

Power for Prevailing

Series: "Living in the Power of God"

Sermon 5: "Power for Prevailing"

Scripture: Acts 26:18-19

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A well-known panhandler approached a preacher who had been tipped off about the man's begging. As the preacher swept the front porch of his church, the infamous panhandler approached him, "Are you pastor Murphy?" "I am," said the preacher with a smile. The man made his move, "Pastor what would you say if I told you I haven't eaten in three days?" Quickly the pastor responded, "From the looks of you, I'd say you've got a lot of willpower!"

We've been exploring the book of Acts to see what it looks like to live in the power of God. God's people need the presence and power of God. That is especially true when you consider the world around us. God calls us to live out our faith even when we are surrounded by people who do not have the same Christian values and beliefs that we as Christians have. The good news is that God gives us the power to prevail when it comes to living out our faith in the world we live in today.

How can a Christian prevail in their faith while living in a world of mixed values?

Some Christians might say, "The best thing to do is get as far away from this world as you can." Reject the world around us and all of its ideas. Build up a fence so that the world won't have any influence on the church or its people. The problem with this solution is the threat of isolation. How can we build a bridge to a world that we don't understand? That's a question that Christians have been asking for many years. For example, "If Christians become isolated from our world then how can we ever reach the next generation?" (And that's just one example of many.)

Other Christians might say, "If we can't hide from world around us, then maybe we should immerse ourselves into the world as much as we can." This train of thought says, "Let's embrace the world and all of its ideas. Let's learn the language. Let's adapt to its trends. Let's tap into the world so that we might be able to attract the people around us and communicate in a language that the world understands." There's a danger here too. The danger with this solution is that world can overly influence Christians. For example, have you heard about churches that now offer the 30 minute worship service for those living a fast paced life? After all, they say, "We're living in a faced paced world."

There is one more solution for prevailing in our faith while living in a world of mixed values. It's the solution in which I prescribe. It's the solution that says, "Let's be in the world but let's not be of this world. Let's keep our eyes on Christ." To me, that means that we need to know what's going on in the world around us but we need to see it through the eyes of Christ Jesus our Lord. The world around us may be in a mess but that's not our

identity. Our identity is in Christ. God calls Christians to be transformed from this world by the renewing of our minds so that we might be able to test and approve what God's will is, His perfect and pleasing will. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. God, through the power of His Spirit, does a work of transformation in our hearts and lives and then He helps us to take that transforming power into our world around us.

That's what Paul did in our passage that we are going to look at today. Would you turn with me to Acts 26:18-19? Paul is taking the message of Jesus Christ into the world. Now his faith is on trial. However, Paul is not living in his own power. Paul is living in the power of God. So his faith doesn't buckle under the pressure. Paul's faith prevails. Now he finds himself standing before a king. The king's name is Agrippa. The king asks Paul, "What do you have to say for yourself in response to those who say you're preaching a big fat lie?" I love how Paul approaches his defense. Paul simply tells the king his story. I love that because the most powerful influence that you have in this world is your story. It's not deep theology. Paul was a theologian. He did not start in theology. He told his story. He said, "King Agrippa, this is what happened to me."

Every Christian has a story of God's changing power. That's what people need to hear. They need to hear the practical. They need to hear what that power of God has done. So that is where Paul begins with King Agrippa. He literally begins by sharing his story. Right before verse 18 in our passage, Paul tells the king that there was a time when he was very antagonistic toward Christians. But then one day Jesus got a hold of him and changed his life forever. Jesus spoke to Paul and said, "I want you to tell people what you have seen and what you are going to see in the future." Paul then tells the king, "Jesus has told me to go to the nations,

"to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to (living in the power of) God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. 19 So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven."
(Acts 26:18-19)

God gave Paul a vision and Paul said, "King Agrippa, I stayed faithful to the vision God gave me." I want to talk to you about what exactly it was that Paul stayed faithful to. When Paul said to King Agrippa, "I stayed faithful" what exactly was he saying? What did Paul stay faithful to? First of all,

Paul stayed faithful to God's WORD.

Paul knew that

It takes the word of God inside of you to prevail in your faith in Him.

God's word gives us power. Jesus modeled this truth in the desert. When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert, Jesus stood on the word of God. Jesus told Satan, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on the word, that proceeds out of the mouth of God."

