

The Kingdom Not in Word, But in Power

by Mack Tomlinson

This sermon emphasizes the importance of relying on the power of the Holy Spirit rather than mere words or human wisdom. It delves into the life of Jesus and the ministry of the Spirit, highlighting the need for the church to seek and welcome the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for true transformation and effectiveness in ministry.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 4:20, Romans 14:17, Acts 10:38, Luke 11:13, John 14:26, Matthew 3:16, Luke 4:1

Topics: "Empowerment by the Holy Spirit", "Transformation in Ministry"

Description

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Transcript

Have you ever, some of you have, have many of you ever listened to the old Baptist evangelist Vance Havner? Anybody ever listened to Vance? Alright, you need an education right now. Go listen to Vance Havner's sermons online. He once was talking about how he really didn't like to eat goulash.

He said, we called it hash. He said, I wouldn't eat it when I was on the road because I didn't know what was in it. And I didn't eat it at home because I did know what was in it.

Well, I think my message today may be a hash. I don't even fully know what's in it. And we'll ask the Holy Spirit to be the cook and the gourmet chef.

Isn't it astounding that even he, in a right sense, is the servant of God's people? To minister to you, to nourish you, to teach you. Everything any of us have ever learned, truly, and been taught of the truth, it's been the direct, personal, tutorial ministry of the Holy Spirit to us. Immediate teaching.

So let's pray and ask Him to minister to us. Father, we do thank You for the high and joyful privilege of even having a voice that can still speak and sing. Having a tongue that can now not be used for evil, but for good.

To sing the high praises of God. To sing the songs of Zion. To testify of God's goodness.

And to speak abroad the Savior's name, whether it's across the street or across the ocean. And Lord, to open our feeble mouth now and to speak Your Word. You know, and I know, that I am insufficient.

You have said, and I believe, and I confess, that my sufficiency is of God, who makes us able ministers of the new covenant by the ministry of the Spirit. So speak, Lord, now, we ask. Let us hear Your voice and not just a man's.

Lord, speak through and beyond the sacred page, because we seek You. Bless us now together under Your covering. Surround this hour with favor like a shield.

And Holy Spirit, breathe upon us. Be near and do Your work. And let us hear Thy voice.

In Christ's name, Amen. Two passages of Scripture. Place your finger in 1 Corinthians 4. And then hold that and we'll go to Romans 14.

I want to read the last verse Martin Lloyd-Jones ever preached on when he was a pastor of Westminster Chapel. He ended his exposition of Romans, which was 13 years long. Pastors, don't do that when you're young.

But he ended on Romans 14.17, which says this, For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink. But what? Righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is not meat or drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

So the negative there, but the positive statement which is broad-sweeping, all-inclusive, the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Now, 1 Corinthians 4, verse 20. Look how small this verse is and think of the implications of it.

1 Corinthians 4.20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. We can't misinterpret Paul's statement here.

He doesn't mean it doesn't involve words. Words are preached or taught. Words are shared.

Words are written. So Paul is writing words when he says the kingdom of God is not in words, but it's in power. So that's my message this morning.

The kingdom not in word, but in power. The Apostle Paul was the preeminent teacher and theologian of the Holy Spirit. No writer of Scripture either knew or wrote concerning the Holy Spirit like the Apostle Paul.

He stands alone in terms of understanding and the amount of revelation that he received as an inspired writer of Scripture. Every epistle that Paul wrote except Philemon is full of doctrine and reality of the Spirit's person and power. And if you attribute the epistle of the Hebrews to Paul, which some do, some do not, Hebrews is full of the activity and ministry of the Holy Spirit all the way through the amazing epistle.

Paul was the apostle of life in the Spirit and the ministry of the Spirit. His teaching was absorbed in it. His life and his personal walk and his teaching and preaching ministry was under the power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember when the demonized girl was following him around for days? He finally got fed up and he turned around and the Spirit of God came on him and he prophesied. Peter's shadow was falling on people in the book of Acts and God was healing them. This was not because of those men.

