

Jesus' Unique Power

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Date: 19 September 2026

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[0:00] Let me invite you to have your Bibles open at John chapter 18 this evening. John 18! We read the opening 14 or so verses of that chapter 18.

! This evening I'm going to begin by asking a question that in many ways is timeless. It's the question, is God good? The reason I say it's timeless is that recent research about those who are 30 years old and younger suggests this is the main question that they have when it comes to God. Not like previous generations, not like older generations asking the question, does God actually exist? No, no, for them the question, is God good? And it's a timeless question in the sense that this is ultimately the question that Eve had to somehow work her way through right at the very start of the Bible, wasn't it? When the serpent comes slithering up with the insinuation questioning the goodness of God about the limitation that God had set upon Adam and Eve and what they could and couldn't eat in the Garden of Eden, it's the same question ultimately. Well, is God good? Because if God was good, he wouldn't be that limitation on your life, would he? Now, of course, Eve and then Adam afterwards, they concluded in their minds that the answer to that question actually is no, that there's something not right about what God is doing here. And so the eight and the catastrophic consequences remain with us now. But it's these consequences of the brokenness of this world that's leading the under 30s to ask the question, is God good? Because they look at what goes on in the world around them, they look at what's going on in their own lives, and they're thinking, well, if God exists, and he does, he has to exist, there's no other explanation. For them, the question is whether or not he actually is good. So how would we go about answering a question like that? Is God good? I mean, we've sung that God is good. The people of God know that he is good. But how would we go about answering those who may be questioning their minds if God was good? Well, we would, I think, probably try and take them ultimately to Jesus, wouldn't we? We would say to folks, listen, the clearest and final communication of what God is like is seen in Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, you look to Jesus. He is the express image of the invisible God. He is the heart of God walking about on two legs. And so when you say to folks, if you want to know what God is like, you look to Jesus, we could then take it a step further, because we could then say, well, if the question is, is God good? You could reframe that and say, well, is Jesus good? Because if Jesus is the express image of the invisible God, it's the same question, isn't it? But when you reframe it, it's slightly different. Is Jesus good? And if we were to ask that question tonight and you were to give me some answers as to what would we say about if Jesus is good or not, you could turn around and say, well, well, he is good. Think of how he lived. Think of how Jesus never overlooked the forgotten. Think of how Jesus served selflessly. Think of how Jesus spoke truth to power. Think about how Jesus used the power that he possessed. He only ever used it in a good way.

And that in itself puts Jesus into a category all of his own, doesn't it? Because we know that those who have power today, they don't tend to be using it in good ways, do they? People who have power tend to bully, whether it's bullying individuals or families or even nations. Those who have power seem to be somehow sucked into its destructive components so that the power that they have, they must hold on to and they must get more of it and they must deal with any supposed threat to their power. And the power that they possess becomes more and more focused upon them than anybody else.

[4:28] And yet when we think of Jesus, the most powerful individual to ever walk in the face of this earth, we see that Jesus used his power, not in some way to grab a hold of it, not in some way to further his own ends, but he used his power for good always. And so trying to answer the bigger question of is God good?

Is Jesus good? I want to just drill into a little bit this evening as to the power of Jesus, his unique power, his unique good power, and then work our way back to answer the question that we started off with. So thinking about the unique power of Jesus, what he possessed and how he used it. And that's where we're going to land to begin with in John chapter 18. It's a dark night, John chapter 18. This is, of course, the record that John gives to us, his eyewitness account of the arrest of Jesus.

It is set in Gethsemane. Jesus knew that was going to be the location where Judas would find him. Jesus wasn't going to change any of his routines. Judas knew exactly what Jesus did and where Jesus would be. And so Jesus continued his routine. Judas comes along with the arresting party to come and get Jesus. Jesus is not going to run and hide. And so there is this party that's come with Judas and some soldiers and some officials that we have, verse 3, from the chief priests and Pharisees coming together to get Jesus. A couple of things to bear in mind. Number one, these officials from the chief priests, it's not the first time they've been sent to arrest Jesus. If you can read on later on tonight, back in chapter 7, you read an account there of how they came to arrest Jesus. It was daylight at that point.