God's word is what sustains you so that you can prevail in your faith in Him. I was visiting with someone about this the other day and they made an observation. They said, "One of the reasons why many of our young college age Christians struggle with their walk when they get into college is because they simply don't have enough of God's word in them to defend their faith."

I want to encourage you to read more of God's word. There is something I started doing this year. I started reading one chapter of the New Testament a day. That's five chapters a week, 260 chapters a year. There are 260 chapters in the New Testament. So in one year you can read the entire New Testament. Maybe you want to join me in that. Anyone can do this. Tomorrow I'll be on Luke chapter two if you want to jump in.

There is something else that I like to do while I'm reading God's word. I like to ask God, "What do you want to say to me directly? What do you want me to gain from what I'm reading in your word? What do you want me to take with me as I travel the road of my day?" That's called a nugget. That's where God speaks to you personally. A nugget a day will keep the devil away. Paul stayed faithful to God's Word. He stayed faithful to what God was doing inside of him.

Paul also stayed faithful in WORSHIP.

The worship in this place has been powerful the last several weeks. Hasn't it? But worship isn't just what we do here. Worship is also what we do out there. Worship is offering your life to Him. It's giving Him your time. It's giving Him your energy. It's you giving yourself to him.

Worship is how you offer yourself to God.

Let me tell you two very important things about worship. First of all, you were made to worship God. When God created you, He made you to worship Him. So when you don't worship God, you're not doing what he created you to do. The other thing is that you can't live in the power of God without it.

Prayer is worship. We've talked about prayer throughout this entire series of sermons. Fasting is also worship. In a few weeks we're going to have our Easter services. I think we should get ready. What if you began fasting something of importance each day leading up to Easter? Now for some people that could be food. I'm not saying that you should go without food every day until Easter. But you could give up a meal on Tuesday or on Friday and then spend that time with the Lord. Fasting is not about punishing yourself. It's about giving something that is valuable to you and putting God above it. Maybe giving up food is not your thing. Maybe you could give up some form or technology. Maybe you could give up TV for one night. Maybe you could give up the internet. Maybe you could give up Facebook.

Paul stayed faithful in worshipping Him.

Paul stayed faithful in WITNESSING to the hope found in God's love.

This one is about sharing the hope we find in God's love. Reach out to others. Let them know through your actions and through your words about your faith in Jesus Christ. Our world is in desperate need of God's love. Who does God send out into the world to share His love? You and Me. God has commissioned us to go into the world and share His love. Our world is in desperate need of God's love. So we can rest assured that,

God gives us His power so that we have what we need to share His hope and love.

There was a young college student named Bill. He had wild hair, torn jeans, flip-flops, a Marilyn Manson T-shirt, but he had just recently become interested in Jesus Christ. One Sunday he decided to go to church some place other than the college small group he had been hanging around; so he goes to the church across the street from campus. It was a conservative church with well-dressed and respectable people.

Picture the scene as Bill enters. He is wearing flip-flops, torn jeans, T-shirt, and sporting that wild hair. The service has already started, so Bill makes his way down the aisle looking for a seat. The pews are full, so he keeps walking. By now, people are a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. He continues looking for a seat, but finds only confused and uncomfortable gazes. When he realizes there are no seats, he simply squats down on the floor at the front. In the small group at his college fellowship this is perfectly acceptable, but no one had ever done it at this church.

The people became nervous, and you could cut the tension in the room with a knife. Just then, this older gentleman gets up from his seat and walks slowly toward Bill. This man is in his eighties, and is wearing a three piece suit. He is known as a dignified and godly man. As he approaches Bill some people are thinking to themselves, "You can't blame him for what he's going to do. We can't just let people come to church dressed however they want and sit on the floor like that!"

Silence fell over the church, and everyone's eyes are on the old man. When he reaches Bill the man drops his cane to the floor, and with a quite a bit of trouble and grunting he gets down on the floor next to Bill and just sits there. When the pastor regained the ability to speak, he said, "What I am about to preach you may never remember, but what you have just seen I hope you never forget."

How will you respond to this world when your faith goes on trial? Will your faith in God shine through? Will your faith prevail? Will it prevail in worship? Will it prevail in God's word? Will it prevail in witnessing to others? I invite you this morning to stand with me as a testimony to your faith in God. Then I would like to pray for you so that when your faith goes on trial, your faith will prevail. Would you make that your prayer this morning? Let my faith in God be my story and give me the chance to share my faith in Him.