

“Spiritual Authority” (Part 2 of 2)

(Matthew 16.16-19; Luke 9.1-2, 6; Luke 10.1-3, 17-19);

Acts 3.1-16; Acts 16.16-18; Ephesians 2.6-10; John 14.12-14

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Episode 1. (Matthew 16:16-19) Jesus says to Simon Peter: “You are Peter. (*Rock.*) On this *rock* I’ll build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.” Meaning: the gates of Hades will *try* to overpower it – but they will fail. Jesus continues: “I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you let loose on earth will be let loose in heaven.” Meaning: I’m giving you a share of my spiritual authority. You will have *power*, here on earth – power to bind things, pin things down, put them in shackles; power, also, to *unbind* things, unpin them, unshackle them. Everything you bind or unbind here on earth will have its corollary in the heavenly realm. What you do *here* affects things *there*. What kind of *power* is Jesus giving Peter here? What kind of *authority*? What kind of things might Peter want to *bind* or *unbind*?

Episode 2. (Luke 9:1-6) Jesus gives his twelve disciples power and authority over all demons, and the ability to heal diseases. He sends them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. They come back and tell him everything that they accomplished. Demons submitted to their authority. People were cured of terrible diseases. They exercised the spiritual authority Jesus gave them. They *bound*, and they *set free*, and the gates of Hades had *nothing* on the Kingdom of God.

Episode 3. (Luke 10:1-3, 17-19) Jesus sends out seventy-two other disciples. He tells them what to do. Share God’s peace. Heal the sick. Bring the Kingdom. They come back amazed: “Lord, even the *demons* submit themselves to us in your name.” Why did they submit? *Because the disciples were using the power of Jesus’ name.* Jesus responds: “I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.” The gates of Hades have *nothing* on the Kingdom of God. When people exercise the *power* and *authority* that Jesus grants them, and they do so *in the name of Jesus*, things happen. The sick are healed. Demons are bound. People are freed. The Kingdom of God advances. Hades trembles. Satan falls from heaven. Jesus says to those amazed disciples: “I have given you authority to crush snakes and scorpions underfoot.” He’s not just talking about creatures of the flesh. He’s talking about strongholds of darkness. “I have given you authority,” he says, “over all the power of the enemy.”

Are you getting the picture? Sickness, disease, debilitating conditions – God’s kingdom is *opposed* to such things. Jesus desires people to be *free*. Death and decay are not part of God’s plan for

this world. God sends Jesus to do something about them, and Jesus sends his *disciples* to do the same. There are dark spiritual forces that manifest themselves in physical ways here on this earth. Jesus gives his disciples power and authority to *bind* those forces, to *stop* them from having debilitating effects on people. What if Jesus has given people like us power and authority to *bind* those forces of darkness? To heal people from their diseases? To cast out demons? To help the lame literally to walk, the blind literally to see; to free people who are afflicted with disease, addictions, mental illness, cancer?

I hear objections. Someone says: “These are just stories. Metaphors. God doesn’t *really* give people that kind of power.” Really? Says who? The New Testament says he does. What makes *you* wiser than John, Paul, and all the rest? Why would God’s Word say we have power if we really don’t?

Someone else says: “Sure. Those disciples *back then* could do it. But *we* can’t do it now.” Oh, yeah? Who put *that* notion in your head? Who *taught* you that? Where is that in the Bible? Could it be that there’s a spiritual force that doesn’t want you to *believe* that you have that kind of power?

Episode 4. (Luke 9:37-43) A man asks Jesus to cast a demon out of his son, a demon causing the boy to have seizures. The man says to Jesus: “I begged your disciples to throw it out, but they couldn’t.” Why couldn’t they? Did they not have the power? No, that’s not it; this takes place after Jesus gave the power to twelve of them. What happened? Did they forget how to use it? Did they stop *believing*? Jesus says: “You faithless and crooked generation, how long will I have to put up with you?” The problem isn’t their lack of power. The problem is their lack of *faith*. They didn’t think they could do it – *and so they couldn’t*. Jesus speaks sternly to the demon – he *binds* the demon – and the boy is healed.

Episode 5. (Acts 3:1-16) After the resurrection. Peter and John are going to the temple to pray. A blind beggar asks them for money. A donation, a handout, something to help him get by. Peter says: “I don’t have any silver or gold, but what I have, I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ, *stand up and walk*.” The man gets up, *free*, walking and leaping and praising God. How did Peter do it? He explains: *The name of Jesus* made this man strong. “Because of faith in Jesus’ name, God has strengthened this man.” That *name* means something. It’s got *power*. But it only works if you *believe* it does.

