

"POWERFUL LIVING"
January 15, 1988

TEXT: John 14:23 "If a man loves me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Dr. Wayne Dehoney, pastor of the Walnut Street Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, tells of a man who was night fishing at the base of the Guntersville dam in the Tennessee Valley. He had hung a gasoline lantern over the side of the boat to attract minnows and, in turn, the hungry bass. But then, after several hours, the lantern went out, and he found himself in utter darkness.

How strange it seemed. Behind that huge dam were billions of tons of pressure --water power. The turbines were humming, the giant dynamos generating millions of kilowatt hours of electricity. Yet there he sat in darkness. Forty feet from all that power, and unable to tap it.

Surely that is a parable for us today. We are so close to God's great reservoir of power with all its capacity to make us better, to make us stronger, to fill our lives with love and joy and peace. Yet so often we, too, sit in darkness and frustration.

Of course, no one really wants it that way. We all want to be strong, and happy, and useful. We want to be on top of life and not the other way around. But, too often we do not know how. And, as a result, we find ourselves wondering if life is not passing us by.

I remember reading somewhere about Papillon, the famous French prisoner who was condemned to spend his life on Devil's Island. It seems that, in addition to all his other problems, he was troubled by a frequently recurring dream. A dream in which he would find himself standing before a judge, much like the one who had condemned him in real life. And the judge would shout, "You are charged with a wasted life. How do you plead?" And, with bowed head, he would answer, "Guilty, Your Honor. I plead guilty." Must it also be that way with us? Is there not some means by which we can know that our lives really matter? Is there not some power, which we can tap, to put more life into our days?

Well, as you might suspect, the answer is, "Yes! There is!" And we find it here in this morning's scripture. In John 14, verse 23, where Jesus says, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." That, you see, is the key. We are not alone. And no matter how hard life may be, or how great its problems, there is nothing that we and God together can not handle.

When life overwhelms us, as it sometimes does, it is only because we have been trying to face it all alone. Because we are not using all the power available to us. Next Sunday the Cincinnati Bengals and the San Francisco 49'ers will be playing in the Super Bowl. If you watch that game you will see a Cincinnati nose tackle by the name of Krummrei, a former University of Wisconsin player, by the way. And, if you watch carefully, you may notice that much of the time the 49'ers double team him. That means that two men, not just one, will block him. And the reason for that is simple; he is just too quick and too strong for one man to handle.

Now, it is the same way with life. From time to time problems arise that are just too much for us to handle alone. But the "good news" is that we do not have to. Our Lord, himself, has offered to help us, to "double team" life's problems. He said, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me . . . for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-29)

You see, he knows how hard this life can be. He has been there. He is no ivory towered philosopher, peering optimistically at life through rose colored glasses. He is the ultimate realist, who has already faced life's worst --and defeated it. He knows that life is hard. And he never promised that we could avoid life's problems and difficulties. What he did promise is that, through his help, we can overcome them. He said, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) And he offers to do the same for us.

First, he helps us overcome ourselves by making us greater than we ever thought we could be. Some of life's "problems", in fact, are part of that process. C. S. Lewis described it this way:

"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on . . . But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you

thought of --throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

"If a man loves me, he will keep my word. And my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Change is rarely easy. But with God all things are possible. And He gives us power, not just to change, but to make the most of life in the process. When Marvella Bayh, wife of former Senator Birch Bayh, discovered she had an incurable disease she wrote:

"When they told me there was treatment but no cure at this time, I dropped to my knees. Two things from out of my past, when I went to church as a child, came back to me. Number one, 'Where can I go but to the Lord?' And number two, 'I am weak, but He is strong.' And it also came to me, [that] even if we live to be 100, how really short [our] life here is. And therefore, it's important to enjoy it and not rush so fast, and take time to smell the roses.'"

Dr. Wayne Dyer, in his book, Your Erroneous Zones, writes that we should forget that nonsense about this being the first day of the rest of our lives. It is not the first day, he says. It is the only day. None of us can count on tomorrow. All we have for sure is today. So let us make the most of it. What does it matter if we get some bumps along the way? They are painful, yes. But they are as necessary to life as they are unavoidable. And each bump is part of the process that makes life creative. In the words of Edwin Markham, "Defeat may serve as well as victory to shake the soul and let the glory out."

We see that so very clearly in the life of Paul. Next to Jesus, himself, Paul was probably the most influential man in all of history. It was he who brought Christianity to Europe, thus forever changing the course of western civilization. But it was not easy. Life presented him with all kinds of bumps, both literal and figurative. Listen to his own description. He wrote,

"Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false

brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches." (II Corinthians 11:24-28)

Next to that my problems seem pretty puny. But Paul did not give up. And he did not give in. He did not even retaliate. He wrote, "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate." (I Corinthians 4:12-13) Now, if you are like me, you may be asking yourself, "How in the world could he do that? Was he really that strong. Was he really that brave?" The answer is, "No!" But he did not have to be. As he, himself, wrote, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Paul, you see, found power to face his problems because he shared them with the Lord. Together they double teamed life and defeated the worst it had to offer. He found power. And so can we. By opening our hearts and our lives to him who loves us. And how do we do that? The same way we learn to do anything else. The way we learn to walk, or to ride a bike, or to drive a car. But we do not learn to walk on a crowded freeway. And we do not learn to ride a bike in a crowded parking lot. And most of us do not learn to drive a car, as I did, at the busiest intersection in St. Louis. We start with little things. And by trusting God we learn to count on Him. And then we can trust Him in larger things. "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."