

Powerful Perspectives

Mark 6:14-29

INTRO:

What is your perspective on power? Power can be a dangerous thing. It can also be a vehicle for doing good. There is worldly power — the power of armies and nations, the power of force and coercion. And then there is the power that is unleashed in the world through the presence of Jesus Christ. In the world's eyes, Jesus was *NOT* a powerful person. But in the eyes of faith, we can see that there is a lack of real power in the world's brand of power and there is surprising strength in the unusual power of Christ.

ME:

I sometimes get my perspectives on power backwards. This is when I rely on the powers originating in this world to solve my problems. And you know, there are problems the world can solve with its power, but there are also areas of life that can only be addressed by the power of Jesus.

YOU:

Do you ever get your perspectives on power mixed up like me? Let's see what God can teach us about power in Mark's Gospel:

Let's pray for some wise eyes and ears first...

GOD:

Mark 6:14–29 (NRSV): 14 King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." 15 But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." 16 But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised." 17 For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. 18 For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. 21 But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. 22 When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." 23 And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." 25 Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her.

27 Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

WE:

Lord Acton once said, “**Power corrupts, and absolute power absolutely corrupts.**” The more of life that we walk through the more we see this is true.

What is it about power that corrupts?

As believers we might think that power gives us the slightest idea of what it is like to be God. We define God as omnipotent — *having absolute power*. To be God is to be able to do anything you want. So, we define divinity on the basis of power or the ability to do whatever we want.

Power is something that separates us from God. God is all powerful, and we are reminded daily that we are not.

Another way we are separated from God is that in the wisdom of God . . . We do not have absolute power. There are limits to what we can and cannot do.

We can't make ourselves taller, *the Bible even says so!*

Paul complained, **“I don’t do the good that I want to do.”** Paul said that he could certainly will to do what is right, but then sin made him powerless to do what is right.

When the Bible says, **“Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord”**, I wonder if this is a matter of power. God gives us power over some things, but not over all things, including vengeance. **“Revenge belongs to me.”** The Lord doesn’t trust us with vengeance. When we try to give someone just retribution for some injustice they have committed, we cannot be trusted with vengeance. We may be tempted to think we are doing this for their own good, when in reality what we mean is we are doing this because it makes us feel good.

So God says, **“Revenge? Let me handle that. You do not have the power to work revenge, no matter how justified, on anybody.”**

They say that some of us are in situations in which we have been given a good bit of power over most matters in life, so maybe we are deluded into thinking that we have power over just about everything. For instance, we have been given the power to earn enough money to be sure that our family is well housed and well fed. We have the economic power to get our heart’s desire. And there is a spiritual danger lurking there. The danger is that since we have the power to accomplish so much in ur lives, we get deluded into thinking that we have the power to do anything we want. With

a little more effort we can be almost like God. Such is the sin that is always lurking in power— absolute power — or any kind of power.

Aggravating this is the fact that we are modern people. The modern world was begun as an act of science technology, mass production, and intellectual enlightenment. Power is the promise of the modern world.

The promise of the serpent to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is fulfilled in the modern world. That promise was, and is, that they, that we, would be like God.

Mark tells the story of the murder of John the Baptist. Remember that all the Gospels begin with the ministry of John. He was the forerunner of Jesus, the prophetic figure who preaches in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Messiah. John baptized Jesus, and so Jesus's ministry was begun. John and Jesus must have been very close. And then...Jesus hears of the execution of John the Baptist.

John's voice was a powerful voice. The wilderness preacher with fierce sermons about the coming judgement of God. That voice was snuffed out by a politically powerful voice, that of Herod. And the voice of Herod was more powerful than the voice of John. But, really, it wasn't even the voice of Herod, but the whim of a dancing girl and her mom.

So once again, governmental violence has triumphed. The king has silenced the preacher. Once again, a good person has been annihilated by

the evil power of the state. They say that you don't have to come to church and listen to the Bible to hear a story like that. When it comes to power, the person with the largest guns or the biggest bomb or the sharpest stick wins. The British Empire lied when it said that India was better off under British rule than independence and democracy. Gandhi sought to tell the truth like John the Baptist. But Gandhi was able to do more. He also embodied the truth because he believed that nonviolent power was stronger than the power of violence. So Gandhi called his autobiography [Gandhi an Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth.](#)

The liberation of India from the British Empire was a painful, violent process in which truth and nonviolence prevailed. Not only did Gandhi talk about the injustice of British rule, he also exposed the evil behind the often-benevolent face of the empire through his experiment with the truth. The British had claimed they were in India for benevolent reasons, but as the world watched British soldiers massacre unarmed Indian civilians, the world came to a different verdict, and so did the British people. Herod Antipas is powerful enough to simply speak and a prophet's head is served up on a platter. *That's power!* But in suffering and dying, John the Baptist reveals the weakness that lurks in Herod's brand of power. Here is a king who not only has soiled his sovereignty by having an affair with his brother's wife, but also has stooped to killing the prophet John the Baptist, on the word of a young girl who has pleased him in her dance for him. **This is**

power? There is a great irony behind this violent story of the abuses of power. Herod executed John the Baptist in order to shut him up. But here we are today, still talking about John the Baptist, still remembering his prophetic words, still admiring his courage. We wouldn't be talking about Herod Antipas except he plays a bit part in the drama of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

Herod couldn't shut up the gospel just by executing some of its preachers. The word goes on. This story is being told. New disciples are being instructed and encouraged by this story. It's enough to make us ask,

“Who has real power? Where does true power come from, power that doesn't end when a ruler goes out of office, but power that continues to subvert the old world and bring forth a new world?”

That power is shaped like the cross. It is shaped by a man about whom there was nothing speculative about the way he looked. Isaiah said:

Like a young plant or a root that sprouts in dry ground, the servant grew up obeying the LORD. He wasn't some handsome king. Nothing about the way he looked made him attractive to us.

There was no power in the way he looked, but oh...there was power in the way he loved. He loves you. He loves me. He loves the world out there through us too.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

There is power, real power in the way Jesus loves.

YOU:

What can you do about this? What will you do about this?

CLOSE:

C. S. Lewis wrote this:

He cannot bless us unless he has us. When we try to keep within us an area that is our own, we try to keep an area of death. Therefore, in love, He claims all. There's no bargaining with Him.

So open your life to Jesus and let his love flow through you.

Let's pray together before we go out and let Jesus love others through us...