

The Power of His Word. Bethesda meditation. 31 July 2016.

Last week Mark drew our attention to the Lord Jesus as the King ... as the King of glory. This week I want us to focus for a few moments on something which the author of Ecclesiastes said about 'the word of a king'; namely, 'Where the word of a king is, there is power'.¹

I suspect that most of us are content to identify 'the Preacher' or 'the Teacher' – 'the son of David, king in Jerusalem' – whose words comprise the book of Ecclesiastes – as King Solomon.² And we can assume that Solomon was better placed than most to know the truth of his claim, that 'Where the word of a king is, there is power'.

But this morning, I am not particularly concerned with King Solomon, and I want to apply his words to the One who could claim (truthfully) to be 'greater than Solomon' ... to the One of whom Mark spoke last week as 'the King of glory' ... to the supreme and final 'Son of David', about whom Jonathan will be speaking later this morning ... namely, of course, to the person of our Lord Jesus.

And, most certainly, He demonstrated throughout the days of His so-called Public Ministry that His word was with power – that His word carried invincible power.

First, we have only to think of how no **disease** or bodily sickness could withstand the power of His word. Confining ourselves just to the Gospel according to Dr Luke, we have only (i) to ask Simon Peter's mother-in-law about that occasion when our Lord had stood over her and rebuked the high fever from which she suffered, and when, 'at once', it had 'left her'³ ... or (ii) to ask Bartimaeus about that occasion when our Lord – then pacing His way through the city of Jericho to Jerusalem – had stopped by the roadside in response to the persistent cry of a poor blind beggar, and had simply declared 'Receive your sight', following which 'at once' he (Bartimaeus) had 'received his sight'.⁴ For on both of these occasions of healing, as on many, many others, our Lord's powerful word was sufficient.

But, *if disease was no match for the power of His word, neither was distance*. We have only to ask the centurion from Capernaum about the occasion when his servant-boy had lain paralysed inside his house, and when he had approached Jesus to plead for His help. 'Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof', he had said, 'but only say the word, and my servant will be healed'. And events soon proved that he had been right, for Jesus spoke the word and the centurion's servant boy was healed that very hour.⁵

Or we could ask the royal official of John 4 about the occasion when his young son had been healed by Jesus' word alone – even though Jesus had then been at Cana and the official's then-dying 'child'⁶ had been at Capernaum over 15 miles to the north-east.⁷ When the man arrived home the following day, he discovered that his son's fever had gone the very same hour that Jesus had assured him that his son lived.

But, *if disease and distance were no match for the power of His word, we know that neither were demons*. We have only to ask Mary Magdalene about the occasion when Jesus had cast out from her no less than seven demons⁸ ... or to ask the man with the unclean spirit in the synagogue of Capernaum of Mark 1⁹ ... the man named 'Legion' of Mark 5, who dwelt among the tombs of Gadara¹⁰ ... and the father of the young child whose life was dominated and endangered by the exceptionally strong demon which had successfully defied the combined attempts of nine apostles to expel it at the foot of the Mount of Transfiguration in Mark 9¹¹ ... to ask each of these men about those occasions when such formidable demonic forces had been expelled by our Lord's explicit command, 'Come out'.

But, *if disease, distance and demons were no match for His word, neither was the devil himself*. For we read that, when, in the wilderness, the tempter finally dropped all pretence and offered our Lord the kingdoms of the world on condition only that He (our Lord) fell down and worshipped him, Jesus had simply responded, 'Go, Satan!' – following which we read, 'the devil left Him!'¹² One short, pointed word from Jesus ('Go') was enough to expel the mighty overlord of evil.¹³

But, again, *if disease, distance, demons and the devil proved no match for the power of Jesus' word – neither did the so-called 'king of terrors',¹⁴ death.*

We have only to ask Jairus and his wife ... only to ask the widow of Nain ... only to ask the sisters from Bethany about the death-defeating experiences through which they and their loved ones had passed. Could Mary, Martha or Lazarus ever forget the occasion when Saviour loudly addressed His powerful word, 'Lazarus, come out' to one who had been dead – not for a few hours – but for four days, following which, we read, 'the one who had died came out'.¹⁵

Yes, all – disease, distance, demons, devil and death – were subject to the power of His word.

But so too, as we know well, were ***the natural elements***. We have only to ask the Lord's disciples about that occasion when, faced with an exceptionally severe storm on the Sea of Galilee, they had been 'at their wit's end',¹⁶ until, that is, Jesus, 'rising up, rebuked the winds and the raging waves' with the majestic words, 'Peace, be still'¹⁷ – following which the 'great tempest' had then become a 'great calm'.¹⁸ As we have often noted, in their days both Moses and Elijah had controlled the mighty waters. But Moses had needed a rod,¹⁹ and Elijah had needed a robe²⁰ – and that simply to divide the waters. Our Lord needed neither rod nor robe to master the surging waves of the sea – His matchless word was sufficient.

