

(Awake! Series): The Kingdom of God Lies Not in Words, but in Power

by A.W. Tozer

The kingdom of God is not in words, but in power, and we must demand that the Word of God be preached in power to bring conviction, conversion, and creation of holy men and women.

Duration: 30:32

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 2:2-4

Topics: "Kingdom Of God"

Description

In this sermon on the book of 1 Corinthians, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the true meaning behind the words of God. He encourages the audience to not focus solely on the words themselves, but to seek the spiritual essence and power behind them. The speaker warns against the danger of becoming too fixated on fundamental words rather than fundamental meanings, as this can lead to a decline in spiritual growth. He emphasizes that the kingdom of God lies in power, not in mere words, and urges the audience to strip away superstition and embrace the truth.

Transcript

...section from the book of 1st Corinthians, 4th chapter. Let a man, says Paul, let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or a man's judgment. Yea, I judge not mine own self, for I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified. He that judgeth me is the Lord.

He said, these charges you bring against me, I don't know any of them that are true, but he said, I'm not hiding behind that. He that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore, judge nothing before the time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.

And then shall every man have praise of God. In verse 15 he says, for though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you.

Since you believe, said Paul, through my preaching, ten thousand people have instructed you, but don't forget, I preached the gospel that won you. Therefore I beseech you, be followers of me, for this cause

have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which be in Christ. As I teach everywhere in every church, now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you.

But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and then I will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? Shall I come unto you with a rod? Are ye going to continue so that to make it necessary that I have to come severely with a rod? Or are ye going to accept the truth and begin to obey it so that I can come in love and in the spirit of meekness? Now, that's what Paul said partly in that 4th chapter of 1 Corinthian epistle.

Paul had authority, there's no getting around that, he had the authority of the chief apostle. He was appointed by the Lord for several things, one of them being to receive and shape church truth. The man Paul received the revelation from God which was behind.

Jesus said, I have many things to say to you, but you can't receive them yet. But when the Spirit of God comes, he will reveal these things and he will take of mine and will show them unto you. And that Spirit that came entered Paul when Ananias prayed for him, and he was filled with that same Holy Spirit.

And he received that which was behind, and he was the mold in which God poured it. And then he was also appointed by the Lord to set up a system and polity for the church, for there was system and there was polity. And he was appointed by the Lord to embody all authority that there was in the meantime.

And then, perhaps most important of all, to show by example the Christian way. He said, I sent to you Timothy, my beloved son and faithful in the Lord, and he will bring to your remembrance my ways which be in Christ. See, the man of God here was having his authority undercut by schismatics, men who came in and taught that Paul was not a real apostle.

They said the reason Paul isn't a real apostle is that he never saw the Lord. The other apostles walked with Jesus while he walked among men. But this man Paul is not an apostle, and we can prove it by the fact that he never walked.

He came after Jesus had died and risen. That was their argument. They overlooked the vision Paul had of Jesus, of one born out of due time.

And these schismatics and dividers of the church had to repudiate Paul's authority in order to establish their own. And they attacked Paul, and as far as Paul was personally concerned, he said it didn't matter. He said, it's a very small thing with me that I should be judged by you.

As far as he was concerned, he didn't care. He said, I don't even judge my own self, I'm in the hand of God. But he knew that if he was going to have any authority, he was going to have to establish that authority.

And so he sent Timothy to tell them about Paul and to straighten them out. And then finally he warns them this. He said, now I'm coming in the will of God one of these times to you.

And it's all right for you while I'm not there to listen to these schismatics and these puffed up fellows. Isn't it strange that there isn't anything new under the sun? I remember years ago there used to be a writer for the Daily News. What was his name? He died finally.

But a very wonderful writer up on the literary level. And he once went to see the old Greek play, The Sisterhood. And he came back after seeing it, and he reported it in his column.

He said, I went to see the old Greek play, The Aristophanes. And he said, I came away deeply discouraged. And he said, here's what discouraged me.

Not that it wasn't well written, not that it wasn't well done. But he said, I came away convinced that nobody had been able to think of a new joke in 2400 years. That everything old Aristophanes wrote into his funny play is floating all around here.

Now that was a worldly man talking about a worldly thing. But the same thing is true in the spiritual life. So many of us imagine that we're original.

