

# God's power for new beginnings

Eph. 1:15-23, Isa. 40:28-31

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## Introduction

“September 11” rings a bell with all of us who were alive back in 2001. The images of those falling towers were permanently engraved on our minds. It was the most powerful attack the US had ever received on its own soil, which was part of what the terrorists wanted to demonstrate: their power against the great Western “Satan.” It was quite a reminder that our world is a veritable powder keg ready to explode with no previous warning. In the first weeks and months after 9/11, there was a major surge in church attendance in the US; people suddenly remembered how fragile and fleeting their lives were and they wanted to connect with transcendence and meaning (Ps. 39:3-7). But within a few months they were settling back into their routines. The Covid pandemic has also made us think about life's transcendence, and the long-term effect on church attendance seems similar too. So we're living with greater insecurity, social instability, and uncertainty, yet this “new normal” is not really new; it's just more “in-your-face.” And the power struggle in our world continues, and everyone is scrambling to try to get some control: how do we do it? Is it by harnessing the forces of nature, using the military or political force, mobilizing the masses? How do we control appetites, obsessions, fears? What is the secret of power in this world?

Where do we get the power to withstand in the midst of so much chaos, turmoil, and evil in our world? In another of my favorite poems (“The Master Speed”), Robert Frost expresses this wish: “In all the rush of everything to waste ... may you have the power of standing still...” But how do we do that in this world where everything is changing at such a rapid pace? In 500 B.C., Heraclitus had already discovered the principle that the only constant is change. And Frost can't be much help to us here, because he was basically a skeptic, even agnostic. And so is our generation, even more degenerate in their attitudes. As followers of Christ, however, we should have no trouble recognizing our true strength is **“in the Lord and in the power of his might.”** So we must **“put on the whole armor of God”** in order to stand against the accuser's schemes, and keep in mind that our true battle is against rulers and authorities (“cosmocrats”) of this present darkness (Eph. 6:10-13). Paul was talking about a kind of power that our world doesn't understand. And it's not just power to withstand,

but to be transformed (controlling our appetite, tongue, temper, spending, fears, passions, etc.); this is the power that will actually transform our world, and it's what we want to explore this morning ... under three headings:

## 1) The power of God in creation

Genesis 1 says God spoke creation into being, so His Word must be more powerful than any created thing. In fact, Psalm 19 says the heavens are declaring His glory and the firmament is proclaiming His handiwork. Hebrews 1:3 adds that God's Son is ***"sustaining all things by His powerful word."*** Our universe has so many hints of design that you have to be obtuse to ignore them – it's far too complex to be the result of random chance! Yet humanity believes itself so brilliant because of our advances in electronics and artificial intelligence. So someone invented a new religion a few years ago dedicated to a new "god" that's been dubbed "A.I." (artificial intelligence). Anthony Levandowski, who was an engineer for Google, thought about it like this: companies worth billions have been inspired by A.I., and if something is a billion times more intelligent than the most brilliant human, "¿how else are you going to call it but 'god'?" So Levandowski launched the **First Church of AI**, also known as "The Way" (of the Future). His next initiative (supposedly "non-profit") is how to go about propagating his "gospel," because **technology has the power to "transform"** every aspect of our existence; so if you're already a "believer," you should start a conversation with others and help them understand what it's about. ¿How many people are already worshiping at the altar of this god? Yet the stars and galaxies show us something so much greater than artificial intelligence: Authentic Intelligence, just like our DNA shows us Living Intelligence! (DNA contains too much ordered information to be the fruit of accidental, fortuitous chance!) But technology makes people feel so empowered that an old out-of-date book like the Bible surely has no *real* power to offer. Jesus said: ***"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"*** (Mt. 24:35). Take time to meditate on the vastness and grandeur of creation – biblical writers did so – and then realize how much greater is our Creator and His Word!

