

L.C.F. 10/7/16

PREACHER: REV. ADRIAN HALLETT

READINGS: COL. 1: 3-13

SERMON TITLE: "PROMISED POWER"

You will notice from our Colossian's reading that Paul talks of 'power'. That is music to the ears for many, many Christians. The promise of power! Many Christians talk of the importance of power... emphasise the need for power in the life of the church. You could actually say that many in the church are

1. ***PREOCUPIED WITH POWER*** (my first heading this morning).

This has been especially true over the last three or four decades. I remember when I was at theological college training for the ministry (78-81), that there was a lot of talk about power - particularly at that time 'power evangelism'. Some of my fellow students bought into this movement and got very involved. The call, or the emphasis was for the church to rediscover the power it once had, to become like the early church in Acts. The emphasis was on the power to heal... to perform the miraculous – then, it was believed, people would sit up and take notice. Modern man would then be so impressed by the power of the church that they would flock to Christ in their thousands. Just like it was in the Book of Acts!

All very appealing! All very attractive! Who wouldn't want the church to be more powerful and effective in our needy world? As I said, many people bought into this, but I can remember feeling uneasy about it all – some people wrote me off as not being very 'spiritual'! But if power... if the miraculous... if dramatic healings were the answer, why did Jesus say, as the crowds gathered around him? *'This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah'* (speaking of his resurrection). Time and again, the people asked for another sign... another miracle, but their motives were all wrong. They were fascinated and impressed by his ability to perform miracles, but they just wanted more.... yet another miracle – 'Let's see what this miracle worker will do next. What trick will he perform for us now?' They just got hooked on the miraculous and never understood the purpose of them. They weren't interested in the spiritual significance of the miracles....they just wanted more.... more miracles.... more evidence of his power.

They too were a people preoccupied with power, but in the end, they turned on him.... despised him.... rejected him.... and shouted 'crucify him!' Miracles alone, more evidence of power alone are not the answer.

But the preoccupation with power goes on....we've had calls for 'power evangelism'.... we've had calls for more power to witness, more power to work miracles.... more power to have an effective healing ministry, more power to overcome demonic forces.... more power to take control of cities under the control of Satan.... more and more power.... this craving for power - so that the world will sit up and take notice!

And still I am uneasy about this constant preoccupation with power. Matthew 7 v. 21-23 are the two scariest verses in the Bible: *“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers'.*

These people thought they were Christians.... these people claimed to be Christians....these people undoubtedly had power.... these people were preoccupied with power, to the extent that they had tapped into the wrong power source. They had to have power, and in the end didn't take the trouble to 'test the spirits'... to check on the source of this 'power'. If Jesus doesn't know them, then what they were doing was not being done in the power of the Holy Spirit. The only alternative power source is the demonic. What a warning that is for all those who become occupied with power! Scary, scary stuff!

So, we have to be very careful in our search for power. Having said that, is there

2. A PLACE FOR POWER

The answer to that is a resounding 'yes!' There is a right power.... the power of God.... the power of the Holy Spirit.... there must always be a place for the power of God.... for the church to be renewed and empowered. There must always be a place for God to work in revival power. And there have been some marvellous moments in church history when God has worked in that way – something that the we should pray for and long for, so that people might be genuinely convicted of sin and cry out for salvation. There is a place for God's power, but it has to be *his* power..... this power is not something that we can in some way 'manufacture'.... we can't be the ones, as it were, to 'order' God to work in power.... 'name it and claim it', as it is in the Word Faith Movement (or

'blab it and grab it' as some critics of that movement describe it!). We can't use our faith as some kind of impersonal force (as some apparently believe) to force God's hand.... a kind of 'lever' that prompts him into action.

There is a place for power – God's power to save, heal and deliver.... that is a legitimate prayer concern...to see God moving in power on masses of people in true revival.

There is a place for power, revival power, but is that the kind of power that Paul is talking of here? Revivals are not that common. We pray for them, we long for them, but they are certainly not an everyday occurrence. In the meantime, we have to live out our Christian lives in the real, ordinary, everyday world. We need power for that and that is what we now turn to, the promised power to Christians to enable them to live out their Christian life:

3) *THE PROMISED POWER*

The world in which you and I live is not an easy world in which to live – even, for Christians. We all have various and different problems and difficulties to face. We can't avoid them. Many Christians, when talking of power, particularly the power of faith, expect that God will in some way lift them out of the problems and difficulties that people (lesser Christians) have to face because they don't have enough faith. But when the problems and difficulties continue, even though they have exercised the 'power of faith', they are left feeling confused and discouraged – the power they were trusting in doesn't deliver. Jesus said didn't he, 'that in this world you will have tribulation' – he didn't promise us an easy ride, but he did promise to be with us *through* the trials and tribulations. This is what Paul is pointing to in his letter to the Colossians. He's pointing to the promised power of God for all Christians– to be '*strengthened with all power.... so that you may have great endurance and patience*' (Col.1:11).

Now people in the world are not impressed with something like that.... strength to endure..... they don't like the sound of that.... it's not very appealing to them.... they don't want hear such talk. When the trials and tribulations come, they will generally think it's 'unfair'.... that it's too much to bear.... why should I be unhappy etc. etc..... when it gets too much, they just want out. The tragedy is that many Christians think like that as well.... the problems and the difficulties come.... and because they keep coming and coming.... they begin to think it is pointless to believe.... they doubt God's ability to do anything for them – they give up, or walk away.

Now I don't want to minimise the pain and the struggles and the tensions that many Christians have to face. When we go through painful times and when the trials and tribulations just keep coming and coming, it can be incredibly difficult. I don't know what you might be facing at the moment... it might be relationship problems... it might be a loss of friendship.... it might be marital problems.... you may be having to face a major disappointment.... maybe it's financial difficulties.... maybe it's rejection of friends and family because of your Christian faith.... you've gone 'all religious'... maybe it's a health scare. It may be any of those things or more. One thing we can be sure of – we all to face setbacks, disappointments, frustrations, opposition, rejection – we can't avoid them. We need a full supply of God's promised power if we are to continue steadfastly and to be able to persevere.

There is no 'magic wand'.... there is no promise of a miraculous delivery from the trials and tribulations we have to face, but there is the promise of God's power. Therefore what I can say to you is that you will come through. Why? Because God's power is at work in your life. You may be shaken, but you will not be shattered, knocked down, but not knocked out. And what is more, you will come through this experience with thanksgiving – that's part of the promise as well, *'being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the Father...'* (Col.1:11-12). *'Joyfully giving thanks'* ... even through all that endurance and patience. How can that be? Because through your difficulties you will be brought closer to God himself. What a promise! The promised power for the Christian. A promise I know to be true. I trust that you have or will experience the truth of that for yourselves in whatever you maybe facing.