

The Character of God
Part 2 – His Power
“Our Mighty God!”

Psalm 104

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Is God powerful?

Is He more powerful than anyone or anything else?

Aware that we are in a church and socially conditioned to say the acceptable thing – we would probably all say “yes!”

But do we believe it?

Again, the easy answer to that question is “Yes, I believe God is all-powerful!”

But when it comes to the “stuff”, the experiences of life and death, do we really believe it – do we actually trust Him?

Do we trust that he truly is more powerful than anything else and fully able to do what needs to be done?

Or do we suspect that God might fail us – either because he isn’t aware, doesn’t care, or can’t do anything significant about our situation?

When you are without a job and income, when your child is deathly sick, when the most significant human relationship you have falls apart, when everything about life seems dreary at best, our beliefs about God are put to the test.

It is then that you find out if your religion is relevant or not.

If we have any expectation at all about God’s intervention in our situations there are three things we must believe about him.

We must believe he is wise – that God knows what is going on – that he is aware.

We must also believe that he cares – that he is gracious toward us – that he wants to do what is best for us.

And we must also believe he has the ability to do something about it – to change what needs to be changed.

Those three attributes are wisdom, grace and power.

Many years ago a Dr. Paterson wrote, “The value of a religion depends on the truth and sufficiency of its idea of God.” (in The Rule of Faith) Maybe this is simplistic, but why is it that many of us don’t pray in a meaningful way.

Oh, maybe we pray in perfunctory ways such as at meals or in religious group settings or in rote, trite, meaningless ways.

But we don’t really come to God expecting anything from our prayers.

Why?

Is it because we are fatalists?

Or is it because deep down we don’t trust the wisdom, goodness or power of God?

I have mentioned three attributes: The wisdom, grace and power of God.

This morning I speak of just one – the power of God.

I need for you to assume his wisdom and goodness for the morning and focus only on this attribute of his power.

I want you to assume that God is **fully aware** of your life and circumstances and the circumstances of this world.

I want you to also assume that **he cares** – he desires that ultimately good not evil prevails.

The question we look at today **is whether he has the ability** to make a difference.

What do you believe about the power of God?

In Romans 8:28 the Apostle Paul wrote, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

Does God have the power to make good on those promises?

Is he truly greater than anything this world or life can throw at us?

I know that the obvious answer to that question for church-going people is “yes” **but** I want you to think, this morning, about why you believe it.

On the strength of what evidence is your confidence in God well placed?

Power, according to the Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary is “the ability to do or act”.

Omnipotence is “having absolute power”.

All living creatures have power, the ability to do or act.

But as we personally know, we don't have the power to do **whatever we want** to do – we are severely limited in power.

But is God limited?

Or can God do everything he wishes to do?

Over and over again in the Bible God showed his power to prove to his people that they could trust him.

It is not our text today, but I remind you of the incident recorded in I Kings 18.

Elijah, the prophet of God, met on Mount Carmel with the prophets of the so-called god, Baal.

The people of Israel, God's people, were worshipping Baal hoping he would send rain on their drought-stricken country.

They still said they believed in God, but thinking of Him as removed from their lives, their confidence was in Baal.

We say we believe in God but in the everyday things of life our confidence is too often in our own ingenuity, other people, government, or whatever – thinking there is more chance that good change will come about because of those things than because of God's gracious intervention.

And so we begin to trust more in Baal than in God.

In the incident on Mt Carmel, God's prophet Elijah built an altar to the Lord and he challenged the prophets of Baal to build an altar to their god.

Then instead of lighting a fire beneath either altar, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal to see whose God would send fire down from the skies to light their altar.

The prophets of Baal tried with all their rituals (some of them grotesque) to convince their god to send fire down – but to no avail.

Finally it was Elijah's turn and the God of heaven and earth did send the fire down.

But what I want you to hear is Elijah's prayer as he asked God to act. This prayer is my prayer today for each of us.

I Kings 18:36-37 "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God... Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

To the extent that we have looked to other sources as the "strength of our lives", to the extent that we have trusted in other sources as the answer to our deepest needs in life, we have turned our hearts away from the only true God, the mighty God, who has the ability to act exactly according to his will.

When the fire fell from heaven that day on Mt Carmel and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and soil of the altar and all the water that had been poured on it, the text says,

I Kings 18:39 "When all the people saw this, they fell on their faces, and cried, 'The Lord – He is God! The Lord – He is God!'"

I am tempted to say that if you and I had been there that day this sermon would not be necessary.

We too would have been so awed that we also would have been on our faces before such a mighty God.

I **want** us to have some of that sense of awe today as we think about the power of God.

But I want our thinking to be more precise than that.

God's power is not just a display of power like some schoolyard bully proving he is strong.