This was because the power of the Spirit of God was coming on them as preachers and as ministers. And in 1 Corinthians, we certainly see Paul emphasizing throughout both epistles the place and the importance of the ministry of the Spirit. He says in chapter 1, the preaching of the cross is the power of God to those who believe.

He says in chapter 2, my preaching was not... I didn't come across eloquent and with worldly wisdom, impressive intellectually. He said my preaching was what? In demonstration of the Spirit and of power. The difference between then and now is there's 3,000 sermons preached today and maybe one conversion.

At Pentecost, there was one sermon and 3,000 conversions. The difference is the power of the Spirit coming. The kingdom being truly in power and not just in word.

He says we preach Christ crucified, which is to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks, foolishness. But to the called ones, both Jew and Greek, Christ is what? The power of God. Christ the power of God.

1 Corinthians 12 and 14 is all about what? The powerful activity and the order and the manifestation of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. And I don't know how often you see how glorious 2 Corinthians is. Don't judge the church at Corinth by the first epistle.

Judge them by the second epistle more. It's the rest of the story as Paul Harvey used to say. 2 Corinthians is full of life and full of Paul talking about the ministry of the Spirit.

And chapter 3 is one of the most glorious chapters in the New Testament because there Paul calls the new covenant the administration of the Spirit. This is a description of the new covenant era and the new covenant Christ has inaugurated. Paul calls it the ministry of the Spirit.

He called the Mosaic covenant what? The ministry of death because the law could not produce life. But he called the new covenant the ministry of the Spirit producing life and glory. Which brings me back to our text.

Romans 14 The kingdom of God is marked by, characterized by, driven by, the life of the church is marked by righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 speaks of 18 times Paul spoke about the Holy Spirit in Romans 8. The greatest theology of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life is Romans 8. Study it closely and see everything Paul says about the Spirit and the life of the believer. The kingdom of God is not in word but in power.

And it has always been that way. The kingdom of God has always been marked by the power of God. Begun by the power of God.

Administered by the Holy Spirit. Carried on by the mighty acts as Spurgeon calls it, by the mighty acts of God through the Holy Spirit. Administering, orchestrating, coming, equipping, giving gifts to men, giving unity in the church, pouring out a Spirit of love.

The work of the Spirit is the oil that makes the machinery and the wineskin of the church function with real wine. We neglect Him. We don't honor Him enough.

But Paul did. From Genesis 1 when the Spirit moved and hovered and brooded over the waters to Revelation 22 which says what? The Spirit and the bride say to the end the Holy Spirit is calling men to the

Gospel. And the church is the voice by the Spirit saying the Spirit and the bride say come let him who is thirsty come and drink the water of life freely.

The kingdom has always been governed by the power of the Spirit of God. And I tell you this, since the end of the 19th century through the 20th century dispensational theology has scarred the church in its wrong view of the Holy Spirit. And as goes the teaching and the leaven, so goes the life of the church.

In America in the 20th century the church became deficient and weak and began to depend on methods and planning and leadership skills and pastors and elders become CEOs and who knows what when all the time the Spirit is more and more neglected and less and less manifesting Himself. And as one old preacher said the Spirit of God could leave a church and sometimes they wouldn't miss Him for a year because they got it down. The order of service the Spirit can't interrupt.

The preaching is often dead letter informational and it's not life giving. Through the Old Testament the power of God has been at work and entered the coming of John the forerunner. He was filled with the Spirit from His mother's womb.

That's a striking thing. Doesn't mean He wasn't a sinner but He was filled with the Spirit in the womb and He came forth like a burning and a shining light. And the Spirit of God was powerfully upon Him.

And all Israel not every person but from all over Israel that came out to John in the wilderness that's the way to have a revival. Get so full of the Spirit of God. Whitfield saw it.

