

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: God - At Work in the Shadows

Ahasuerus: Powerful People

(selected passages from Esther)

Study #2

Introduction: Power. We all deal with it...

Power comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Power can be measured in terms of voltage and dollars and guns and muscles. There is military and political power. Leadership is often defined as the power to influence.

We've all got some measure of power AND we all deal with people who have more power than we do.

I have always had people in power over me. These have included parents, employers and teachers. I am currently answerable to a group of godly Elders here at church, and to you.

And of course, I have always lived under the power of government where a City Council and a mayor, a governor, congress and a president make rules that I have to follow.

If I say "power" you may immediately think of realms of life where someone has power over you. But you'll also think of those arenas where you exercise power.

Life is good when life's power relationships are good. When power is wielded by a good boss, the workplace benefits. It's a beautiful thing to see parents use their power to bless their children.

When the opposite happens, though, it's tragic in the home, at work or at church. And very often the opposite happens. Power brings problems. Power can be used for tremendous benefit and it can do untold damage.¹

Some of those who have power abuse it. Some of those who are under the power of others are fearful or rebellious.

This morning we are going to consider the dynamic of power in our lives. I'd like to explore good ways to use power when it is ours to wield. And I also want to look at how we are to relate to those in positions of power over us.

All of this exploring is going to take us back to the book of Esther.²

Preview...

Last Sunday we took a 40,000 foot flyover of Esther. Today, and over the next three weeks we'll be looking closely at the four major characters in the book.

Next Sunday, we'll consider the important theme of enemies when we look at Haman, the book's bad guy. Then, we'll see what Mordecai, Esther's step-father, tells us about the doors of opportunity that simple faithfulness will open. And we'll conclude by seeing the story's heroine, Esther, own the idea that she is where she is for a purpose - in short, to further the purposes of God.

Our first character study, though, concerns Ahasuerus, king of the Medo-Persian Empire, a person with enormous power. But then, kings, generally, have a world of power at their disposal.³

¹ Lord Acton's dictum stands as a caution to all who hold power: "*Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*"

² We believe that Esther was written shortly after the events recorded took place, during the 5th century BC. While we have no way of knowing for certain, many believe that Esther was written by one of the heroes of the book, Mordecai.

³ I have long believed that it is difficult, if not impossible, for a citizen of the United States of America to fully appreciate the impact of having a king.

The Person in Power in Esther's World

Kings of Old

Kings in the ancient world, generally

In a kingdom, a king holds the kind of power that no one does in a society like ours. A king has the power of life and death. He has unilateral authority and his might means he's right, whether he's right or not.

That is the way it is today in parts of the world where a monarchy is in place.

Of course, the United Kingdom is "ruled" by Queen Elizabeth, but - at least as I understand it - she is mostly a benign figurehead. Not so in a place like Saudi Arabia, where what King Salman says, goes.

And that is the way it was in the nations of the ancient world.⁴ Kings of the biblical world (the Ancient Near East) were sovereign over their realms, and in no society was that more true than in the Medo-Persian Empire.

Persian kings

The king who established Persia's dominance was Cyrus. Cyrus led the military conquest of Babylon and was a very good ruler. He was known for statesmanship, character, benevolence⁵ - and for his power.⁶

Cyrus ruled over a vast and advanced empire comprising most of what is today, Europe, along with all of western Asia and northern Africa.

His kingdom was established on the field of battle when he defeated the Babylonians. But then his kingdom was doubled when the armies of Media betrayed their king (Astyages) and pledged loyalty to Cyrus, instead. (Hence, the "Medo-Persian Empire")

Cyrus was followed on the throne by his son, Cambyses, who was not nearly as good a king as Cyrus. But Cambyses was followed onto the throne by Darius, a very good king, and much like Cyrus.

Like Cyrus, Darius⁷ had absolute power in the kingdom. Under Darius, whatever the king decreed was law, and the law was enforced with the iron fist of the military.⁸

Then, following Darius, came his son, Ahasuerus.⁹ This was the king under whom Esther and Mordecai lived. So what do we know about him and his power?