God is not a law unto himself – some kind of arbitrary, absolute use of power.

The exercise of God's power always has a purpose. Theologian Donald Bloesch wrote, "God is not power in and of itself but the One who exercises his power to liberate and redeem a lost human race... His almightiness is his persevering and indefatigable (tireless) will to love, heal and redeem." Bloesch 106-107 God the Almighty

As we think about God's power today, I don't want you to just think "Wow! Isn't God powerful!"

I want you to realize that all his power is purposeful and is directed to creating, saving, and forever keeping you and me.

May we not be amazed just at the display of power like we were watching some strong man at a circus – let us be humbled that it is power used for us.

Yes, if we had been at Mt. Carmel with Elijah that day we would have been amazed and humbled but God knows how quickly we forget and so He has given us another witness to his greatness – a witness that is in front of us every day.

Psalm 19:1-2 "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge (of God).

The Apostle Paul said it this way in Romans 1:20 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse."

It is in the world and universe around us that we see one of the most dramatic and effective witnesses to the power of God.

I want you to look with me today at one of the greatest works of poetry ever written about the greatness of God as revealed in creation – Psalm 104.

In this Psalm the author is obviously caught up in emotion as he worships God for his greatness in both creating and sustaining the universe.

Before we read the Psalm, I want you to see how personal this reflection on the power, the greatness of God is.

Psalm 104:1 “Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord, my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.”

The Psalmist is captured by one mighty thought – “This God I am describing is **MY** God”, the God in whom I trust.

Psalm 73:23-26

O God “you hold me by my right hand... Who have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

The God of all power is the Psalmist’s God, is He yours?

Now listen as He describes God in **raw** power, **creative** power, **preserving** power, **the magnitude** of power, **the variety** his power creates, **the power of life and death** and ending with another statement of **the sheer power** of his power.

READ Psalm 104

Before I continue talking about the power of God as displayed in creation and preservation of the world and its universe, I must acknowledge that **this biblical worldview** of the Psalmist and the church **is dismissed by many** in our western culture.

For the past couple of hundred years, some in the academic world have declared there is **no place in rational modern thought for the myth of a God** who created the universe.

Materialism with its attendant agnosticism or atheism **has become common fare** in our schools, our media and our governments.

Historian and college president, George Roche said, “It really does matter, and matter very much, how we think about the cosmos.”

Astronomer Hugh Ross (whom we will have with us next spring) went on to say, “If the universe is simply uncreated, eternally self-existent or randomly self-assembled, then it has no purpose and consequently we have no purpose. Determinism rules. Morality and religion are ultimately irrelevant, and there is no objective meaning to life.” (In the Creation Hypothesis 141)

If the universe of which the Psalmist writes, was self-created then his conclusion about God is nonsense.

You have to make a decision about God before the Psalm can have any relevance to you.

Is God the Creator or did the universe create itself?

British physical chemist Peter Atkins wrote, "My aim is to argue that the universe can come into existence without intervention, and that there is no need to invoke the idea of a Supreme (God)...".

We (scientists) have been back to the time before time, and we have tracked the infinitely lazy Creator to his lair and he is of course not there." (The Creation 115)

In his book Creation Revisited he writes, "In the beginning there was nothing. Absolute void, not merely empty space. There was no space; nor was there time, for this was before time... From absolute nothing, absolutely without intervention, there came into being rudimentary existence." (Quoted in How Large is God p119)

Steven Hawking, has written a very popular book entitled A Brief History of Time.

In the preface to that book, the late but well-known author Carl Sagan wrote, "This is also a book about God, perhaps the absence of God."

Hawking himself writes in his book, "The idea that space and time may form a closed surface without boundary also has profound implications for the role of God in the affairs of the universe.... So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a Creator. But if the universe is really self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place then, for a Creator?" (In How Large is God)

I believe that kind of thinking and writing has affected not only the academies of our country but also all of us.

More and more people are afraid to speak of a personal Creator God for fear they may sound ignorant.

I haven't time or the ability to build the case that Hugh Ross can build but I want you to listen to British physicist Paul Davies **and hear the change** this scientist went through in just five years.

In God and The New Physics 1983 he denied the possibility of God as a creator and promoted an atheistic interpretation of the universe.

By 1984 in Superforce he wrote, "The laws of (physics)...seem themselves to be the product of exceedingly ingenious design...The universes must have a purpose."

Then in 1988 in The Cosmic Blueprint he wrote, "I see powerful evidence that there is something going on behind it all. The impression of design is overwhelming." (cited in Hugh Ross Creation and Time 128)

And Mr. Davies is one of a fast growing number, in the scientific community today, who like George Greenstein would say:

"As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency – or rather, Agency (God) – must be involved (in the existence of the universe). Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to we have stumbled upon scientific proof of the existence of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?" (1988 The Symbiotic Universe)

The simplistic materialistic explanations for the existence of the universe that have held sway for so long are fast becoming the philosophical equivalent of the Emperor Who Wore No Clothes.