Wesley saw it. The power of the Spirit coming upon the truth of God begins a fire. And Ravenhill said you never need to advertise a fire.

Just go watch it burn. John the Baptist was a burning and shining light. And the apostles in the early church you read the book of Acts it's just power and life and reality because the Spirit had fallen and they walked and lived in it.

And the Spirit came in power seven, eight, nine, ten times throughout the book of Acts at different places, different times. Don't have time to go into that. But read the book of Acts and read the events, the times Acts 2, Acts 4, Acts 10 and the other places.

Read where the Spirit came and fell to confirm the gospel powerfully that God was including the Gentiles and the hard-headed brothers in Jerusalem finally got it through their thick skull that God had included the Gentiles. Peter said, when I saw that God had included them, who was I? It was a wake-up call. God's included the Gentiles as well.

And it took the powerful manifestation of the Spirit for the apostles to finally see and get it. So, those outpourings of the Spirit in Acts are amazing. So this is the word this morning.

I want you to go away memorizing this, thinking about it, praying it, and realize, work out the implications of this. The kingdom is not in word, but it's in power. That's what the Apostle Paul said.

And that means something, doesn't it? It means something. Let us find out what it truly means and live it. It's not in word.

That is, I don't know all that Paul means here, obviously, but the implications are kind of staggering. It's not in theory. The kingdom is not in information.

It comes from man's intellectual abilities. That's what philosophy does. That's what theologizing does with human logic.

A lot of words. A lot of talk. The kingdom is not cerebral.

It's not just thinking and our thoughts and our opinions. It's not talk, Paul said. But today, you're led to believe the kingdom is all about primarily talk.

And my good friend Chris Arnson's here. Iron Sharpens Iron Radio. And God uses that radio program.

A lot of them ought to go off the air. Some of them say, send us an offering to keep us on the air. Ravenhill said, I'd send a thousand dollars to some of them to get off the air.

So, true talk in the Spirit on the truth is valuable and I love listen to Iron Sharpens Iron if you haven't. Tune in and pray for Chris. God's using him and he's a dear friend.

But here, the kingdom is not in talk. Twitter, Instagram, Facebook. Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, talk.

Talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. Chatter everywhere. This thought, this thought.

This opinion, this opinion. Somebody says something. You don't know them.

It offends you. You're going to go answer. Reply, reply, reply.

Talk, talk, talk, talk. The kingdom's not in talk. Words of theory, philosophizing people's so-called brilliance gives them a tongue as long as Long Island.

Full of thoughts, opinions, ideas, and views. And we're going to let people know what our view is. It's all talk.

It's cheap. It's often useless. And often damaging.

I'm not getting an amen on that one, but it's true. Words, we've got to get our views expressed. We've got to win the argument.

We've got to talk. When most of the Bible's view about our words is negative, how serious our words are, how damaging, how foolish and hurtful and unwise are words that are spoken. One of the most sobering fear of God producing things Jesus ever said is this verse.

Men shall every idle, careless word that men speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment. Every idle, careless word that boys, girls, women, men speak. Every idle, every careless word men shall give an account in the day of judgment.

That's sobering. That's very sobering. Paul drops this little bomb.

The kingdom is not in words. Rather, what truly marks the kingdom is God's power. That's the mark of it.

That's the proof of it. What's really about the kingdom is the power of Jesus Christ at work. In love, in truth, with grace, with efficacy, effecting people and producing change and changing hearts.

The kingdom is in power. Now, most evangelicals and reformed churches have shiploads of talk and no power or very little power. No power upon the preaching.

I grieve. I've preached 47 years. I would not want to know what percentage of my sermons had no or little power.

No power on the preaching. No power in the services. Never a manifestation of His power upon a service.

