

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church and I'm grateful to be with you! Before I preach this morning, I've got to tell you something that happened last night at church.

Our small group had planned to have a get together at the church around 4:30 pm; we planned to eat dinner together and we wanted to have a place large enough for our kids to run around. And so, about twenty after four, Naomi and I were in the foyer waiting for people to arrive. As we were standing by the door, we saw a garbage truck come whipping into the parking lot, come to an abrupt halt, and then promptly open the back hatch. As you can imagine, garbage began to pour out of the back onto our parking lot.

I'm thinking to myself, "*Is this really happening? Is he really going to drop his load and then take off?*" So I blazed through the door, ready to tell the driver he had better pick up all that garbage, but by the time I got 10 feet into the parking lot the hatch swung open a little higher and I could see that the garbage in the back of the truck was completely engulfed in flames. Within 30 seconds, two fire trucks had converged on our parking lot and were dousing the garbage and the truck.

I waited until the blaze was out and then asked the fire chief what was going to be done about the garbage, he suggested that I grab my small group, get a few shovels and start to clean up...he was kidding. When the driver phoned in to the garbage company, he told me they were thinking about leaving the pile and dealing with it on Monday. I told him to think again...there's going to be hundreds of people here on Sunday morning. They came a few hours later and picked it up.

Most of our small group had been present to see the blaze, the fire trucks, and the pile of garbage, and later that night, one of the guys quipped metaphorically, "if there's any parking lot, where the world needs to come and dump their garbage, it's the church." Isn't that true? God takes what we bring him, even our garbage, and He redeems it, He heals it, He cleans up our mess. He's a good God, isn't He? I'm so glad you're here today, mess and all; so is He.

All week I've been thinking about what God's word has to say about who we really are. As a pastor, I'm well aware of the power that a single lie can have over someone's life. *You're not good enough; you'll never do anything significant.* This lie dogged me for more years than I care to mention; it kept me anxious, striving, but firmly "stuck".

Do you know that all sin begins with a lie we believe? The sin of greed begins when we believe the lie that life is about accumulating more stuff, that we deserve more stuff, or, that more stuff will fill the void in our life. All sin begins with a lie we believe.

And do you know that most of the "stuck" places in our lives begins with a lie we believe? I've already shared with you the lie I believed for years; which lie is dogging you? Let me recount some of the most popular:

- *I've got nothing to offer.*
- *I'm not worth loving.*
- *I'll never amount to anything.*
- *I'll never get past my past.*
- *I'm insignificant.*
- *my addiction is who I am.*

- *God cannot transform someone like me.*

None of this is true...not a single word. But for many of us, one or two of these lies are keeping us anxious, striving, and firmly “stuck” in life. We all need something objective like God’s perspective; God’s word can expose the lies we’ve swallowed. The One who made us is the only One who can tell us who we really are.

When we invite Jesus to forgive our sins and lead our life, we are united to Him, and we are given a brand new identity. Over the last five weeks we’ve talked about the fact that **in Christ** we are made new, we’ve been chosen, we’ve been adopted into His family. **In Christ** we are loved, and we are free from condemnation. Last week Pastor Dave talked about the fact that **in Christ** we have been set apart as God’s handiwork.

Now I suspect that some of us had a hard time last week when we were confronted with this truth. If we’ve believed the lie that we are insignificant, that we have nothing to offer, it can be nearly impossible to believe the truth that our lives are being fashioned by God’s hands, that we are His work of art.

But notice that I only said *nearly impossible*...all things are possible with God, and I trust this truth has been sinking in over the past 7 days. God has designed us to join Him in the good that He is doing. God has hand-crafted us, and He’s intent on using us in the hand-crafting of other people.

Now I’ve talked enough about lies this morning, I want to turn the page and begin to talk about the truth...I want to share with you a

truth that I’ve been contemplating all week: **in Christ we are marked with God’s power and authority.**

There’s the power!

I’m pretty confident this morning that we all have a grasp on the concept of power; we see it all around us. If you’ve ever watched a game of professional football, then you’ve seen power; these athletes have tremendous strength.

If you’ve ever been pounded by the surf, or watched an avalanche pick up speed, or seen a volcano erupt then you’ve seen power. Just a few weeks ago, we saw raw power as Hurricane Sandy battered the east coast.

Or if you’ve paid attention, then you’ve either read about or lived through the rise and fall of nations; all throughout history, leaders and nations have flexed their muscles, using power to conquer those around them.

Power. It’s a simple word, but not so simple to explain. The word “**power**” can refer to the measure of our strength: *I have the power to lift this rock over my head.* The word “**power**” can refer either to the ability to choose for ourselves, or the power to choose for others. But whatever our definition, those who don’t have power, want it, and those who do have it, want more.