Philosophical materialism is wholly inadequate to explain the existence and complexity and beauty of the universe around us.

What some of us have been willing to say only in Sunday school we can now say with a growing boldness, "The **heavens** declare the glory of GOD!" "In the beginning, GOD created the heavens and the earth."

Maybe that the Bible says it ought to be enough, but sometimes my faith needs bolstering and it helps me when even agnostic scholars recognize what the Psalmist said is right in front of our noses.

Now back to Psalm 104.

What kind of God are you being asked to trust today?

What kind of God are you being invited to give your life to?

Is he capable of doing good for you?

Is he more powerful than all else?

I. The Psalm begins in verses 2-4, with a poetic statement about the raw power of God in creating the universe.

Look at verse 2 “He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent...”

The Psalmist uses some of the language of the Genesis account of creation.

Genesis 1:3 “And God said, ‘Let there be light and there was light’.”

Genesis 1:6-7 “And God said, Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water. So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse (earth) from the water above it (sky). And it was so. God called the expanse ‘sky’.”

So powerful is God, that the Psalmist pictures him as wrapping the light he created around himself like a coat and then taking his arm to stretch out the heavens (the skies) with all their galaxies around the earth which he had separated from the heavens.

So great is our God that the Psalmist pictures him as making the clouds his chariot and he rides on the wings of the wind.

We look at the clouds and particularly the storms that emerge from them and we are dumbstruck in awe of their power.

Hurricane Floyd was 600 miles across and today there are far more people than before who respect the power of the wind.

So powerful, so great is our God that all of creation is his servant – he created, controls and uses it all.

For all the unfair questions that raises about the goodness of God we must not attempt to answer them by reducing God to something less than the all-powerful God He is.

II. In verses 5-9 the poet writes a word-picture of Day Three of creation.

From Genesis 1:9-10 “And God said, ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear. And it was so. God called the dry ground ‘land’ and the gathered waters he called ‘seas’...”

Here in Psalm 104 the poet makes clear that it was God who caused all this to happen.

He spoke and the world came into existence. He rebuked the water and it fled, doing his will.

God assigned the water to the seas and the dry ground to land – and it was so!

The God we trust is the God who speaks and the waters of the earth obey.

The God in whom we place our confidence is the God who with a word can make heaven and earth appear.

III. In verses 10-18 we see the greatness of God in providing for the world he has made.

I hope you were as impressed as I was the first time you learned about the way the earth cycles water, air, and soil.

It takes 100 years to build produce even ½ inch of topsoil.

But the earth does it, year after year for thousands of years.

Water falls from the clouds, it flows down mountains, it waters the plains, and plants and animals quench their thirst as the water flows into lakes and oceans.

Those plants, animals, lakes and oceans give off moisture, evaporation, and the water cycles again to the atmosphere above us only again to form clouds and rain on the earth.

The air we breathe is constantly recycled, as is carbon upon which all of us depend for life itself.

The whole complex system created and sustained by our powerful God.

One author cites 32 ways God delicately balanced and sustains the world's relationship to the universe around us. I show you four.

1. The number of stars in the planetary system:
 - If more than one, the tidal interactions would disrupt planetary orbits.
 - If less than one, the heat produced couldn't sustain life.
 2. Surface gravity
 - If stronger the planet's atmosphere would retain too much ammonia and methane
 - If weaker the planet's atmosphere would lose too much water
 3. Tilt of the earth's axis:
 - If greater, the surface temperature differences would be too great
 - If less, the surface temperature differences would be too great.
 4. Thickness of the earth's crust
 - If thicker, too much oxygen would be transferred from the atmosphere to the crust.
 - If thinner, volcanic and earthquake activity would be too great.
- (Ross in The [Creation Hypothesis](#) 162)

“Oh Lord my God, you are very great!”

IV. In verses 19-23 the Psalmist introduces the very existence of the sun and moon, the celestial universe around us.

He notes how it controls our lives.

But **who made it all?** – Our God!

Humans have always looked to the skies with awe.

Little else makes us feel smaller and the universe larger than to contemplate the immensity of the skies above us and around us.

By the time of Christ, 2000 years ago, philosopher-astronomers thought the lights in the sky (the sun, moon and stars) were fixed on rings around the earth like concentric circles or shells at differing distances from the earth.

The moon was 60 earth-radii away and the sun was 19 times further away than that.

They thought that the stars were on the furthest circle or shell.