Two years, three years ago, I was at the Banner of Truth Ministers Conference and Jeffrey Thomas was preaching four times. And the Spirit of God came on those services so powerfully that you had starchy Dutch reformed men and high Presbyterians loudly saying amen with tears running down their cheeks. You know when that happens the Spirit of God's at work.

But we see very little power of God's manifested grace upon a service in all ministries that go on. It's mainly only words. But the Kingdom is not in word.

Whatever Paul means by this statement, the Kingdom of Christ is not rooted in, founded upon, or governed by human intellect, words of man's wisdom, theory or the brilliance of talk. No. And we see this most clearly in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, I'm shifting into second gear. Stay with me and I won't be long, I trust. The life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, His words often address this.

He said to the Pharisees one time, you boys are in error because you don't know the Scriptures nor the power of God. They were truly ignorant of the spiritual meaning of the Word and they did not know anything about the power of God. The Word and the power of God.

They were in error because of that. Now apply that today. How many know the Word but know nothing of the power? They deny the power.

How many of people don't know the Word at all and they think they know the power and they traffic in what they think is power and it's counterfeit power. The Kingdom of God is in Word and in power. Truth and the power of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the individual Christian life.

We need the fullness and power and help of the Holy Spirit as much as we need the Bible. The power of God comes through this book, but this book is not the power of God. God is the power of God.

God the Holy Spirit is the power of God. And He opens our eyes and illuminates and teaches us and He empowers words when we preach however feebly we preach and it's the Spirit's presence that quickens the Word to our hearts and in preaching. Not by might nor by human power, but by My Spirit says the Lord.

That's the Old Testament prophet. So the Lord Jesus emphasized this big not only in His preaching but in His life. He declared once when the Pharisees were gritting their teeth, every time they saw a full unlimited manifestation of the Holy Spirit through the Messiah, they hardened their heart more.

Every time. There was never a more full infinite display of the activity of a living God by the power of the Spirit ever in history than through the man Christ Jesus. They saw it more than anybody in history and always they progressively hardened their heart.

And that was the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit of which there's no forgiveness. So, when they said He was casting out demons by the prince of demons, He said, if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, you know the kingdom of God has come near you. If I, by the Spirit, cast out demons.

So think about the ministry of the Spirit. Think of the Lord saying, I am casting out demons by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's think about the ministry of the Spirit in Jesus' life.

The Gospels record that Jesus prayed all night and He came forth and they brought to Him many from all over the area and the power of the Lord was present to heal. Jesus didn't heal except by the immediate guidance and power of the Spirit through Him. Why? Because He emptied Himself of His deity functioning, not emptied Himself of deity, but all His rights and privileges of functioning as the divine Son, He emptied Himself of that, and He fully became a man and functioned only as a human being, independence on God, full of the Holy Spirit, and He did everything by the Holy Spirit.

If you've never studied the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus, dip into it. John Owen writes about it. Thomas Goodwin writes about it.

Sinclair Ferguson has two articles in the Banner of Truth magazine. Go read them. The Holy Spirit in the Life of Jesus.

Think about this. He was born of a virgin by an act of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God came upon Mary and took the divine seed, the divine person of the second person in the Trinity, the divine Son, and planted Him, the divine nature of Christ, into her womb, took of Her substance physically, all the DNA, all of humanity, formed a human body, and the divine Son was joined to the human body.

Perfect union. Not mixed together. The divine became human.

The God-man in the womb. That was an act of the Holy Spirit, and He was made a true human being just like you and I. But no sin nature. But truly human.

And so, He grows up from in the womb possibly like John, but from the day of His birth, the baby is being perfectly tutored and taught by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah prophesies about this and says, the Messiah says, He openeth my ear morning by morning, and He teaches me. The Lord Jesus, all those days of His youth up to 30 years old as a young man, He was memorizing the Old Testament Scriptures.

He was learning them. He was being taught. And He was growing in His understanding perfectly in wisdom and stature and favor.