There's nobody original except Adam. And if you'll find puffers, uppers, and men who are puffed up now. Paul wrote in the 18th verse, now some are puffed up.

And some are puffed up thinking that I won't come. But when I come, he said, and I'll do it shortly. I'll make a test.

And I'll not test the words of these men, but I'll test their power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. Now here's what I want particularly to emphasize.

The kingdom of God doesn't lie in words. I am among the few who are trying to tell the Church that in this day. I was encouraged Thursday.

I, as you know, spoke and Brother McAfee sang and we kind of took Wheaton over Thursday. And after the last talk, Dr. Redmond came over and said, Well, God bless you A.W. Keep telling them. There are a few that see it, but not very many yet.

But re-see or see over again, see again what they saw back there. That the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power. See the words are the form of truth.

They're the outward image of truth only. And they can never be the inward essence. And words are incidental.

They're incidental. If I were to say, now everybody here that can speak Swedish, bring your New Testament next Sunday. And everybody that speaks German, bring yours.

Norwegian, yours. And so we'd have a half a dozen different languages. And I would say, now read that fourth of Revelation.

It would be quite a revelation to us. To hear that the words were only incidental, it was the meaning that mattered. Somewhere in the middle of this all, there's a meaning, a spiritual meaning.

And the six different people embodied that meaning in six different set of words. And those words were not alike, or only occasionally alike. We ought to remember that, we ought to know it.

The kingdom of God is not in words. They're only incidental, and they never can be fundamental. When fundamentalism ceased to emphasize fundamental meanings, and began to emphasize fundamental words, and we shifted from meanings to words, and from power to words, we began to go downhill.

Now there's an essence of truth. And it may follow the form of words, as the colonel in an English walnut follows the confirmation and figuration of the shell. But the shell is not the colonel, and the colonel is not the shell.

And so while the truth follows the form of words, it sometimes deserts it. The great error is in holding the form to be essence, and putting the kingdom of God in words. So that if you've got the words right, you've got the whole thing.

And if you can get a better set of words, you have more truth, not necessarily to all. Now, words deceive even good, honest Christian people. They deceive because we feel that if we mumble words, there's certain safety in mumbling words.

And that there's a power to frighten off Satan if you mumble certain words. Now my brethren, if a man is just as plainly ordinary as I am, and not afraid of words, would you ask me please why the devil should be afraid of words? The devil who is the very essence was of ancient created wisdom back there, and had the perfection of beauty and the fullness of wisdom, and whose power lies in his shrewdness and in his intellectual brilliance, can you tell me how that devil should suddenly become so foolish as to be afraid of a word, or afraid of a motion, or afraid of a symbol? To keep the devil away, I put a chain around my neck. Or to keep the devil away, I make a motion with my fingers in front of my face.

I wonder what a man without any arms would do, an amputee, if the devil came after him and he couldn't make the sign of the cross. I hadn't thought of that until now, but it's worth considering anyhow. But the devil isn't afraid of words, and he isn't afraid of symbols, and you can surround yourself with symbols, religious symbols, Protestant or Catholic or Jewish, and you haven't helped yourself in the slightest.

Because the devil isn't afraid of a symbol, he knows better. You ever see the little child that's afraid of a false face? Put a false face on, and the little child runs and yells. But if the child did that when it's sixteen, you'd be shamed of.

We, as soon as we grow up, we know that false faces don't mean anything, and words don't mean anything as words. And we imagine if we say certain words, they have power to bring good. If we say certain other words, they have power to fend off the devil.

And there's safety in mumbling words, and if we fail to mumble the words, we're in for it. And if we're remembered to mumble the words, we're all right. That's just paganism under another form.

And Paul told them plainly, for these were pagans recently, but only lately converted, and he said, you Greeks, you're Greek, and the Greeks love oratory, and they love fine language, and they produce a lot of fine literature. He said, you Greeks, you love fine words. But he said, I don't come to you with fine words.

I come to you in this second chapter. I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but instead a demonstration of spirit and of power, that your faith should stand in the wisdom of, not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

So we ought to throw this off. You may feel a little bit mentally naked when you throw all this off. You know, it's one thing that we do when you strip superstition away from a man.