## 2) The power of God in Jesus

He showed a kind of power unknown to His contemporaries as He preached with authority, performed healings and exorcisms, fed multitudes, walked on water, calmed storms – all by the power of His word, exercising authority over everything, from nature to disease and evil spirits and death! One day three of His disciples got a special glimpse into the Man behind the miracles and the source of His power when they were invited to climb the Mt. of Transfiguration. The traditional site is Mt. Tabor, but Mount Hermon, closer to Caesarea Philippi, is likely a better candidate. Either way, it was heavenly glory that transfigured His body and dazzled those disciples out of their minds! What Jesus discussed with Moses and Elijah was His upcoming "departure" which He would carry out in Jerusalem (Greek, exodus). Peter didn't pick up on that; he just thought of honoring these three greats of Hebrew history with three tabernacles. So God had to intervene and set the record straight for Peter when the celestial voice boomed out, ***"This is my Son, the Chosen One! Listen to Him."*** That's what you and I need to do: tune in to the Son. Have you heard this message from the Lord? (Acts 10:38, Heb. 13:8).

So where we see Jesus' power most at work is, of course, in the culmination of His ministry: at the cross (1 Cor. 1:23-24). John Stott, British pastor and teacher, wrote: *"Our Christianity is poor because our Christ is poor."* We desperately need a deeper understanding of Christ's work on the cross! An old hymn says "there's power in the blood," but we easily fall into superstitious interpretations! His blood is not a lucky charm or a magic formula! It's actually a figure of speech known as metonymy, in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it. So Jesus' blood is symbolic language for the Life that was being laid down in love when humanity rose up in rebellion against our Creator. At the cross it didn't look like power, but like weakness! Laying down your life doesn't look at all powerful. But Jesus knew God's power is made perfect in weakness. So He would not force, manipulate, or retaliate. He would not violate the wills of this misguided mob, so intent on destroying His life and authority, because He knew His battle was not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and rulers, the powers of darkness (which we, with our scientific rationalistic perspective, tend to underestimate!). Paul says He was making a spectacle of those cosmocrats (Col. 2:15) as He refused to submit to them, as He showed *their* power to be a lie and a farce. So He triumphed over them – even in the weakness of the cross, where He was still so powerful to save (2 Cor. 5:19)! But this "power"... was **invisible** to almost everyone there, except maybe that pagan Roman centurion who watched Him die and was so impacted by it that he said, *"Surely this man was a son of God!"* In conclusion, you and I are normally like that crowd: not satisfied with a power that nobody can see or acknowledge; we're hungry for visible kinds of power! But the reality of the power of the cross didn't remain invisible; it showed up 100% in the resurrection!

### 3) The power of God in the Christian life

Pastor Tim Keller wrote: *"The majority of our problems in life come from a lack of adequate orientation to the Gospel."* Is your life Gospel-centric? We need to get better oriented to the Gospel! What is God's power supposed to look like in the life of a Christian? It begins with that power of the resurrection: the same strength that raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in us who believe (Eph. 3:18-20)! That's the **power of salvation**, and the gospel **is** that *"power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes"*; it's also the power of the cross (Ro. 1:16). There's **power in the Name of Jesus**, for *"there's no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). There's **power to be transformed**, which comes from the renewal of our mind through the Word (Ro. 12:2). There's the **power of the Holy Spirit** to bear the fruit of Jesus' character (Gal. 5), and power to resist the evil one and advance God's reign in the world, which come from putting on the **whole armor of God**: the belt of truth, preparedness that comes from the Gospel, the breastplate of righteousness [being rightly related], shield of faith, helmet of salvation (Eph. 6). There's His **power made perfect** in our weakness (2 Cor. 12:9), which is also the power of renewal in His Spirit (Isa. 40:28-31).

We desperately need power, but not the kind the world offers! So how do we get connected to true power? It's a matter of meeting with Jesus at the cross every day, putting on that armor for battle, growing deeper in our conversations with our Maker/Redeemer. If we would indeed resist the evil one, have power to withstand in the evil day, and be truly transformed into Kingdom agents, it will be from having the Mind, the Word, and the Spirit of Jesus totally permeating our soul, so much that we learn to think, speak, act and react like Him.