He learned just like we do, but He learned perfectly because there was no fallenness. But it was true humanity just like us. So He comes forth at 30 and what does He do? He goes to the river Jordan.

And there what happens by the Spirit? John baptizes Him. And there is a mighty messianic anointing baptism that comes upon Him from Heaven by the Holy Spirit, fulfilling Isaiah 61 and equipping Him with a fullness to go forth and minister that He had not known experientially before that. Study this out.

It's true. So, He goes forth from into the wilderness experience, driven there by the Spirit and He comes out, Luke says, in the power of the Spirit to go forth and minister. He did all His miracles by the power of God upon Him as a man.

And not just because He was God. I love Acts 10 38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit.

And when it says Jesus of Nazareth, that term is representative of His being a man. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, who then went about doing good and healing all who

were oppressed of the devil. For God was with Him.

God was with God? Yes, great is the mystery of godliness. But God was with the man Jesus in an anointed way. The Father gave Him the Holy Spirit for ministry.

And He was as dependent on the Holy Spirit and upon His Father in faith and in prayer as any human being ever has been more than anyone else. And the same equipment He had, the Spirit, the Word, prayer is what you and I have. He didn't use anything different than what you and I are to use.

So, He was sustained and strengthened all His ministry by the Spirit. Why did He pray all night before the next day when He chose the twelve apostles? Was He getting revelation? His divine knowledge, He didn't have access to the divine knowledge of His deity. He emptied Himself of that rock and He had to receive everything as a man from the Father by the Spirit.

He was taught. The Father showed Him. He said, I only do what the Father shows me.

I only go where He leads me. I only speak what the Father speaks to me. There was always perpetual, consistent, real revelation coming to Him as a man.

But it was perfect. No hindrance. He was taught perfectly.

He understood perfectly. And He never said a wrong word any moment of His life. And it was always by the immediacy of the Holy Spirit.

And the people said, it says, they were astonished at His gracious words that He spoke how? With authority and not like the Pharisees. The Spirit of God strengthened them in His weakness. How did we think He made it through Gethsemane and the agony of facing the cup? In the Garden of Gethsemane, apparently, the horrible realization of what drinking from the cup meant dawned on Him.

And it crushed Him to the ground in His humanity. He was weak and broken. And He didn't want to drink it.

He didn't want to have to drink it. And He cried out and He won that battle. Father, if there's any way, let this cup pass from Me.

Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will. In His humanity, like you and I, He was bearing it and experiencing it. And He never had experienced that before.

And remember, angels came and strengthened Him after the wilderness experience in His weakness. Man of sorrows. And even think of this, even in His dying act of the cross, He had to be sustained and helped by the Holy Spirit.

He through the eternal Spirit offered Himself to God for us on the cross. The Spirit of God sustained Him, helped Him all the way through. The Holy Spirit brought those psalms and those prayers to His mind in His agony.

And He was able by the Spirit's aid to speak and to pray. And then the day of Pentecost comes. It's not a day of talk.

It's a day of power. We always think the Apostles' preaching was so eloquent. This wasn't a prepared sermon.

Peter had no idea that morning he was going to preach. But the Spirit suddenly came upon the church and Peter, under the leading of the Spirit, stands up and preaches an extemporaneous unplanned sermon, an average sermon, Old Testament text. And he applies it and says this is that which was spoken by Joel.

And he proclaims the Gospel. And 3,000 the Spirit falls on them under average preaching. I want to read you a quote by Spurgeon about what happens in the church when the Spirit does this.

In 1859, those years that the New York revival had happened and it was really spreading in America, 1859, there was a real revival happening in Great Britain. Particularly, 1859, the revival in Northern Ireland. Read about it.

You can read about it easily. The Irish revival, 1859. Spurgeon preached this sermon in 1859.

I think I'm losing something here. He preached this sermon in London in 1859 while the revival is going on in Northern Ireland. Just a few hours by boat from England.

