



## Powerful Faith

Ephesians 1:19-20 NIV

**...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...**

### What Sort of Faith Do You Have?

A few weeks ago, my son tried to open a pickle jar but couldn't get the lid to budge. My daughter gave it a shot and nothing. Then my wife tried and got nowhere. I was kind of laughing at them and so they handed it over to me, knowing full well I would not be any more successful. Now my manhood was at stake. I was needing to pull out my dad card to show I was a full-fledged member and not an imposter. However, I needed back-up...so I prayed. Without closing my eyes or revealing my desperate state, I silently called out to Christ for help. Now this power contest was not just on me, it was on God too. Gripping the jar with the determination of Samson, I gave it a twist, and off came the lid. So who got credit for that show of strength? Who was the powerful one there?

There used to be a Christian ministry called the Power Team who toured all over the US and maybe even the world. They shared the Gospel while doing great feats of strength. Our passage today could have been their theme verse as it is all about power. **...and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...** (Ephesians 1:19-20) There are four different terms used to describe God's power and combined they are a mighty strong statement. The first, dunamis or power is natural ability, inherent power. The second, translated working, is energeas and is operating power. We get our English word energy from it. The third is mighty, kratos and is manifested or exhibited power. The fourth, strength is iskuos and describes physical might or power. Piled together, these four terms are a dramatic statement of the power God possesses. It is a reminder of the name for God often found in the Old Testament, "El Shaddai", God Almighty. Sometimes we have to be reminded of just how powerful God is, that He really is not just one of us, but rules over all things, has no rival and the universe bends its knee to Him. All this power we are told in this verse, is made available to a specific group of people.

One of the most fascinating accounts in the Old Testament is the thought-provoking tragic tale of Samson. The story opens with the angel visit made to first his mother and then his mother and father before Samson was conceived. From the very beginning, it is made clear who had all the power. The angel opened his address to his mother this way. **"You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son."** (Judges 13: 3 NIV) If you consider this from the child-bearing perspective, you could put it like this. Speaking for God, the angel declared to the woman, "You are powerless, but I am not!" Without the might of God working in her, she could never have a child, but with Him making it possible, she would. This in a nutshell is what it is like for all of us. There is no life without God, and we exist only because He made it

happen. All power resides in Him and if Samson's mother were to have Samson, it would be because of God.

There are two parts to Samson that are peculiar. The first was his supernatural strength. The second is more subtle. From the very beginning when the angel of the Lord told Manoah and his wife that she would give birth to a son, they were directed that Samson was to have a particular lifestyle that made it clear that he belonged to the Lord. He was to not consume anything that had to do with grapes, he was to leave his hair uncut and he was never to eat food determined by God to be unclean. The point of this was to make Samson a visual declaration of God and His glory. I have often pondered the great strength of Samson and the point of it from God's perspective. Of course it made Samson a formidable foe for the enemies of God's people, but it seems like there was more to it than that. Plenty of Jewish kings and leaders were able to fight off their enemies using just natural abilities. God might act supernaturally such as when He knocked down the walls of Jericho or sent a deadly disease to destroy the Assyrian armies in Hezekiah's day but mostly it was just men like David or women like Deborah taking on the Philistines or Canaanites with normal abilities as God led them along.

Samson was different than all the others. Everything about him screamed, God's power and supernatural strength. His long hair. His abstaining from wine and grape products. His physical bearing. It was as if the Lord decided to make Samson an object lesson teaching the world just how mighty He is and what that power can make of His people. In a single human being, El Shaddai gave a glimpse of what it is like to have God in you, to have His power working through you. The difference between the two Samsons, the one who had God empowering him and the Samson that was left to fend for himself, was stark and memorable. Israel had a permanent reminder, when they thought of Samson, what it was like to be fully God's and how it looked when you weren't. The two visuals were unforgettable. One was Samson killing with his great power a thousand attacking Philistines with just the jawbone of a donkey. The other was Samson, without God's power sitting forlornly chained and bound in a Philistine prison weak and blinded by his enemies. "Which would you rather be", became the question for each Jewish boy or girl pondering the account. It is your question too. Which Samson would you rather be—the one with God's power streaming through you or the Samson on his own, having abandoned God Almighty in his pursuit of what the world has to offer?

God's power is promised in our key verse to "believing ones" or "faithing ones". Faith is one of the most critical of Christian qualities, one that Jesus often addressed. He frequently complained about the lack of faith of his disciples and challenged them to be full of faith. There is a Greek word that is used to translate Christ's concern. It is oligopistos or "little faith" When Peter began to sink in the lake after he courageously followed Jesus out onto the stormy waves by walking on the water, Jesus chastised him for being one who was oligopistos, little faith. (See Matthew 14: 31) Consider that for a moment. To Jesus, walking on water made you one of normal faith, not great faith, but just having regular faith. You are of the little faith variety when you start out walking on water during a great storm but become afraid and sink. It is normal faith to walk on water. That is the average in Jesus' mind.

We see the same view of things in Matthew 17: 20. When the disciples were unable to cast out the demon plaguing a young man, Jesus told them the reason they didn't was because they were of oligopistos, little faith. Again, something requiring what we would think of as monumental, super-spiritual faith to accomplish, casting out a demon, was to Jesus only normal faith, average faith. Not being able to do so was "little faith". We must rethink our life with God or better yet, recalibrate what it means to live by faith. What we take as sufficient or enough faith falls flat in God's eyes. It is easy to justify our little faith as a result of what we have seen and experienced, but I wonder if we will look back like Samson and shake our heads at what could have been. Our scripture tells us that God has great power available to faith people. It seems like often we settle for the power Samson had at the end of his life rather than go after the power he had at the beginning. It doesn't need to be that way.

Take one area of prayer and lock in on it. Make sure its something that pushes your faith upward. Pray for it without quitting. I am praying for the recovery of a friend's son from cancer. Keep the concern on your mind and see it in your head as you pray. Take one more need and do the same with it. Have two matters that require developing faith on your part and work this muscle. The power is from God, the faith is from you. It is your faith working in confident agreement with God that generates power in you. Real power. Working, power. Make sure God hasn't told you to not pray for either of these two matters but once God gives you the green light, pray forcefully and decidedly. When you are ready, add a third concern for prayer, but make sure it pushes your faith even further. You may need someone to join you in praying because two or more praying for something has great promise.