

Pursuing God: The Power of God that Transforms Life

Ezra 6:13-22

MPS God's power permeates all of life when the gospel centers everything for the display His glory.

OBJ Every person can understand how God's power permeates all of life by the gospel in three distinct ways.

INTRO Today in "Pursuing God", the work has been completed, worship has been restored and re-organized to flourish among God's people and the Passover culminates their celebration. For the Israelites, there was no more powerful celebration than Passover. And Passover represented the power of God that transforms life.

READ Ezra 6:13-22

Then, according to the word sent by Darius the king, Tattenai, the governor of the province Beyond the River, Shethar-bozenai, and their associates did with all diligence what Darius the king had ordered. ¹⁴And the elders of the Jews built and prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by decree of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia; ¹⁵and this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

¹⁶And the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites, and the rest of the returned exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. ¹⁷They offered at the dedication of this house of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁸And they set the priests in their divisions and the Levites in their divisions, for the service of God at Jerusalem, as it is written in the Book of Moses.

*¹⁹On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover. ²⁰For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves. ²¹It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. ²²And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel. **Ezra 6:13-22***

God's will is fulfilled in this passage as they finished their building by His decree, both through His prophets and through the decree of the government leaders. **Ezra reveals how God providentially works through divine and human means to accomplish His sovereign will.**

Then, the people of Israel dedicate the house of God through celebration. Ezra notes the extensiveness of this celebration. Each tribe of Israel is represented by a male goat. All of God's people are included in this way, and not only the exiles who returned. The celebration culminates by reinstating the leaders of worship for God's service according to God's Word. **With the work finished and worship reestablished, the people's identity is restored as God's servants among the nations.**

TRANS Finally, after the house of God is dedicated, the time comes for Passover.

Passover was the annual celebration of God's salvation for his people. Exodus 12:1-30 records the account of God's blood-covering protection against the last plague in Egypt before their deliverance. God tells His people, 'a blood will cover you and death will pass you by. Under the blood you will live because you are mine.' **Passover was the remembrance of God's most powerful display of mighty deeds in saving his people and served as the central celebration of salvation until the cross.**

Friend, we worship the God who is mighty to save! These passages show us His power at work for His glory and for the good of His people. His divine providence acts for the good of His people. He is present among the people in their worship. And ultimately, His provision to save is celebrated by the Passover. **The God of the Bible is a powerful God who is mighty to save His people; the Lord of all creation who works all things for His people in accordance with His will.** Rom8:28

Are you experiencing God's power displayed in your life? Do you want to see and experience more? Eph 3:10-12 says God's power [wisdom] in the gospel of Jesus Christ is on display thru the Church. Where the gospel points us back to Jesus now, the Passover pointed them forward to Jesus in Ezra's day. **God is reconciling all things to himself thru Jesus** Col1:20, and **His power is on display in the world through the lives of His people.**



God's power permeates all of life when the gospel centers everything for the display His glory.

OBJ God's power permeates all of life by the gospel in **three distinct ways**.

1. God's power permeates all of life when His Word becomes our sustaining strength. 6:13-15

God's Word awakened the people to begin working again and now we see that it strengthened His people to persevere and sustain the work of mission. Ezra makes clear that it was God's Word that provided the strength to accomplish His work, both in His people and in the pagan rulers. There is no greater power nor any other means to accomplish God's will than His Word working in us by Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that God's Word is living and active.^{Heb4.12} God's Word produces faith in the hearer to believe and obey.^{Romans10:17} And God's Word fully empowers our obedience.^{2Timothy3.16} God sends forth His Word to accomplish all His purposes in the world.^{Isaiah55:11} **By God's promise, His power strengthens us to obey and live on mission when His Word remains in us, to labor, prosper and see God's Will accomplished.**

Clichés always fail to sustain. Words that tell us everything will be okay but with no substance leave us longing for more. When we struggle to remain faithful, we should not go to the Word to hear how we can be better or good. Our goodness will never suffice, but God's greatness and faithfulness is always sufficient! Press into God's Word where you will He meets you with His promises for you. Read to hear His voice and behold His greatness, to receive faith, strength of heart, peace of mind, and comfort for a weary soul. Meditate on His Word to invite Holy Spirit to illuminate and apply it. Memorize it to take with you as strength and guardian. Study it for deeper understanding, to gaze into the face of God. You will never know God's will nor recognize His work apart from His Word. But the more His Word saturates your life, the more His power permeates to bring His strength to every part of your life. **God's power permeates all of life when we are saturated by His Word to awaken and sustain us.**

2. God's power permeates all of life when His joy fuels our motivation and celebration. 6:16-18

The work was completed and the celebration began. What a great joy to see a part of God's work completed. Though this offering didn't compare to past offerings, that didn't matter. It was an outpouring of God's work among them; all of God for all His people. This was the first time in over seventy years a sacrifice for sin had been made. **Can you imagine how powerful that must have been?** The priests and Levites were restored to lead the ministry of the God's work. Their celebration and thanksgiving produced more joy in the Lord, which strengthened their motivation for His presence among them. **God's people were gathering again for worship, and with a powerful, renewed sense of the important for their lives.**