Spurgeon says, witness the great revival which is going on in and around Belfast. After carefully looking at the matter and after seeing a trusty and well-beloved brother who lived in that neighborhood, I am convinced regardless of what enemies may say that it is a genuine work of grace and that God is doing wonders there. A friend who called to see me yesterday tells me about the lowest and vilest men, the most depraved women in Belfast have been visited with this extraordinary epilepsy, as the world calls it, but with this true rushing of the Spirit, as we call it.

Men who have been drunkards have suddenly felt an impulse compelling them to pray. They resisted, they sought to their drink in order to quench the conviction, but when they have been swearing, seeking to quench the Spirit by their blasphemy, God has suddenly brought them to their knees and they have been compelled to cry for mercy with piercing shrieks and agonizing prayer. Then after a time, the evil one seems to have been cast out of them and in a quiet, holy and happy frame of mind, they have made a profession of their faith in Christ and have walked in His fear and love.

The Spirit of God swept across Northern Ireland that year of 1859 because the kingdom was not in talk, but in power. Tim's question last night, what do you need? You thought of things. You thought, well, I could start a soup kitchen.

But look, you could be overwhelmed by Tim Conway's sermon and think, I can't do that. Do one thing! Do something! You can do one thing. Start a prayer meeting.

That revival in Northern Ireland, you know where it started? Teenage boys after school prayed in a haystack. They met and they prayed. They didn't know how to pray eloquently.

And that revival started in Northern Ireland. Do whatever you can do. Do it.

Whatever you're going to do for Jesus, do it now. Do something that you can do. Our church five years ago, we got convicted by something.

I was with Tim one day and he was saying, I don't remember who else there, he was saying, you know what we did is we drew a circle if I get this wrong, forgive me. We drew a circle on a map two hours around San Antonio. And we said, we're going to endeavor.

We're going to pray and we're going to set a goal to plant churches in the cities with certain size population where there are believers and we're going to have a goal to plant churches. And they did! Austin, Temple, Laredo, Corpus Christi. And I said, we're doing nothing and didn't.

Well, I mean, you know what I mean. I said, we're not strategic. We're not visionary.

We don't plan that way. And our elders repented of our lack of vision. And we said, Lord, show us what to do.

Just show us what we're to do and we'll do it. Soon, we had a group in Portland, Maine call us and say, would you come up here and help us? Would you come and plant a church? We had a group in west of Fort Worth, Texas say, hey, would you plant us as a church? We had a group in Oklahoma, north of Tulsa. Would you plant us as a church? And since that repentance and prayer, God sent us works to do and we've been planting churches following their example and mission work too in Nicaragua with them and Mexico and Jordan.

And so, do something. You can't do except what God enables you to do and what He calls you to do. You can do the impossible when He calls you to do it, but you can do things this year.

Whatever Jesus says to you, you can do it. But in terms of the question He asks us now, what do you need? First and foremost, God's power. In your own life.

In your marriage. In your church leadership. In your church body.

On Long Island. In Queens. In Brooklyn.

In Manhattan. In Texas. Because the kingdom is marked not by talk, but by power.

When the Spirit of God is welcomed, consciously welcomed and sought and prayed for, Luke 11 13. He works. He moves.

He empowers. He comes. He gives a spirit of prayer in a church.

He gives unity. He gives love. And He blesses average preaching.

He blesses hash preaching. It's not by mind. And it's not by human power.

It's by my Spirit. Because the kingdom is of power. Let's pray.

Lord, we just confess that this is true. I know Paul's word there in 1 Corinthians 4 has never gripped me that way before now. But it's true.

It's true that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, external things, how we dress, what we look like, how we observe this, do that. Lord, Your kingdom is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. And it doesn't come by observation because it is within us.

And we are in it. In the kingdom. Heirs of the kingdom.

And it's our Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. So Lord, change us through even these two verses You've spoken to us about. Work this in us to will and to do of Your good pleasure for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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