He feels terribly naked for a moment. But until we strip off our superstition, the Lord can't put on us a cloak of truth. Now, the kingdom lies in power.

Its essence is in power. The gospel is not the statement that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. The gospel is the statement that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, plus the Holy Ghost in that statement, to give it meaning and power.

And just the statement itself never will do it. Have you wondered at times, as I have, why those churches, some of them, who drill their young people from their childhood in the catechism and teach them the doctrine so that they're positively instructed in the words of the truth, yet somehow strangely fail to get them through to the new birth? Have you noticed that? We're not referring by name to any denomination. And I have nothing against the catechism.

I think it's a fine thing for young people. But have you noticed that there are whole generations of so-called Christians who are drilled in the catechism and who know the doctrine and can recite the gospel as well as the law, and still never manage to break through to the new birth? They never come through to that shining wonder of inward renewal. The reason is, they are not taught, or they are taught, that the word lies or the power lies in the words.

And if you get the words, you're all right. Whereas Paul says the kingdom of God doesn't lie in words at all. The kingdom of God lies in the power that involves those words.

And you can't have the power without the words, but you can have the words without the power, and a lot of people do. So that the power of the Spirit operating through the word, that's the gospel. It's the statement of the fact that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he rose again, that he was seen of many, that he's at the right hand of God and will forgive those who believe on him.

That's the gospel in its shell. That's the shell of the gospel. But the power must lie in there, or there'll be no life in it.

So Paul appealed away from man-given authority, and he appealed away from talk however eloquent, and he appealed away from even his own position, and appealed direct to the power of the risen Lord manifest through the Spirit. And he said, I want you to know, and I sent Timothy to try to straighten you out and remind you that it's the power of God that talks, not a man's mouth. The appeal, I say, was to the power of the risen Christ.

My brethren, if this church and the people who compose it are not living in a constant miracle, they're not Christians at all, because the Christian life is a miracle. It is what the Ark of Noah was in the day of the flood. It is completely separated from that flood and yet floating upon it, completely separated from it.

It was what Jesus was when he walked among men, right in the middle of them and yet separate from sinners and higher than the highest heaven. There operates within the true body of Christ a continual energizing of the Spirit that makes a continual miracle. A Christian is not somebody who is believed only.

A Christian is somebody who is believed in power, and the working of the power is a moral power. It has power to expose sin to the sinner's heart. Nobody will ever be truly saved until he knows he's a sinner.

Nobody will ever know he's a sinner, truly know he's a sinner, by simply threatening him or warning him or telling him. You can go to a man and say, You're a sinner. You swear and lie and you're wrong, you're evil.

He'll grin and shake his head and say, I know, I know, I shouldn't do those things, but I guess we're all human. You haven't convinced him. You can read Plutarch and Aristotle and Herbert Spencer and all the rest of the books of ethics and show him he's dead wrong, and he still will never know what it is to be a lost sinner.

You can threaten him that if he doesn't look out, if he doesn't straighten out his ways, the atom bomb will get him, or Khrushchev will be over, and you still haven't convinced him. You haven't told him anything he didn't know. But when the Holy Ghost has come, says Jesus, he will convict the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment.

And when Peter preached at Pentecost, the scripture says, being pricked in their hearts, they cried out and said, What shall we do to be saved? And that word pricked, they say, Weymouth says, is a word stronger and deeper than the word pierced, where they pierced the heart of Jesus with a spear. The words of Peter in the Holy Ghost, the new baptized prophet and apostle, the words of Peter penetrated like a dummy spear, so deep, deeper than the spear had gone into the heart of Jesus on the cross, and forthwith came water and blood. So, my brethren, the Holy Spirit isn't something that we can argue about, or somebody that we can say, Well, you believe your way, and I'll believe my way.

The Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity in the Church, an ungrieved Holy Spirit, because there is a power in the Spirit to expose sin and revolutionize and convert and create holy men and women, and nothing else can do it. Words won't do it. Instructions won't do it.

Line upon line, precept upon precept won't do it. It takes the power to do it. Then it's a persuasive power to convince and persuade and break down resistance.