And Jesus is speaking publicly in the temple. These guys came back to their leaders. Where's Jesus? Judas? Ah, well, we didn't get him. Why? Well, no one ever spoke the way this guy spoke. [6:42] Whether it's the same group of guys who were given the second opportunity to remedy the mess they made of it the first time or not, we don't know. It's likely. Wouldn't have been a huge amount of people who would have had that particular role. But they're joined by what's described here, that Judas has the officials from the chief priests, but he has a band of soldiers. The term band there, literally, or detachment in the original language can mean anything up to a number of hundreds of soldiers. So you could have potentially a couple of hundred battle-hardened soldiers, these officials from the chief priests and Pharisees, and you have Judas. And if they're coming with lanterns, even though it was Passover time, we don't know how cloudy or cloudless it was at that point, but you could sense that there would be a degree of a commotion coming towards this group where Jesus was with his disciples. Not simply would there be light, but there would be noise. Jesus does not run. He does not hide. We could ask the question, why were there so many people sent to arrest?

This single teacher? Was it that the disciples were to be arrested as well? Is that why Jesus said, well, if you're looking for me, you'll let these guys go? Potentially. Was it that they were afraid that there may be some sort of riot that may start? I mean, they didn't want to arrest Jesus at this time of year at all because of the fear of unrest? Or was there something in the back of their minds that they're coming to arrest somebody who has made the blind see? He's made the deaf hear. He's made the lame walk.

We don't know what proportion of any of these options are included, but there's a big crowd of people coming to arrest this single preacher. And so with this crowd that's coming to him, we see that Jesus actually takes control. He's outnumbered and he's physically, in a military sense, he's outgunned, but he's the one who takes control. And we have verse four, Jesus, knowing all that would happen, came forward and said to them, whom do you seek? So literally he's striding out towards them and he's taking charge of the situation. Who are you looking for? Looking for Jesus. Well, that's me. I am.

And as he communicates that answer, we have verse seven here, verse six, when he said, I am he, they drew back and they fell to the ground. We have something that's really rather spectacular. We get something rather spectacular in the sense that what's unfolding here is that mere words from the mouth of Jesus have rendered this arresting party incapable of even standing before Jesus.

[9:48] It's not that there was some tremor from an earthquake that just so happened to coincide with the very words that left Jesus' mouth. No, no, no. They heard this guy speak. And as soon as they heard this guy speak, they are left with no option but to fall backwards. The power that left his lips rendered this arresting party dumbstruck in that sense. Jesus, of course, answered with a very special answer, didn't he? Throughout the Gospel of John, on many occasions, Jesus has this same form of words, I am. And then he adds to it the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the resurrection and the life. But the crucial bit is the I am bit, isn't it? It's the very name of God that was revealed back in Exodus chapter three. The God who has chosen to communicate the fact that he is inexhaustible, the God who has chosen to

communicate the fact that he is the covenant-keeping, covenant-making God. Here is Jesus saying, I am. Who are you looking for? Jesus of

Nazareth. I am. Two words in the Greek, three in our English, and they are helpless before him. They're prostrate before him. What's going on? Well, if we had some of the folks who went in chapter seven, who came to arrest Jesus the last time, who were so amazed by the words that left his mouth in the daylight at the temple, well, the words that left his mouth in the midnight on that occasion were even more startling for them. There is no way that they could do anything about it. And it is, in John's gospel, the last time that we have the record of Jesus using or revealing his power by what he said.

You know, in the gospel records, you have different instances of Jesus saying certain things and these things then happening. So the disciples, terrified on a boat, thinking they're going to sink, thinking they're going to drown, thinking it's game over. And the storm is wild. And Jesus literally speaks, doesn't he? The power of his words. And creation recognizes the voice of its creator.

Quiet, be still. And the wind ceases. And the swell evaporates instantly in its calm. Or when Jesus is giving the command to demons to leave those that they've been tormenting.

This is the last time that we have recorded in the gospels, the very power of Jesus being expressed in words. And you would think, but then we know how thick spiritual darkness is over the natural man and woman. But you would think that hearing these words and then realizing they're flat on their back or they're flat on the front of their face, however they landed, you would think that they would join the dots and they would say, we may be in over our heads here. We maybe need to beat a retreat.

[13:17] This is not a normal task we've been allocated here. This is somebody remarkable. You would think that they would know that they were in over their heads.

