

Biblical Reflection 5: “Are We Powerless?”

March 9, 2021

Sometimes, I feel so helpless and powerless. I can't protect people I care about. I can't stop bullets, beatings, and arrests. My classes are suspended, so I can't teach. I can pray. And I do. A lot. But I want to do so much more to help than is possible.

I wonder if the Apostle Paul also felt powerless when he was beaten and left for dead. I know he didn't, but why not? How did he cope with being unjustly whipped, humiliated, and thrown into prison? How could he sing hymns and rejoice with his fellow prisoners under such circumstances?

The short answer is this: He leaned into his faith in Jesus Christ and relied upon the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul considered it an honor and privilege to share in the sufferings of Christ. He believed that his present miseries were nothing compared to the glory (the wonders and blessings) that awaited him in the next life. Then, from day to day, he drew on the Holy Spirit for internal strength to not be overwhelmed by his sorrows or defeated by his oppressors. Even more, he relied on the Spirit to empower him to fulfill God's will and mission for his life.

Jesus was persecuted because he dared to stand up for the people against the hypocrisy and injustice of the establishment. The rulers were embarrassed and enraged by his audacity. They were jealous of his popularity and furious that they could not control him. They wanted to crush him to preserve their power and domination. But, of course, the rulers were not successful in the long run. Yes, they brutalized and even killed him. But God resurrected Jesus from the dead and used his death to provide salvation for all those who put their faith in him. Paul was one of those believers. And so, when he suffered unjustly, as a result of his faith in Jesus and his faithfulness to the Gospel, he was sharing in Christ's sufferings and believed that one day he would share in Christ's glory (Rom. 8:17-18). He did not see himself as a helpless victim, but as someone who was privileged to participate in God's saving work in the world, which God accomplishes through those who trust in him and remain faithful to him in the midst of their suffering.

So, Paul could write, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13, NRSV). He didn't mean he could do everything he wanted to do. He meant, because of the Holy Spirit's presence in his life, he could be at peace (or, content) in all circumstances. He could accomplish everything that God wanted him to do with his life no matter what happened to him. He could draw upon the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23)—to reassure him and to enable him to keep shining God's light and love in his dark and troubled world.



Brothers and sisters, there is so much outside of our control, and so much more that we wish we could do or change. But, as Christians, we are not powerless by any means. We have Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We can do all of things that God intends for us to do through his power and strength within us, among us, and through us.

Let us not give up hope.
WE ARE NOT POWERLESS.

With Christ's love, always,

Dr. Tim

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