No - *neither disease nor distance – neither demons nor the devil – neither death nor the elements –* were a match for His powerful word.²¹

But I remind myself that there was one thing – just one thing – which lay outside the range of His powerful word. And that one thing was my salvation from my wretched, fallen condition, which would cost the Saviour, *not His word, but His very life* – which would cost Him the dreadful soul sufferings of the cross.

For it is our Lord's sacrificial death (symbolized for us in this bread and wine) which *has proclaimed to us* – as nothing else ever could – the enormity and seriousness of our sin, and which has *secured for us* a 'great salvation' which lay far beyond the reach of even *His* most-powerful word.

And before our time of open worship we will sing just two verses of number 7 in the Light and Love hymnbook ... verses 1 and 3 ... and I want you to note in particular Mr R. C. Chapman's²² words in verse 3:

In His spotless soul's distress,
I perceive my guiltiness;
Oh how vile my low estate,
Since my ransom was so great!

We marvel ... They told me of One who so loved me that in heaven He could not remain.²³

The single offering this week will be for the Church Fund.

While the offering is being taken, we will remain seated, and sing number 413 from the Praise hymnbook ... verses 2, 4 and 5.

The Prince of life! For us He came
From that high throne above,
His cross the measure of our shame'
His death the price of love.

Notes

¹ Eccles 8. 4; The word of a king, that is, carries with it power and authority Not 'supreme', as NIV and ESV. This is the word of verse 8 – twice. Akin to 'power' in 5. 19 and 6. 2. LXX = ἐξουσία – authority. 'ἰουῶ here, and in Ecc_8:8, need not be considered as an adjective', Lange.

² So in:

'Ecclesiastes: Koheleth's Quest for Life's Meaning', by Weston W. Fields. Submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Theology in Grace Theological Seminary, May 1975.

'The Message of Ecclesiastes', by Robert V. McCabe – DBSJ 1 (Spring 1996): 85–112.

Also in Gleason Archer (http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/12/12-3/12-3-pp167-181_JETS.pdf); Roy B. Zuck (http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/te_d_hildebrandt/OTeSources/21-Ecclesiastes/Text/Articles/Zuck-GodEccl-BS.pdf); Walter C. Kaiser Jr ('Hard sayings of the Old Testament' and commentary), F.F. Bruce, "The Wisdom Literature of the Bible: The Book of Ecclesiastes," The Bible Student 23.4 (Oct. 1952), 144-148 ['probably']; the Nelson Study Bible; John MacArthur; and G C M Douglas in Keil's 'Manual of Historico-critical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament: Volume 1', pages 516-529. Accessed at ...

https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=oX9AAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA479&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false, and

<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=oX9AAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en&pg=GB.S.PA515>.

³ Luke 4. 38-39. Just as He 'rebuked' the wind and the sea, Matt. 8. 26.

⁴ Luke 18. 40-43. It was a truly remarkable moment when "the sun stood still" at the voice of Joshua, Josh. 10. 12-13; how much more wonderful when "Jesus stood still" at the cry of a poor blind beggar! Luke uses the same word translated 'at once' in Luke 10 as he had back in chapter four – noting that the effect of the word of the Great Physician was both instantaneous and complete.

⁵ Matt. 8. 5-13.

⁶ As he described him to Jesus.

⁷ John 4. 46-54.

⁸ Luke 8. 2.

⁹ Mark 1.23-27.

¹⁰ Mark 5. 1-13.

¹¹ Mark 9. 14-29.

¹² Matt. 4. 8-11.

¹³ Note that opened 'say that' stones to bread lit. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, say that these stones become loaves of bread." KJV = 'command' – proper word in 15.35; 27.58 - see WEV, six Greek words for command, five of which in Matthew of Jesus' commands.

¹⁴ Job 18. 14.

¹⁵ John 11.43-44.

¹⁶ See Psa. 107. 25-29.

¹⁷ Mark 4.39.

¹⁸ Matt. 8. 24, 26. 'He was King of the elements, so that the winds and waves hearkened to His voice, and laid themselves to rest', T. Spurgeon. Well did the psalmist ask, 'Who is a strong Lord like you? ... You rule the raging of the sea – when its waves rise, you still them', Psa. 89.8-9.

¹⁹ Exod. 14. 16.

²⁰ 2 Kings 2. 8.

²¹ They were no match for that powerful word by which He had once made all things, by which He now upholds all things, and by which one day He will destroy His every foe, Psa. 33. 6, 9; Heb. 1. 3; Rev. 19. 15.

²² Robert Cleaver Chapman (1803-1902). C. H. Spurgeon once described him as 'the saintliest man I ever knew'.

²³ George Bennard, who is well known for composing the famous hymn, "The Old Rugged Cross". See ...

<http://matthewball.us/2016/04/01/philippians-friday-name-jesus/>