Episode 6. (Acts 16:16-18) Several years later. Paul and his companions are in a Roman colony. He is disturbed by a young handmaid, who has a demonic spirit of divination, which her masters used to make a profit. He says to the spirit: “I command you, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her.” He uses the *name of Jesus*. Remember that Paul had never once met Jesus in the flesh. He was not one of those people on whom Jesus had poured out his power in the gospels. Paul came to know Jesus after his resurrection, after his ascension. In that regard, Paul is *just like us*. Jesus did not just share his power and authority during his ministry *on earth*. He shares it, from heaven, with those who follow him *now*.

Paul says in Ephesians that God has “made us alive *together with Christ*,” that God has “raised us up *together with Christ*,” that God has “made us sit *together with Christ*” in the heavenly realm. (Ephesians 2:6-10) He’s not talking about our *future* life, our life after death; he’s talking about our life, *now*, as we live *for Christ* and *in Christ* here on earth. Something *happens* to us when we become believers, when we place our trust in Jesus, when the Holy Spirit comes upon us; *we get to share in the benefits that Christ himself received*. Among those is the ability to *sit with Christ* in the heavenly realm,

at the right hand of God the Father Almighty – where the *power* is. *We* get to wield it – just like *he* did.

Back in the gospels, in John, on the eve of the passion, Jesus had said to his disciples: “whoever believes in me will do the works that I do.” (John 14:12-14) Is he kidding? Is it hyperbole? Or does he *really mean it*? Do we really have the ability to wield spiritual power and authority the way Jesus himself did? John says we do. Paul says we do. Mark says that certain “signs” will be given to those who believe in Jesus’ name, including the ability to heal the sick and cast out demons. (Mark 16:17-18) James says that if anyone is sick, the elders of the church should pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of Jesus. (James 5:14) There’s a consistent message, across a huge portion of the New Testament: *there is power in the name of Jesus* – spiritual power and authority, that *we* have access to.

The only question is whether we’re willing to try *wielding* it. I know, some of you aren’t so sure about this. We’re Presbyterians; we’re good at helping people with kind deeds, acts of mercy, gifts of charity. This spiritual stuff comes less easily to us. *But does that mean it’s not worth a shot*? If I told you that you had the ability to do something about that sickness, something about that disability, something about that addiction, something about that mental illness, something about that *cancer*, and it wasn’t going to cost you a *dime* – would you be willing to give it a shot? There are *strongholds* out there – strongholds impacting people *you love* – *don’t you want to help your friends, your loved ones*?

I need to be honest: I am not an expert on these matters. I’ve had to learn, from people wiser and more experienced than I am. But I do have three pieces of advice, if you’re willing to give this a try.

First: offer your prayers *in the name of Jesus*. There’s something special about that name. Something *powerful*. It’s got *authority*. Don’t just pray to God. Pray *in the name of Jesus, your Lord*. And don’t just do it half-heartedly. Pray like you *mean* it. With *belief* that it really can *break strongholds*.

Second: don’t just pray *for* people. Pray *against* the strongholds that have taken up residence in them. When Jesus and the disciples wanted to free someone who had a spirit or a demon, they spoke to the spirit or the demon. There are dozens of examples in the New Testament. “In the name of Jesus Christ, I command you, *come out of him*.” When someone you love is suffering from cancer, don’t just pray for them to get better. *Talk to the cancer itself*. Command it, in the name of Jesus, to *leave*.

Third: treat the spiritual strongholds of darkness as just that: *strongholds*. Your friend who has cancer: imagine that it’s a dark fortress, a malignant blight in God’s good creation, an invading power, an affront to his Kingdom. You want to break down the walls, crush those stones into rubble. *Don’t expect that one little prayer is going to take care of it*. Don’t come at a fortress with a *twig* when what you really need is a *battering ram*. There were times when even Jesus had to command a demon to leave *more than once* before the demon submitted to his authority. (See Mark 5:1-13, especially verse 8). You need to hit hard, and you may need to hit repeatedly. Hit those strongholds *hard*, and hit them *repeatedly*, until the gate breaks down, and the darkness is bathed and conquered in light.

You’ve got power – power to make Hades tremble. You’ve got authority – over all the power of the enemy. You can bind and set free, in the name of the Jesus. So ... *what are you going to do now?!?*

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