I mean, Jesus, he could have done so much more, couldn't he? Merely from what he said. He could have ordered the legions of angels to come to his rescue, but he didn't because he is going to allow himself to be taken because this is going to be part of the obedience that he's going to show to that great plan of salvation that was developed in eternity and enacted in time. That's going to mean he is going to go to the cross. He's going to be the substitute for my sin and for your sin. He's going to allow himself to be taken. But you see, it's not Judas by his cunning treachery. It's not these soldiers by their military might. It's not the officials and the chief priests and officers with their particular cunning that's going to in any way arrest Jesus because they've come to arrest him. By his very words, he arrests them. He allows himself to be taken into custody and to be led away. One writer puts it this way. It's almost as if this is another situation akin to the transfiguration of Jesus. Do you remember when Peter, James, and John went to that prayer meeting and they saw Jesus in a way that they'd never seen him before, that light just radiated from him? It wasn't light that was shining onto him. It was light that shined from him.

And the veil that had been covering the glorious identity of the Savior was lifted for that spell in the Mount of Transfiguration. It's almost as if there's just a little bit of lifting of that veil again here. Two words from the very lips of our Savior. And the might of its day is rendered helpless.

So that therefore leads us to ask a number of questions, doesn't it? The first question being, where did this power that Jesus possessed actually come from? Where is the origin of this power? power. And that's why we read and reminded ourselves how John begins his gospel. Because John begins the gospel by taking us back to the beginning, doesn't he? Paralleling the start of the very Bible in Genesis, reminding ourselves that in the very beginning, before there was anything, there was the Word, there was the eternal Son of God. And that he is the one through whose power, verse 3, all things were made through him. And without him, nothing was made that was made because of who he actually is. The power that Jesus possesses stems from the very identity as to who he is, that he is the eternal Son in that sense. He is the one present at the very beginning of creation, calling all things into existence. Colossians tells us he's the one that creation was made, in and through and for, it was all about the eternal Son of God. So here is the eternal Son of God, having come into this world, having laid aside the glory that's his by nature, and having come into this world to experience life in this polluted world, and yet to remain uncontaminated by it.

[16:59] Here is the eternal Son of God. Here is the eternal Son who has this power because of who he is. The Gospels, through rather unusual means, remind us of this, don't they? In Luke chapter 4, you have the reference there where Jesus is casting out demons. And these demons, they're crying out. They're in anguish. Of course, you'll know that there was this heightened

demonic activity that coincided with the very Lord of Glory being in this earth, as all the forces of hell, effectively, were mustered to try and fight the Savior, and to try and distract him and divert him from that path of obedience. But what does it say when the demons are coming out of many crying, you are the Son of God? Why does he have this power? He has this power because of who he actually is. It's not a power that's been devolved to him. You know, we speak in political terms of a power being devolved from one institution to another, and it says that the main power broker was able to devolve it. Well, that's not the case here. It's not a devolved power that Jesus possesses. It's an intrinsic power that belongs to him. And it's not a power that can in any way be taken from him.

You know, in almost all the good movies, the good movies of the good guys and the bad guys, there's always the bad guy, the villain, trying to somehow gain the power to use to his or her own advantage. You think of the classic villains in the Bond movies, and whether it is the concoction that they need to try and develop the weapons that they're going to rule, or whatever it might be.

There's always people trying to get what's not theirs. Well, nobody's going to take the power that belongs to the eternal Son of God. It was not devolved. It cannot be stolen. And it does not dilute with age. You know, some of us kind of know that we can't run as fast as we used to be able to run. The power's not in our legs, or maybe not in our lungs the way it used to be. But the power that is in the possession of Jesus, it does not fade. It was not devolved. It cannot be stolen. It is his, because of his identity as the eternal Son. And so if the origin of that power as to where they come from is clear, what we need to do, and bearing in mind what we're doing in answering the question, is God good? Is Jesus good? We ask ourselves, how did Jesus use his power? How did Jesus use that power that was in his possession?

And this is quite remarkable, because the power that was used to create this very world was the power that Jesus used to fix what was broken. One of my, I think it is my favorite passage in the entire Gospels is Matthew chapter 8. There you have the story of the man with leprosy who comes towards Jesus.

