

Text: [2 Corinthians 4:1-9](#)
Date: January 24, 2021
Title: “The Work of God & the Power of God”
Theme: We can’t do the work of God without the power of God.

I’m going to make it really clear today. We can’t do the work of God without the power of God. That’s the bottom line.

And let me tell you why: the work of God isn’t for a day. It isn’t for a week. It isn’t for a season. It’s for all time, and it requires all our time over a lifetime. Its work that’s bigger than any of us, bigger than all of us.

You can’t do that kind of work on your own. You just can’t.

Paul, in his ministry, had a million reasons to be discouraged. He faced persecution from his own people and prosecution by the Roman authorities. Mobs sometimes attacked him. From time to time, those who opposed him would riot.¹ It’s clear if you keep reading in 2 Corinthians, especially chapter 11, that Paul’s life after Jesus called him was anything but easy.

That’s probably not a message any of us want to hear right now. It seems to me we’ve been living through a whole lot of not easy lately – especially these past 11 months. As individuals, as a nation, throughout the whole world, people are struggling. With their health, with the economy, with loneliness and boredom and anxiety – people are struggling.

We oftentimes describe faith as the ultimate source of comfort and consolation. And it is. How else would you describe having direct access to the Creator of the Universe?

And yet, let’s not forget that we often require God’s comfort in direct proportion to our commitment to following God’s call. That is, if it hadn’t been for God’s call, we wouldn’t need so much of God’s comfort and care!

When Jesus shows up at our door and begins his work in our hearts and lives, prompting us to love and serve our neighbors, to serve the causes of

peace and justice and righteousness, it's not just a call to serve when it's convenient. You're not being hired for a part-time job.

There will be times when a friend will call in the middle of the night, and you'll respond, because that's what it means to love and care for the people around you. There will be times when you'll see something happening – at work or in the community - that you can't agree with, and you'll stand up and say something, even at the risk of your job or your reputation. There will be times when you'll make a decision to help some-one else, even though it means giving away money you had planned to spend on something else.

Sometimes you'll be tired. I've listened to interviews with doctors and nurses treating COVID patients and they're just tired. Exhausted. Physically, emotionally, spiritually. And I'm sure they're not the only ones. Maybe you are too. Taking care of the world will do that to you. It will wear you out. And yet, God will not leave you alone. God will not let you quit.

Paul even says that it's part of God's design: this relentless call, and our persistent weakness, is to remind us that it's not about us, and it never was. "We don't preach about ourselves," he says. "We preach Jesus Christ as Lord."

The treasures of the gospel have been poured into clay jars so that we can remember that the power belongs to God and not to us. That word clay – literally earthen - I'm sure is not chosen lightly. It's chosen not only to create a contrast to heaven, but also as a reminder of God's breathing life into the first human in Creation. What was Adam made from? Dust. Dirt. The earth. The glory of God was pleased to dwell in Christ's earthenware body – not only in his life, but through his death and resurrection – so that we might know that God has the power not only to work through, but to redeem our earthenware bodies too.

And because of that fact, we know these facts. Yes, we're going to see trouble. But we won't be crushed by it. Yes, we'll have days when we are confused, but we don't have to let drag us down into the pit of depression. Sometimes we'll feel harassed, but we can be sure we'll never be abandoned. We might get knocked down, but it wouldn't be wise to count us out.

This is important. In the face of challenges: to our health, our finances, or our relationships, to our jobs or to our families, we'll be tempted to give up. When we meet resistance in doing good – as Paul often did – we'll be tempted to give up. And when we are just bone tired, worn out, and ready to conclude that none of it is worth doing, we'll be tempted to give up. In those moments, we need to know one thing: the power belongs to God. It doesn't come from us.

The things that God values in the world – the things that Jesus spoke about and calls his followers to – love and peace and care for all people – are eternal kinds of work. I don't just mean work done for an eternal reward, though certainly Jesus speaks clearly about the promise of heaven.

I mean that every generation leaves the work unfinished. Through the ages, many have spent entire lifetimes preaching, teaching, praying, marching, and working for peace.

Monday we remembered Martin Luther King, Jr. More than fifty years after his death, we still aren't living into the fullness of his Dream. A skeptic might well ask: then, what was the point? But it's naïve to think that the work that an eternal God calls us to could ever be finished in a single lifetime. It just can't.

What we can hope to do is light a candle and push the edges of the darkness back a little bit farther. "God said that light should shine out of the darkness." And so our task is to allow that light to shine out from us, from our hearts to make our corner of the world just a little bit brighter.

But remember, no light is ever self-sufficient. The candle burns down, the flashlight runs out of battery, the light bulb burns out. Even the sun, in another, oh, 7 or 8 billion years, when it runs out of hydrogen, will burn itself out.

We are not self-sufficient lights, because there is no such thing. Only the One who spoke light out of darkness is self-sufficient, and that One True Light becomes the source of all the light and all the power needed to do the work of love and peace and justice in this world we've been given.

Here's the bottom line: We can't do the work of God without the power of God. The work of God requires all we are and all we have over the course

of a lifetime - because it's tiring and frustrating and all consuming, because it's work that's eternal and important and so much bigger than us. God - sized work can't be done with human-sized energy. We get tired, we get worn out, we get discouraged.

But it's not about us. And it never was. It's about the good news we know in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's about that good news at work in us, and then us carrying that work out into the world. We don't preach about ourselves. We're just the vessels. And imperfect ones at that. The power needs to come from elsewhere.

So I have three questions for you this week:

First, what work of God are you committed to?

Second, how are you tapping into God's power to do that work, so that your light doesn't burn out?

Third, how are you helping someone else tap into God's power, so that their light stays lit too?

We can't do the work of God without the power of God. Remember that.

Amen.

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¹ See Acts 19.