Ahasuerus

From historical sources

Power

We know that Ahasuerus inherited the power of his Persian ancestors when he came to the throne. He inherited the enormous wealth of Persia, wealth that that had been gained through conquest and taxation of conquered peoples.¹⁰

⁴ While many kingdoms had a separate priesthood presiding over the nation's religious life, the king was usually also considered the leader of that religion. Especially in the kingdoms of the Ancient Near East, religion and politics were so inextricably mixed that to rebel against the king was to rebel against the gods. In some cases - Egypt and ancient Babylon - it was believed that the king was a divine being. More often, though, he was thought to be the gods' representative.

⁵ Not that the Persians couldn't be cruel. They invented crucifixion.

⁶ See Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 where Cyrus is named and referred to as "My Shepherd" and "YHWH'S anointed" before he was born.

⁷ When Darius became king, the prophet Daniel had already been in exile for years.

⁸ Cyrus' empire included an advanced system of roads, a postal system, legal codes, and a certain degree of humanitarianism lacking in Babylon and Assyria.

⁹ Another way to pronounce the name is "Xerxes."

¹⁰ Ahasuerus' empire stretched from India in the East to Ethiopia in the south and to Palestine (Israel) in the west, including what is today Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey as well as parts of Greece, Russia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Ahasuerus was the Persian sovereign.

However, when we follow the historical record of Ahasuerus closely through secular records, we discover that there are chinks in the armor of his kingly sovereignty.

Powerlessness

For one, it was during Ahasuerus' reign that the Persian navy suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Greeks in 480 BC. In fact, Ahasuerus watched helplessly, in horror, from the shore while it happened.¹¹

The next year, the Persian army was defeated by Athens. And, not long after these military defeats, Ahasuerus died, murdered in his own bed, in 465 BC.¹²

That is a weak ending for an all-powerful sovereign. And the book of Esther gives us this same picture of Ahasuerus. He was powerful and he was weak.

First, consider the power of the king.

From Esther

Power

The parties he hosted, which we see at the beginning of the book speak of power, the power that comes from unbelievable wealth. Only a powerful king could host parties lasting one hundred and eighty days, followed by a banquet lasting seven more days.

We find another sign of his power in the third chapter of the book. After a brief discussion with Haman, one of his chief managers, the king was persuaded to put to death an entire race of people living within the confines of his kingdom. Just like that.

He was told that they were "different." So, he issued a decree - casually - to put this people to death. He didn't even bother to ask what people was sentencing to death. The king had the benefit of unopposed power. He acted unilaterally. He did what he did because he could.

Later, when he discovered that a certain Jew, Mordecai, spared his life from an assassination attempt, he decided, again unilaterally, to honor Mordecai. He didn't have to get permission from anyone. He just did it.

When the king walked into the banqueting room to find the wicked Haman pleading with Queen Esther for his life, he sentenced Haman to death - no jury by Haman's peers. Ahasuerus was prosecutor, judge, and jury all rolled into one.

Then, in order to spare the Jews from being totally destroyed, the king gave permission to Mordecai and Esther to write a letter that allowed the Jews to defend themselves against an attack.

And finally, Ahasuerus honored Mordecai for all he had done for his people with a royal robe and a crown and he unilaterally decided to elevate Mordecai to second in command in the empire.

All of this speaks of a man with immense personal power. And at the same time, Ahasuerus' powerlessness was stunning. The book of Esther highlights his weakness.

Powerlessness

His empire stretched across continents. He had control of a vast army. Men killed and died for him. But his wife wouldn't do his bidding when he summoned her to display her beauty at a banquet for his friends.

¹¹ The poet Herodotus records Xerxes (Ahasuerus) moaning that the Greeks fought like men and his men fought like women.

¹² The historical novel by Stephen Pressfield, *Gates of Fire* (and the movie "300") tells the story of the battle of Thermopylae where King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) led the Persian army against the three hundred Spartans (along with several hundred other Greeks). Persia won that battle (while sustaining great losses), but Xerxes later lost the Persian navy to the Greeks at Salamis and also lost the land battle for Greece at Plataea (ca. 480 BC).