[20:33] Leprosy meant shout out unclean. If someone with leprosy comes towards you, everybody else steps back. They don't want to be in the vicinity. They most certainly don't want to be within breathing distance.

The very cross would have been touched by someone who had leprosy. Well, the contamination risk was so high. Leprosy was just a life sentence. It was so dreadfully awful in that environment. Matthew chapter 8.

This man comes to Jesus. Jesus doesn't move. In my small mind, everybody else has moved back, but Jesus hasn't. This guy comes to Jesus. What does he say? He says, if you are willing, you can make me clean. What's spectacular about that is that there is no question in that man's mind about the power of Jesus. It's unquestioned that this man has the power to do this. The only question is if he has the willingness to actually use his power for someone who has got nothing, absolutely nothing to offer Jesus. So in this man's mind, his power is unquestioned.

It's just the willingness of Jesus. And of course, Jesus answers in two ways, doesn't he? So beautifully, he touches the man. Before he speaks, he touches the man. When did that man last hear or last feel human touch on his body? And then he hears the words, I am willing, be clean. It was just the willingness that was in question, not the power. What insight that man had. And then another illustration that we have in Luke chapter 8. Think of the situation where you've got Jairus and he is, as you can only imagine how tormented he is. His daughter is ill. She is dying before his very eyes. His last hope is to somehow come and find Jesus. He finds Jesus. He convinces Jesus to come with him. They're moving in that direction. As far as Jairus is concerned, he's moving only too slowly. And then the slowly even comes to a stop. And then Jesus says, well, who touched me? [22:51] And the disciples go, sorry, Jesus, but there's lots of people around here. Probably lots of people have touched you. No, no, no, no. I felt power go out from me. Who touched me? And this woman comes forward and she says, it was me. I thought if I would even just touch your clothing, I would be made well. And he welcomed her. Your faith has made you well. Jairus is going, can we go please? I bet it's too late. He sees the people coming towards him and they don't actually need to say very much to him because it's written in their eyes. And his world slowly begins to collapse. And Jesus says, no, no, just, it's okay. It's okay. We'll go. And he goes to Jairus' house and there's the wailing, the mourning, the, you know, the horror. And he goes up to see his daughter, Jairus' daughter, and he wakes her up from death like you and I might wake a child from sleep. Such power. Used for what? Used for good.

Power used for good. There was never anybody who walked on the face of this earth that had the power that Jesus possessed. And he used it for good. He used it for others. He used it to make people well again. The power that was used to create the world was used to clean up the mess and to make people well again. And so his power uniquely used for good. So what does this mean for us then?

Because all these truths, they are grounded in your life and in my life. And when we think of the unique good power of Jesus, there are multiple ways in which we could ground this in our experience tonight. But the obvious ones would be as follows. With the unique good power that Jesus possesses, every single follower of Jesus, therefore, is ultimately, absolutely secure. We are ultimately, absolutely secure because of the power that Jesus possesses. Jesus has said in John chapter 10 that no one can snatch us out of his hands. No one can snatch us out of the Father's hands.

That's true. They can't. Who would want to? Well, an enemy would want to. Because we have come to bow before King Jesus and have now been enlisted in his army. We now live and breathe and operate under the best of masters imaginable. It does now mean, however, that we are hated because Jesus has an enemy who hates him. And that enemy who used every weapon in his arsenal to somehow try and deal with Jesus and the mission that he was on, who failed dramatically, now wants to destroy the people that belong to Jesus. And so that's why in your spiritual life and in my spiritual life, there's always a battle. That's why taking time to read God's word is never straightforward. That's why we're so distracted when we're trying to pray. That's why when things seem to be going so well, all of a sudden, little foxes come in to spoil because the enemy doesn't want us to thrive. The enemy ultimately wants to destroy us. But the enemy can't do that because we are ultimately absolutely secure because of the unique good power that Jesus possesses. And so we are, in that sense, among the most protected on the face of this earth tonight. And therefore, however weak or vulnerable we may feel ourselves to be, we apply the truth of God's word to that and say, yeah, I may be weak. I am weak. In fact,

[27 : 20] I'm getting weaker. But I am held. And I am absolutely secure in Jesus Christ. Not simply are we secure and have this ultimate security because of our position, we actually experience even more of a strengthening on the basis of our connection to Jesus.