This idea held sway until the 1500s when it was judged that the sky was 20,000 earth-radii away from the earth and the universe was 80 million miles across.

In the late 1500s English astronomer, Thomas Digges, convinced the world that the stars were not equal distance from the earth but were scattered throughout space far beyond what was earlier thought.

By the 1600s astronomers were calculating that the universe was much larger than earlier thought – it would take a bullet from a canon 700,000 years to reach the nearest star.

By the 1800s they were saying the universe was 175,970,880,000,000 miles across.

They coined the term “light-year” to describe distance – the distance that light travels in one year.

Thus the universe was 30,000 light-years across in size.

By 1923 with the discovery of the Andromeda Nebula scientists revised their estimate of the size of the universe so that it was then thought to be 200,000 light-years across (1,173,139,200,000,000 miles).

When the 100 inch telescope at the Mount Wilson Observatory opened it was estimated that the universe was 1million light-years across (5,865,696,000,000,000 – five times as large as previously thought).

It now seems that the universe may be expanding and stars moving away from us at a rate so fast that we may never be able to calculate the size of the universe.

It is beyond our ability to measure, maybe even to imagine.

We can see about 5000 stars with the naked eye.

It is estimated that there are 100 billion stars in our one galaxy - the "Milky Way".

There are an estimated 100 billion galaxies which means 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars.

If each person on earth had an equal number of those stars, 2 trillion (2,000,000,000,000) stars would be yours.

Howard Van Til of Calvin College wrote, "The universe in which we live is no place for a small God..." ([How Large is God](#) 131)

"O Lord, my God, you are very great!"

V. In verses 24-26 the Poet speaks of the greatness of God in the variety of his creation.

Psalm 104:24-25 "How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number – living things both large and small."

Veterinarian and author James Harriot didn't originate the phrase, "all things great and small".

He took it from poet Cecil Alexander, "All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful; the Lord God made them all. "

And Alexander obviously took it from Psalm 104:25

"How many are your works... beyond number."

40 years ago it was believed that in the world there were over 1 million different kinds of living things.

25 years ago it was believed there were 5 million kinds of living things.

We could identify 250,000 flowering plants for example.

Today it is estimated that probably closer to 25-40 million (40,000,000) different kinds of living things exist.

Thus far we have named only about 1.5 million.

Much of life beneath the oceans, which cover 2/3 of the earth's surface, has been only partially explored. (From Calvin

DeWitt in [Earthwise](#))

By the late 1940s scientists knew that neutrons and protons were not the smallest particles in an atom.

They continued their search for the basic building blocks of life.

In 1958 an almanac was published to list all the particles – it was 19 pages long and discussed 16 new particles of matter smaller than neutrons and protons.

By 1984 that almanac was 304 pages with 200 ever smaller particles being discovered such as muons, pions, and neutrinos.

Particles known as quarks are now believed to be in 18 different kinds.

Now with gluons and leptons added to the list some scientists are acknowledging that they may not have even come close to the smallest particles or building blocks of matter.

“There may be additional levels, and even the possibility that there are an infinite number of levels. Quarks and leptons may be composed of smaller particles, which are composed of yet smaller particles, and so on. Physical reality could conceivably be a kind of cosmic onion, with level below level below level. It may be that the levels never come to an end.” (Morris quoted in Herrman in [How Large is God](#) p230)

Our universe is not static but dynamic – ever expanding, ever changing, new variations billions of times a day.

The universe is not like some gigantic machine simply doing the same thing over and over again.

Our world is moving - we have traveled through space over 1000 miles just as I have spoken this last sentence.

Like snowflakes, no plants, animals or even children are alike – each one a slight variation of all the others that have ever existed or will exist.

“Oh Lord, my God, you are very great!”

VI. In verses 27-30 the Psalmist describes the power of God over life and death.

I can delay here only to say, if we had stood outside Lazarus’s tomb or had been in the upper room when Jesus showed himself alive to his disciples, we would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our God has the power of life and death.

“Oh, Lord my God, you are very great!”

A year or so into the Civil War a group of statesmen met in Washington D.C. to lament the South’s surprising strength and victories.

The famous Fredrick Douglas speaking on behalf of many choked with emotion as he described the terrible fate he feared was awaiting the North.

In a pause, pregnant with desperation, a voice called out from the gallery.

A mature older black woman spoke with absolute conviction: “Mr. Fredrick Douglas, God is not dead!”

I end this message and begin the remainder of our worship this morning with the closing words of the Psalmist:

Psalm 104:31-33

“May the Glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord rejoice in his works – he who looks at the earth and it trembles, who touches the mountains and they smoke. I will sing to the Lord all my life, I will sing praises to my God as long as I live.”

I can trust him in death and I can trust him in life.

“O Lord my God, you are very great.”