Now I want to be careful here, because the king was probably ordering Queen Vashti to do something in pretty bad taste. But the author wants you and me to know that Ahasuerus is the most powerful potentate in the world - and he is powerless over his wife.

The decree he was persuaded to issue following this embarrassing incident with his wife emphasized that domestic powerlessness.

His advisors counseled him to banish Vashti, the queen, from ever making an appearance before him again. And then he sent out letters to the far reaches of the empire, decreeing that **[1:22) every man should be the master in his own house.**

So, he tried by force of law to accomplish for all the husbands of Persia what he was unable to accomplish for himself. He wanted a little r-e-s-p-e-c-t. And that sounds to me a little d-e-s-p-e-r-a-t-e.

Later in the story the king realized what an awful mistake he had made in ordering the slaughter of all the Jews. But he was powerless to revoke the decree.

That's because in the Medo-Persian Empire, once the king made a law/deed, that law stood. The law stood above the king.¹³

It was only by letting Mordecai and Esther write a new decree that allowed the Jews to defend themselves when attacked that he was able to counteract the damage done by his first, foolish decree.

But here is the thing. The all-powerful king of the Medo-Persian Empire was powerless to undo the original decree.

And this brings us to one of the many theological points we find in the book of Esther.

¹³ Remember, this was also the problem Darius faced. He made a decree calling for the death penalty for anyone who prayed to anyone other than himself. When Daniel - his friend and advisor - prayed to God, Darius was forced by his own decree to throw Daniel into the lions' den.

While kings are powerful, they aren't that powerful. They have some limited authority, but there are more things they can't do than there are things that they can do.

Even kings are impotent to control the things in life that concern them most. They don't always get their way. Their plans are thwarted. They are not really sovereign. And powerful people's power is nothing to be all that impressed with.

A word to powerful people...

We who are here today are a group of powerful people.

Some are employers and managers. Some are husbands or wives, moms or dads. You are young people with options. You possess material wealth. All of this speaks of power - power to do, to make, to influence, to control.

What will we do with our power, with our physical strength and material wealth and abilities and influence?

For one thing, you and I will adopt humility.

If we are wise we will realize that like the power of King Ahasuerus, our power is not that great. We are, none of us, indispensable. We will "get over" ourselves.

We will also own the truth that our powers are not intrinsic, but are gifts. All of our powers can be lost in a moment's time.¹⁴

And despite our powers, like the king, we are least in control of what matters to us the most.

My good friend, Roderick Barnes, wrote recently on Facebook, *"God lowers the lofty and lifts the lowly. So get low."*

¹⁴ On Friday, a rain slicked track in Eugene, Oregon resulted in some world-class sprinters not making the US Olympic team. A 52% Brexit majority vote meant the end to Prime Minister David Cameron's power in Great Britain. A moral failure has led to many powerful Christian leaders' loss of power. Just like that.

Good counsel.

So first, we will hold our power loosely, with an open hand, not a clenched fist. Humility is simply seeing ourselves as we truly are. And humility demands that we admit that we are all dependent beings. Our power is temporal and slight.

But second, if we would be the radical disciples Jesus calls us to be we will use whatever power we have to further God's purposes and to meet needs in Jesus' Name.

When we place our powers at God's disposal we'll be hard workers, just employers, parents who don't exasperate and spouses who don't frustrate.

We will start to view our strengths and abilities and positions of influence as opportunities to press Jesus into our world, because that is just what Jesus did.

He was God's Son in the flesh, with the power of God to do whatever was God's will for Him to do. And He used that power to serve, to heal, to love, to rescue, and to redeem.

So, what is the context and the currency of your power? How will you use that power to do God's will and to shine God's love?

- How will you use the position you hold at work to bless those around you?
- How will you use your powerful position as parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, mentor to say, "Jesus" to the next generation?
- How will you leverage your roles here at church for greatest kingdom advance?
- Where will you invest time and energy to powerfully bless the community in which God has placed you?
- How will you use the power of the purse - your financial power, your money - to meet pressing needs in Jesus' Name and to spread the good news that Jesus saves?

