

Power And Control At The Cross Series

April 05, 2023

Scripture: John 10:17-18, Matthew 26:47-54

John 10:17-18

17. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

18. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Matthew 26:47-54

47. And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.

48. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.

49. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.

50. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

51. And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out *his* hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear.

52. Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

53. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

54. But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

Summary: Although Jesus appeared to be the least powerful man in Palestine when he was on the cross, He was actually the one in control.

It's frustrating to feel powerless, isn't it? To feel as if you're not in control. To feel like things are happening to you, without your consent. No one likes that feeling. And sometimes when people feel this way, they get the urge to do something dramatic, just to prove to themselves that they're not powerless. And so, they do something foolish, or dangerous, or even harmful.

For instance:

· A man feels powerless at work. His boss is always telling him what to do, controlling him, boxing him in. So, one day, he tells his boss he's leaving the job.

· A woman feels powerless in her marriage. Her husband is a dictator.

So, she quits -- she leaves, file for divorce. Or she has an affair, just to feel that she has some kind of control over her own life.

· A teenager resents her parents' authority and control, and so she rebels in destructive ways. Taking drugs, or getting involved in sex, just to prove her independence.

· How about you?

Where do you feel that someone else has control over your life?

We don't have to feel this way. We don't have to feel powerless, "boxed in," trapped. Because the truth is that we are not under the control of other people. We are not powerless; we are not victims. We are the sons and daughters of the King of Kings, Jesus Christ. And when we understand that our attitude will not be one of frustration and anger, but of peace, and joy, and confidence.

But appearances can be deceiving. Consider Jesus Christ, hanging from a cross. By all appearances, he was the least powerful man in Palestine.

He had been arrested, beaten, tried and convicted, sentenced to death, and then stripped of his clothing and brutally nailed to a cross of wood, naked and bleeding.

He was exposed to the elements. He was completely at the mercy of the Roman soldiers guarding him, completely under their control.

He had no army, no military power.

He had no friends in high places, no political power.

He had no money or land to offer in exchange for his freedom.

All of his followers had deserted him. At that moment, He lacked control even over his own movements, the ability to wipe sweat away from his forehead or brush away the flies that buzzed around his open wounds.

He couldn't even raise his hands to protect himself from the garbage and rocks that were thrown at him by hostile onlookers.

Can you imagine anyone more powerless or more lacking in control than this man?

And yet, at that very moment, Jesus Christ was the most powerful man in Palestine, the most powerful man the world had ever seen.

In spite of how it appeared, He was not at the mercy of the Roman authorities; on the contrary, they were at his mercy. And it was only because of his mercy that they were not destroyed on the spot.

Because it wasn't the nails pounded into his flesh that kept Christ on the cross. It was his love that kept him on the cross.

Jesus had the power, any time he wanted, to come down off the cross and annihilate his enemies.

Listen to what he said He was first arrested: Matthew 26:47-54, NIV

"While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs. . . Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed him. Jesus replied, 'Friend, do what you came for.'

Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear.

'Put your sword back in its place,' Jesus said to him . . . Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?'"

A Roman "legion" was six thousand troops, so twelve legions would be 72,000 angels. Jesus is using a large number to emphasize that if he requested, he could have as many angels as he needed to defend him.

How many would he need? Well, in the book of Second Kings [19:35] in the Old Testament, we read that a single angel killed 185,000 soldiers in one night. So obviously, 72,000 angels would have been more than enough to keep Jesus out of the hands of the Romans!

But instead of calling out to God the Father to rescue him, Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, and tried, and crucified, in order to fulfill the commission, he had been given -- that he should lay down his life in payment for our sins.

Jesus Christ was not a powerless victim. He wasn't forced to the cross against His will. He went to the cross voluntarily, for our sakes.

Listen to what He says when he is brought before the Roman governor, Pilate:

John 19:9-11, NLT

"[Pilate] took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, 'Where are you from?' But Jesus gave no answer. 'You won't talk to me?' Pilate demanded. 'Don't you realize that I have the power to release you or to crucify you?' Then Jesus said, 'You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above.'"