All of us have either seen power at work, and the question before us this morning is what does it mean for us to be marked with God’s power and authority?

Beginning With Jesus

I want to begin to answer this question by reflecting on the life of Jesus and His relationship to power and authority. Think about the kinds of things that Jesus did:

- Jesus taught with authority and insight into God, and the human heart.
- Jesus had the power to persevere in the face of incredible opposition and suffering.
- and what about all of His mighty deeds? He healed sickness and disease wherever He went: the blind, the deaf, the lame. He turned water into wine at a wedding, He multiplied a few loaves of bread into enough food for thousands, and He once spoke to a storm causing it to stop.
- Jesus raised a few people from the dead, and three days after His own death, He was seen walking around among the living.

I think it's safe to say that Jesus' life was marked with God's power, and this power stemmed from the authority God the Father had given Him. I want to take just a moment and focus in on these two words, **power** and **authority**; both are present in Jesus, and both are important.

The word "authority" comes from the Greek word "*exousia*": it implies having the right to do something. For example, a police

officer in uniform has the authority, the "*exousia*," to pull you over and give you a ticket if you're speeding. The officer also has the authority to make a judgment call and give you a warning instead.

The word "power" comes from the Greek word "*dunamis*": it implies having the ability to do something. For example, a prison guard, by virtue of their key, has the power to lock up, or release, an inmate.¹ John Coles writes, "To have authority without power is degrading. To have power without authority is dangerous. Jesus...had both".²

So let's think together for a few moments: *where did Jesus' authority come from? Jesus' authority flowed from His identity* as God's beloved Son. At His baptism, Jesus was named and blessed. The Father spoke from heaven saying, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.*" Later on in ministry, on Mount Tabor, Jesus was transfigured and the Father spoke saying: "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*"³

Jesus' authority flowed from His identity. But notice that in Jesus, authority never led to independence. Jesus had "*exousia*" but He exercised this authority moment by moment according to the Father's direction.

Let me ask another question: *where did Jesus' power come from? As you read through the Gospels, particularly Luke's Gospel, attention is*

¹ John Coles, *Developing a Healing Ministry: A Training Manual For Churches*, 14.

² Coles, 14.

³ Matthew 3:17; 17:5.

drawn to the connection between the Spirit's presence, and the "dunamis," the power, present in Jesus. **Jesus' power flowed from the filling of the Holy Spirit.**

At His baptism, Jesus was given authority on the basis of His identity, but He was also anointed with power when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Let me encourage you to take your Bible and turn with me to Luke 4 (page 1595 in the Blue Bible).

In Luke 4:1-2, following Jesus' baptism, we read "*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.*" The power Jesus needed to resist temptation and remain true to God came from the filling of the Spirit.

After leaving the wilderness, note once again in Luke 4:14, that Jesus "*returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.*"

And then in His home-town synagogue, Jesus picked up Isaiah's scroll and read aloud from chapter 61, announcing His calling for everyone to hear; take a look at verse 18-19 and don't miss the reference to the Holy Spirit.

Luke 4:18-19, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*"

Acts 10:38 says, "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*"

Jesus had power, but notice that it flowed from His dependence on the Holy Spirit, not from His inherent divinity; Jesus did what He did because He was full of the Holy Spirit.

Let's look a few more verses; turn with me to Ephesians 1:18-21 (page 1818 in the Blue Bible). "*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.*

That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

There are two things I want you to grasp; the first has to do with Jesus, and the second has to do with us. First, Jesus is seated at the Father's right hand, *far above all rule and authority, power and dominion*. In other words, where Jesus now resides, there is no rival to His authority or power. And second, we are **in Christ**; we are where He is.

Earlier in Chapter 1, Paul reminds the Ephesian believers that God loves them, has chosen them, forgiven them, and adopted them as His sons and daughters; all of this stems from our being **in Christ**.

If we are united to Christ, and He has been exalted to God's right hand, then so have we. If Christ has been given power and authority, and we are united to Him, then we share in His power and authority. ⁴

Paul says, “ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, **and his incomparably great power for us who believe.***” In Christ we are marked with God's power and authority.

In the time remaining I'd like to answer the following two questions: *what is the nature of this power?*, and, *what is it for?*

The Nature of 'power' in Christ

The reason I began by talking about Jesus, is because simultaneously He reveals two things to us: (a) as God He reveals what God is like, and (b) as a human, He reveals what it means to be truly human; Jesus models a pattern for our living.