Learning to rejoice in the Lord is essential for strength, "...for the joy of the Lord is your strength"^{Neh8.10}. Rejoicing in the Lord means we turn from other idols and sources of false joy, and trust God for eternal joy. Worshiping God with joy is not a fake happiness, but what results from recognizing and giving thanks for His provision in life. You will always pursue that which you believe to bring you greatest joy. When you celebrate God's joy, it strengthens you with greater joy. **And the greatest motivation for obedience in your life is the celebration from God's joy within you.**

If you want God's power to permeate your whole life, then you must look to Him and acknowledge Him in your joys and sorrows, in your highs and lows, as well as our "whys" and "what for"s. If God's is not worthy of your celebration, He will never be glorious enough to command your motivation. If He is not your greatest gain for all of life, He will never become your highest aim in daily living. We love to 'give God a nod' when all is good, but we are quick to question Him when things do not go our way. Until God is as glorious and hopeful to us in what appear as life's defeat and failure as in our success and victory, our worship is predicated on our will being accomplished by Him, instead of His will being revealed through us. **God's power permeates all of life when the joy He gives fuels our motivation for His glory and our celebration, that He is worthy.**

APPL For me, the seasons of greatest challenge and difficulty have always proven to be times of greatest growth. The same holds true for LifePoint Church. The greatest challenges to gospel ministry and hardest problems encountered have



historically been the seasons that produced the greatest fruit from our ministry and mission.¹ Now, I do not wish to return to those times not repeat them. But I must honestly consider them and recognize how God proved faithful and his blessing did far more than I could have imagined. When you consume your life with God, in worship celebration, thanksgiving, and in every other way, He fills your life with His presence, power, and eternal pleasures, to grow our hunger for more of Him! [When God is our greatest joy, seeing His will in our lives and serving His mission becomes our highest celebration and strongest motivation.](#)

3. [God's power permeates all of life when the gospel shapes the practice of our life.](#) 6:19-22

The last portion of our passage today says, *"the returned exiles kept the Passover"* and *"the Feast of Unleavened Bread"*. *"Kept"* means they did not allow competing priorities, pressing demands, or personal pleasures to take higher precedence in life. Worshiping the Lord faithfully according to His Word remained their first priority for two practical reasons. The first was an important recognition. Verse 20 states that they all recognized their need for cleansing, priests, Levites, and all the people. And their cleansing came only by faith through the slaughtered Passover lamb. The second practical reason was an important reception. Verse 21 states that all who *"joined and separated himself from the uncleanness of the people of the land to worship the Lord"*. All who "believed" received the cleansing for sin by faith by participation. This was not religious ritual but faith-fueled practice. Faith was identified not by words spoken, but by demonstrated actions of life (*"joined them and separated himself"*). [Christians keep the gospel, through which we are forgiven and cleansed, and made righteous by Jesus' blood, when we honor Him first in all of life.](#)

This simple statement forms a critical principle: If you want God's power to permeate your life, you must keep by your life that which is given from God. The separation identified in Ezra is not foreign to the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul instructs, *"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers."* because righteousness has no partnership with lawlessness. Christians hold distinct priorities that govern our lives because we live in covenant relationship with God. [When we neglect the practices that demonstrate our faith, we forsake the testimony of the covenant that defines our faith.](#)

Paul teaches how life practice flows from God's covenant by faith: God's work FOR us determines how we live FOR Him.

- Romans 12:1-2 instructs, *"I appeal to you...by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice"*.
- Galatians 5:16 instructs, *"walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."*
- Ephesians 4:1: *"I...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,"*
- Philippians 1:27: *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ,"*
- Colossians 2:6: *"Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him,"*

[It cannot be any more plain or practical. If you want God's power to permeate your whole life, you must allow the gospel to shape the practice of your life.](#)

It is often argued, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian." Tony Evans, noted preacher, responded on Social Media this week by saying, "It is often said, And that is true. And you don't have to go home to be married. But try it and see how well that works for you.

God does not call us to worship, serve, nor obey by saying, "Just give me all you can." No, He dares to invite us by, "Come and give me all, and see if I am not worthy." [I wonder how many today have "lost" the sense of God's power at work in their lives because of how much "gospel" and faithful worship has not been "kept", but forfeited and neglected for other things?](#)

[God's power permeates all of life when the gospel centers everything for the display His glory.](#)

¹2012 was the year immediately following the release of a staff pastor. We baptized 36. 2018 was a year marked by a very challenging resignation of a second staff pastor. We baptized 34. 2021 was a very chaotic year in the middle of worldwide pandemic. We baptized 31. In addition, our giving rose to all-time highs during these years as well.