And it's a worship power to create reverence and excite ecstasy. If we were to put statues all around this place and have candles burning here, and have beautiful Italian-made glass-colored windows, pictures of shepherds and altars and all that, and I were to come in here in a long black robe, you would have a sense of, well, I think you'd probably, you being you, you'd probably have difficulty restraining your mirth. But if you'd been brought up to it, you wouldn't.

You'd think that's reverence. No, brethren. Reverence is not created by beautiful windows, although I like to see them, nor by symbols.

Reverence is the astonished awe that comes to the human heart when God is seen. And that the Holy Ghost can do through the Word and that nobody else can do. I can imitate holy tomes all I will.

We can try to be just as religious and ecclesiastical as we can, and still when it's all over, the feeling will get psychological or aesthetic at best. But when the Holy Ghost came upon the early church, they durst not join themselves to them. And in 1 Corinthians, the sinners fell on their faces and said, God's in this place of the truth.

So there's a power to bring reverence, to excite ecstasy, to bring worship. It lies in the Word when it's given in power. And in the Holy Ghost, the power of the Holy Spirit is a magnetic power.

It draws to Christ, and it will exalt him above all else and above all others. And in this church, we must demand more than correct doctrine, though we dare not have less than correct doctrine. More than right living, though we dare not have less than right living.

More than a friendly atmosphere, though we dare not have less than a friendly atmosphere. We must demand that the Word of God be preached in power, and that we hear it in power. For in 1 Thessalonians, you'll remember, Paul wrote and said to them there, that the gospel came not unto you.

I know, O brethren, he said, that you're the elect of God, and here's how I know it. Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance. That is, not only Paul had the power, but the gospel could run in power, because it was heard by them in power.

So when the Spirit of God, through the Word, preaches in power, and it's heard in power, then the objectives of God are wrought out, and holy men are made holy, and sin is forgiven, and the work of redemption is done. Briefly now, the way to attain it, prayer and faith and surrender, the old-fashioned ways, and I know none other. Prayer and faith and surrender.

Pray, and as you pray, surrender, and as you surrender, believe. And that's for all of us. You, as God's people, have every right in the scriptures, every scriptural right to demand that you hear the Word in power, and if you do not hear the Word in power, you have a right to rise up and ask why.

If you're hearing nothing but teaching, nothing but instruction, if there's no evidence of God in it, then the preacher can't say, I appeal to God to say whether this is true or not. If this can't be, then you have a right to demand that somebody come that can. On the other hand, any man who stands here to preach has a right to expect that you believe in power, and that we're so close to God and so surrendered and so full of faith and so prayerful that the Word of God can work in power.

Shall we not believe God for that kind of church here? For the kingdom of God is not in words. The kingdom of God is in power, and you can take the little lance manual and read it and sign your name under the bottom of every page. It won't mean one lonely thing to you.

But if the Word of God is in power, it means everything to you. So let us trust God for correct doctrine. We dare not have less, but we must have more.

Right living, we dare not have less, but we must have more. Let's be a friendly church, but beware lest it be simply a friendly church. It's amazing how socio-religious or religio-social atmospheres can permeate a church so that it's hard to tell which is a holy ghost and which is simply nice social contact.

I believe that both ought to be there, and I believe they can both be there. I believe that when the early church met and broke bread, they fulfilled both their spiritual communion and their social fellowship. So there's no reason why they can't be fused.

There isn't any reason why the warm cordiality of social fellowship can't be made incandescent with the indwelling holy ghost, so that when we meet and shake hands and sing and pray and talk together, we're doing both these things. We're having social fellowship plus the mighty union and communion of the holy ghost. Let's be very careful that it's both, not one only.

To try to destroy or prevent social contact and social fellowship is to grieve the Spirit, for the Spirit made us for each other. And he meant that there should be social fellowship and friendliness together. He meant that we should break bread, not only formally in a church, but be times when we meet.

He meant that we should know each other by our first names and have our social fellowships. He meant it. And the churches that try to destroy that succeed only in getting a lopsided and fanatical type of church.

But be very careful, my friends, lest that we don't mistake the one for the other. So let's have a friendly church, and let's have a morally right church, and let's have a church where correct doctrine is taught. But let's also have a church of which any man can come here and say, when he goes away, I know the entrance I had unto you, that I could preach unto you, not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance, because you are a kind of people that could take it.

I say this is most important, that the kingdom of God lies not in words but in power.

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