with a divine mandate to disciple every person into a follower of Jesus, launched out to establish the Church.

*Acts 4:33 And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.*

There's the key. "With great power" — they did wait for the power and now it carried them along and made great impact as they testified to the resurrection of Jesus. As they moved among the people, conducted temple ministry and preached the good news, power was pivotal. They gladly relied on God's power to bring conviction, clarity and commitment to people's hearts. They seemed light on marketing and heavy on spiritual reality as they reached out to their world.

By the time Paul wrote to the Romans he summarized his outlook:

*Romans 1:16 For 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.*

He knew that God's power was endemic in the gospel which meant merely saying it to someone released God's power into their life. He didn't apologize to anyone for this nor was he in any way ashamed.

He acknowledged that the message and word of the cross are offensive to pagans:

*1 Corinthians 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*

Paul's first commitment was to preach Jesus and the word of the cross, always avoiding anything that could empty the power on the ground. Amazingly, even water baptism could be a problem if handled improperly.

*18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

Unbelievers consider the whole concept of a dying Savior foolish, and especially the part about the death being on a cross. But he knew that the instant God touched a heart with saving grace, that same message again proved it was the power of God as that heart turned in faith to Jesus. Because he knew this fact he preached in a certain way:

*1 Corinthians 2:4 And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.*

He didn't fall back on human resource or method — skillful oratory wasn't his focus. Rather, he trusted in the demonstration of the Spirit and power to put a vital, dynamic faith in people that rested not on natural wisdom, but on God's power. Powerful preaching provided the proper foundation for faith in the hearers.

*Colossians 1:28 We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.*

If there ever was a purpose statement, this is it! Proclaiming, admonishing, teaching, and laboring all for one reason — to present every man complete (mature, perfected, independently dependent on Christ) in Christ. Paul poured his life into people with exhausting labor, but the energy and authority was Jesus' power. The power mightily worked in him giving the ability to accomplish the task. Here is the critical question: According to what power are you ministering — from your soul or from the Christ in you?

*1 Thessalonians 1:5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*

One of Paul's most successful ministries was in Thessalonica and it all started with this five-fold gospel presentation. He proclaimed the good news in word, power, the Holy Spirit, full conviction and lifestyle. It is imperative that the message be spoken. If a person is going to get saved, someone has to tell them how to do it. But words alone don't get it done — power (*dunamis*), that is ability, efficiency and might must be present and at the disposal of the Holy Spirit for there to be full conviction. At last, the proclaimer's life must back up what he preaching or the message may be negated.

*Hebrews 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

Now we come near to the answer of the question: How can a man have and move and minister in the power of God? Notice that Jesus sustains all of creation by the word (*rhema*) of His power (*dunamis*). *Rhema* is a spoken word that bursts forth from the foundation of faith. *Logos* is the exhaling of God, His eternal Word which is also Jesus Himself. When *logos* is spoken it is to be received into the heart of the hearer who is to combine it with faith that is a solid anchor. Then that faith - processed *logos* is transformed into *rhema* that bursts forth to excite faith in the next hearer as stated in Romans 10:17. Faith comes by the

*rhema* of God. Hebrews 4:1,2 explain the train wreck of faith that kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land. They had the good news proclaimed to them, but they did not combine the word they heard (*logos*) with faith and thus they crashed in unbelief. Preaching must be done in the same power that Jesus uses to sustain the universe and that power is activated by the preacher seeking out the *logos* of God, combining it with *pistis* in his heart, and then proclaiming *rhema* which causes faith in the hearers.

This is huge and not all that easy. A whole generation died short of God's rest because they didn't combine His Word with faith and live out His power. Hebrews cautions that unbelief will to this day have devastating results in anyone's life.

*Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

This is the bottom line: the Word of God is alive and authoritative, sharp enough to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and capable of discerning thoughts and motives of human hearts. The Word of God preached in the power of God can do things that only God can do and it doesn't need to be preached about, but simply preached.

To preach in power you must first process *logos* into *rhema* so that you are in the power of the Spirit in your own life. Then you must go to the Word and let it be the source of all that you will say. Don't create a bunch of thoughts you have on a subject and then try to support them with a verse or two. Instead identify the theme of your text and then outline it, do the word studies necessary to unlock the message, then share this *rhema* with your people and watch God create faith in their hearts. Call on the Holy Spirit to apply the living Word to lives and you will be amazed with the growth of your people.

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[rtflame@msn.com](mailto:rtflame@msn.com)     [rekindletheflame.org](http://rekindletheflame.org)     303.883.0944

George & Kathee Stepan

**Rekindle The Flame Ministries**

PO Box 746523  
Arvada, CO 80006