So we're ultimately secure because of who he is. But there's a strengthening that's given to us as well. Famous chapter 2 Corinthians 12, Paul is speaking about great things that he's experienced, and then really hard things that's come as a consequence of that. And he talks about the thorn in his flesh. He talks about the difficulties that he's had. He's talked about praying earnestly for these difficulties. He sees that his life would be so much better if he didn't have these difficulties to navigate every day. And he hears the words of Jesus that my, my, but I'll give you the actual quotation itself, that my strength is made perfect. My grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in your weakness. And so he goes on to say, therefore I boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. What have we noted about that power?

Well, that power is peerless. That power is unique. That power is good. And he says, for the sake of Christ, and I'm content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, calamity. For when I am weak, then I am strong. Because not simply are we ultimately absolutely secure. That's, you know, the final page, as it were in our pilgrimage here, that that's not in question. But until we get to that final page, here we have the promise of the very power of the Savior being in us, helping us with all of the struggles that we have. And I don't know about you, but I frequently have these struggles that are heightened, or maybe I'm just reminded more of them when it comes to a communion weekend. And I'm, and I question lots of things about myself at that point. And then I need to remind myself that actually my salvation is secure. And even though I am weak, I am strong, because my Savior, whose perfect good power is unique, and it is toward me. A couple more things that ground the idea of Jesus' unique power. And I was trying to figure out how to express this, and maybe I didn't come up with the right word there in the slides. By the way, I did have images there, but the images are all gone. So technology is only good in some context. I'll change it for tomorrow, don't worry. I was thinking about sincerity. I was thinking about the temptation for us to abuse power, to force ourselves into circumstances or situations, because we may think that we've got an opening or something that we may give to it. I want you to be aware of how Jesus never forces himself on anyone. Never forces himself on anyone. There's no one who's erected such a strong, impregnable

barrier to Jesus. Oh, Jesus, no, is he going to get through this? No, the way I've constructed my life, and I've made sure that I've got no contact with Christianity or with Christians or and then with the Bible. I've erected this impregnable wall. No, nothing's impregnable when it comes to Jesus.

But Jesus will never force himself upon anyone. He never does it. He entreats, he invites.

[31:19] And it's so compellingly attractive when God is working within us, but he never forces himself upon anyone. And there's a lesson for us in that with whatever very minimal power we may have in comparison to Jesus, but whatever circumstances and position that we're in, how we use what's been delegated to us.

Following the example of Jesus. It's quite powerful. And then to finish off, just now our time is up, but finishing off, thinking about the unique good power of Jesus means we're ultimately absolutely secure, that we are strengthened when I'm weak. We're actually stronger because it's the power of Jesus within us, that Jesus doesn't force himself upon anyone. But here's a final thought for you. Are you ready to meet such power? Are you and I ready to meet such power? Because we're going to meet such power one day.

We're going to meet the one who spoke and everyone was left prostrate in front of him. Because when the Lord Jesus comes back, he's going to come back, not with the veil hidden to the glory and power and authority that he possesses, but that is going to be so very evident. And that's going to be so very overwhelming. Because one day we're going to stand before this ultimate power.

Because if the power that was present with Jesus in his state of humiliation as we talk about him coming into this earth, in the state of glorification as he comes back, what power is going to be visible then?

You know, it's why Philippians 2 tells us, every knee will bow, every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. I don't know where you are in your relationship with Jesus tonight. I don't know if you have a relationship with Jesus tonight. I don't know how you think about meeting Jesus tonight, because you are going to meet him. If it's for the first time that you are bowing before King Jesus on that return in power, then that's going to be too late. Because you need to be ready to meet that power. And that's by bowing now, repenting, believing, turning, and trusting. So what have we seen this evening? We've been thinking about the unique good power of Jesus in a league of his own, in a category of his own. We struggle, especially, some limited myself struggle even with the vocabulary to try and express the unique good power of Jesus. A power that was used for good. Is Jesus good? Well, yes, he is good.

[34:15] Is God good? Well, yes, he is good. Because God in his goodness is doing something so spectacular to fix the brokenness of this world, the brokenness of our lives, that this very good eternal Son came into this world for us. So is God good? Is Jesus good? Yes, he is. And the more we look at him, the more we see how wonderfully precious he is. And I pray that he will be to each one of us.