If you have any doubt as to whether Jesus was in control before, during, and after his death on the cross, listen to these passages: John 10:17-18, NIV

"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

Acts 2:22-23, NIV

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth . . . was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross."

Jesus Christ, as he hung on the cross, at the moment he appeared to be the most helpless and powerless, was actually in complete control of everything that was happening. It was his choice to allow himself to be arrested; it was his choice to allow himself to be condemned to death by Pilate, and it was his choice to go to the cross, to suffer and die for our sins.

So, what's the significance of all this?

First, it shows that evil did not triumph at the cross. It shows that the power of evil is not greater than the power of love and righteousness. Jesus wasn't overcome by the power of sin and death; instead, he gave up his life of his own accord.

Second, it reminds us that God is the one who is really in control over our lives. No one else. Not the government. Not bosses. Not husbands or wives, not ex-husbands or ex-wives, not judges or lawyers, not doctors or hospitals. The only person who is ultimately in control of your life is God.

This means:

- That those in authority over you are themselves under God's authority and under His control at all times,**
- That their power over you is always limited by God, so that they can do only what he permits and commands, and**
- That their power over you can be revoked by God at any time.**

Or to put it another way, no one (regardless of their title or their position) -- no one can do anything to you, without God's permission. No matter how unpleasant or difficult this person may be, you are not their helpless victim. God is using them to accomplish his purposes in your life.

Now, do "they" acknowledge this? Of course not. Was Pilate trying to advance God's purposes when he condemned Jesus? Did Pilate go back to his study and pull out his Isaiah scroll to read the prophecies about the Messiah, so that he could find out what he was supposed to do next? No.

As far as he was concerned, he was acting purely on his own initiative. He wasn't trying to do what God intended. He had no intention of carrying out God's plan. Yet somehow, he did.

And it's the same with the people who have authority or power over you. They may not have any interest whatsoever in cooperating with God. And yet, somehow, they end up doing just what God intends.

Listen to the words of Joseph, spoken to his brothers, who had sold him into slavery many years before: Genesis 50:19-20, NIV

"But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. . . You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

So, you know that manager of yours who doesn't listen, who gives you bad assignments, who doesn't appreciate your work?

How does that make you feel? Anxious. Worried. Fearful. Angry.

Sometimes you wonder if he has your best interests at heart. Other times, you're sure he doesn't.

But here's the good news: It doesn't matter. Your manager is not in control of your life. Your manager isn't even in control of your career. God is. God may have temporarily granted this person some degree of power in your life. But ultimately, God remains in control, and He will accomplish all of the purposes that He has for you in that job. Your manager does not have the power to thwart God's plans.

It's the same for a husband, or a wife, or an ex-husband or ex-wife, or a parent, or an in-law -- anyone who exercises any kind of control in your life. God may have granted them some degree of power or influence, just like he granted Pilate authority over Jesus. But they don't have any independent power over you at all. They can only do what God permits. And nothing they do, nothing -- no matter how deceitful, or corrupt, or mean-spirited, or selfish, or just plain dumb -- nothing they do can prevent God from carrying out his plans and purposes in your life. They aren't in control. God is.

Now, all of this is a great comfort. But by itself, it's not enough. Just knowing that God is in control; just having a theological conviction that He is sovereign, isn't enough to give us peace.

You have to get this truth out of your head and into your heart. And the one essential practice for doing this is prayer.

In prayer, we take a nugget of truth, and we tell God that we believe it and that we're relying on it. And we ask Him to keep his promises.

So, in this case, we're asking God to bless us through all of the other people in our lives, even if they have no interest in being his instruments of blessing to us. He can do that, and He will, if we ask Him.

That's called exercising faith. And as we continue to pray, as we commit every area of our lives to God, we'll find that our anxiety, and fear, and anger, and worry, and frustration dissipates. It melts away. Why? Because we'll know in our hearts that other people don't really have the power over us that we thought they did. We'll find that the places in our heart where before we had stored up all that anxiety, and fear, and anger, and worry, and frustration -- we'll find that those places are now getting filled up with peace, and joy, and confidence. Because the one who is in control is God, and we know that in Christ He loves us and cares for us more than we can imagine, and He will always, always do what's best.

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