Jesus' authority flowed from His identity; so too does ours. Jesus' power flowed from the filling of the Holy Spirit; so too does ours.

We're already heading down the wrong track if speak about God's power in terms of an impersonal force. This “incomparably great power” that Paul is talking about is not an “it;” Paul's talking about

the Holy Spirit: God's Empowering Presence.⁵ It comes down to getting connected to Him and then deepening this connection.

illus: When we confess our need for God's forgiveness, recognizing that Jesus died for us, instead of us, the consequence of our sins are put to death through His death; in that moment we are united to Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit. This is what I mean by “getting connected,” or, being marked with God's power.

Let me borrow an illustration from the world of electricity. When you plug a cord into a wall socket that has been wired, you are instantly connected to power; all that you need is present and available. But a lamp won't turn itself on, the switch needs to be flipped doesn't it?

Getting connected is God's work; deepening this connection is our work, but even this work is empowered by God. All throughout the New Testament we are invited to walk in the Spirit, keep in step with the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, and be filled with the Spirit. And all of these are invitations into intimate friendship with God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit doesn't make us independently powerful; we are filled with His empowering presence.

The founder of our denomination, A.B. Simpson, once wrote: “Christ is not a reservoir but a spring...If we do not perpetually draw the fresh supply from the living Fountain, we shall either grow stagnant

⁴ Klyne Snodgrass, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians*, 102.

⁵ Gordon Fee, a fine New Testament scholar, coined this phrase.

or empty, It is, therefore, not so much a perpetual fullness as a perpetual filling.”⁶

The Purpose of 'power' in Christ

So what is this power for? Clearly the kind of power we see in Jesus didn't lead to imposing His will, or exercising independence. So why are we marked with God's power?

Let me give you a three part answer that is by no means exhaustive, but will get us moving in the right direction.

1. First, we are marked with God's power that we might experience the depths of His love. In Ephesians 3:18-19, the apostle Paul prayed that followers of Jesus would be empowered to “*grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.*”

The Holy Spirit is the One who marks us with power, the power to know, believe, and receive the love of God the Father. Romans 5:5 tells us that God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. He is at work, reminding us that we are loved.

Nothing is as important as knowing and feeling that we are loved by God...nothing. Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so; until we've got this settled, there's no sense moving on...we have nothing to move on to.

2 Timothy 1:7 says, “*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid (fearful), but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*” Because we are in Christ, because we are loved by God, we can trust Him with what we cannot control. Because we have been filled with the Spirit's powerful, loving presence, we can take a particular stance towards the things in life that might cause us anxiety and fear.

2. Second, we are marked with God's power so that we might live a holy life. The third member of the Trinity is known as the Holy Spirit; when we keep in step with Him, His holiness shapes and transforms us from the inside out. We are empowered, that we might be like Jesus. We are empowered, so that His character qualities begin to grow in our lives.

Galatians 5:22-23 talks about the fruit-producing-power of the Holy Spirit. Where He is present, where He is honoured, when we cultivate connectedness with Him, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control grow in increasing measure.

3. Third, we are marked with God's power that we might join Him in His kingdom work. In John 14:11-13, Jesus said “*11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. 12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*”

⁶ A.B. Simpson, founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Denomination.

This is quite a statement: “whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things.” This promise cannot simply mean that we will do “more things;” Jesus only had three years of earthly ministry and the church has had nearly 2000. Nor can it mean “more impressive things”: it’s hard to imagine something more impressive than feeding thousands, giving commands to a storm, or raising the dead.

What makes our works “greater” is the fact that every act of love, every time we forgive, every sacrifice offered, every miracle empowered by the Holy Spirit now speaks with absolute clarity about who Jesus is and why He came. When Jesus ministered, there was a veil over people eyes/hearts; they didn’t understand who He was. But after His death and resurrection, His identity was made plain. When people see His power at work within us, we can say with great joy that we are but fragile jars of clay; this all surpassing power is from God and not from us.⁷

Jesus had both power and authority and He has extended both to those who follow Him. When we are united to Jesus, we are filled with the Holy Spirit: God’s Empowering Presence. He intends that you will know the depth of His love, that you will live a holy life, and that His power would be made evident in and through you.

Church, we cannot follow Jesus apart from the empowering presence of the Spirit. Cultivating intimacy with God is what keeps us connected to the flow of His powerful presence. Maybe you need to grow in your experience of the Father’s love. Maybe God wants to grow you in the area of holy living. Or maybe you need to hear

God’s invitation into serving, and trust Him to equip and empower you for the task. Whatever your need, I trust that you will know the Spirit’s power filling you and equipping you for life and for godliness.

Pray

Benediction:

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:7.