When you - Jesus' radical disciple - lay your powerful resources at His feet, He will take those resources and multiply them to bless a world in desperate need.

So all of us have some power in our lives. And all of us, too, have some people in our lives who have power over us.

The person in Esther's life who had power over her was King Ahasuerus. So, we who deal with powerful people watch Esther to learn how she dealt with hers.

We return now to the story and remember Esther's dilemma.

Esther and Power

Esther's Dilemma

The king had issued a decree that all the Jews were to be slaughtered wherever they lived in his empire on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of the year.

And this king is powerful. He gets what he wants. What he decrees comes to pass.

So Esther, who was a Jew (but *incognito*) who normally did what her step-father, Mordecai, told her to do, balked when he told her to go to the king to plead for her people. She refused. She would not go to the king. To go to the king without an invitation was too dangerous.

But Mordecai was not so easily put off. Without dropping THE NAME, Mordecai dropped a very loud hint to Esther that brought her to her senses.

[13]... "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. [14] "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

No, Mordecai didn't use the word "God" in that little speech. But it is hard to listen to what he said without hearing "God."

Mordecai's confidence that the Jewish people will survive is based on God's promise that they would survive. That promise was first made back in Genesis and it is repeated over and over again in the Law and the Prophets. The Jews are God's covenant people. He chose them and He has a future for them.

Then, Mordecai's wondering about the purpose of Esther having attained royalty "**for such a time as this**" echoes Proverbs' wisdom -

[Proverbs 21:1] The king's heart is like channels of water in the hands of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes.

God rules over the affairs of nations.¹⁵

And if an obscure orphan from a despised, refugee nation is chosen to be the queen of the Medo-Persian Empire because the king loves her above all the other women of the realm, what more reasonable conclusion is there than that God orchestrated Esther's rise?

And if He did that, is it not a short leap to suggest that God has a plan for Esther in this role?

Esther's Decision

Esther "got it." She will speak to her powerful king.

She still fully recognized the danger involved in approaching the king without an invitation.

¹⁵ In 1787 at the Constitutional Convention, it is reported that Benjamin Franklin said, "*I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth- that God Governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid?*"

But now she is weighing the power of King Ahasuerus against the power of the King of Heaven. And now she chooses to risk the wrath of a human king rather than risk the displeasure of God the King.

And here are the final words of her response to Mordecai - "**...if I perish, I perish.**"

Esther's Peril

Esther's deliverance...

As Esther marched toward the king's throne room without an invitation did she have an assurance that there would be a good outcome, for her or for her people? No.

Mordecai had assured her that if she refused her assignment, God would find another way to save His people. He had not given her the assurance of success in her venture.

And remember the situation. She had not been summoned by the king for thirty days. She didn't know if he was angry with her or if he would receive her kindly. Would he hold out the golden scepter or would he withhold it?

Esther had no way of knowing what he would do. But she went. And she went because she was moved *more* by a fear - a holy reverence - of the Lord who is ALL-powerful than she was fearful of a human king who just might put her to death.¹⁶

We, who read this story twenty-five hundred years later, know how it ends. We know that Esther's quest was successful.

But she didn't know how it would all turn out. There was every reason in the world for her to believe that her chances of surviving this encounter with King Ahasuerus were about 50/50.

¹⁶ Jesus' words come to mind here, **[Matthew 10:28] "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."**

It was her reverence for the King of Heaven that liberated her to approach and to speak to this powerful man.

But of course, her encounter with the king did go well. Ahasuerus was moved by her plea for help. And other such encounters have turned out well, too.

Remember Daniel's friends...

Remember that when the prophet Daniel's three friends - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego - refused to bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, that king threatened to have them thrown into a fiery furnace.

They didn't cave before this most powerful king alive. They refused to commit this idolatry and told him,

[Daniel 3:16-18], "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. [17] "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

So, the king carried through with his threat and had them tossed into the furnace. But their story turned out well in the end because God protected them from harm even while they were in the furnace.

But, did they know, in advance, that they would not be killed?
NO!

What they did know was that on that day the real King was not dressed in robes and seated on a makeshift throne on the plains of Shinar. The real King was reigning from on high.

And it was their confidence in that King that gave them the courage to say to the king they saw, ***[18] "But even if He does not [deliver us], let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."***

That was the word of Daniel's friends to the human power in their lives. And Esther's word about the human power in her life was, ***[4:16] "If I perish, I perish."***

These people stood for God and they did not perish.

A pattern emerges...

So, are we seeing a pattern here? Yes, but it may not be the pattern we think. We see a fuller pattern when we look more fully at Scripture's witness.

Many of God's people through the centuries have said, *"If I perish, I perish."*

The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews tells of a few of them.

[Hebrews 11:32] And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, [33] who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, [34] quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. [35a] Women received back their dead by resurrection...

These didn't perish. Just like Esther and Daniel's friends, they lived. And then the author continues with the stories of others who also said, *"If I perish, I perish."*

[Hebrews 11:35b]...and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; [36] and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. [37] They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated [38] (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

These perished. Some of them died horrible deaths and others lived, but barely. Many of our brothers and sisters today, who say, “*If I perish, I perish*”, perish, while confessing that Jesus is Lord.

So, yes, there is a pattern. But the pattern is not that God-fearers are always protected from harm. The pattern is that men and women and teens and children who fear the Lord don’t fear what even very powerful people can do to them.

They put their allegiance to God above their allegiance to any human power. They fear and reverence and worship God and they are willing to risk all for Him.

What Esther teaches us today is that if we don’t fear the Lord, we will fear everything else. She shows us that if we do fear the Lord, we will fear nothing else.¹⁷

I’ll close with some thoughts from the broader context of the Bible about what we who fear the Lord can and should do for the powerful people in our world.

First, we pray for them.

A word to those who deal with people with power...

- Pray for those who have power over you (1 Timothy 2)

[1 Timothy 2:1] First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, [2] for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

It is God’s will that you and I pray for those who have authority over us. That’s first. That’s primary.

Bob Burnside was one of the men who helped establish Northwest back in 1982. I was a much younger man then and Bob was a mature, unassuming, godly man who was powerful in the Scriptures.

As our nation was nearing a major election, Bob and I were talking about current issues at the time. He told me something I’ve never forgotten.

Bob said, “*I’m going to vote, of course. But I do much more good when I pray than when I vote.*”

True. Voting is important. I vote when there is opportunity to do so. But my prayers are weightier than my vote. So are yours.

Brothers and sisters, God calls us to pray for powerful people in government, for powerful people at work, for people in power at church.

Second, we are to show honor and we are to respect those who have power over us.

- Honor those who have power over you (Romans 13; 1 Peter 3)

[Romans 13:1] Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

and

[1 Peter 3:13] Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution (and Peter goes on to speak of governmental power, ending with)...[17] Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Let’s take these words to heart. Let’s make it our ambition to speak about those with power over us respectfully. Let’s speak in such a way that others know we believe that these authorities “***are established by God.***”

¹⁷ Please see the Appendix (at the end) for some thoughts about nurturing a “fear of the Lord” from the book of Job.

Let's be known as those who interact on social media in ways that "**honor**" and show our "**submission**" to authorities.

When we are at work, or here at church of all places, let's speak respectfully about the powerful people at work, at City Hall, in Austin, and in Washington.

And then, while we are fearing the Lord, let's speak to those with power as God-honoring people have done in all ages, fearlessly calling powerful people to use their power for good.

- Fearlessly call those who have power over you to use their power for good

I am currently reading through the Old Testament prophets in my daily Bible reading and am being reminded of how the prophets spoke to power.

Isaiah and Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah called on the leadership of Israel in their day to righteousness and to use their positions of leadership to promote justice.

Jesus did the same thing with the powerful rulers of His own day. He called out scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He urged them to care for widows and orphans.

And throughout history, many Christians have followed the lead of Jesus and the prophets, serving as the moral conscience of powerful people.

And they have not done so by speaking *about* powerful people's failings. They have taken the much riskier road of speaking *to* powerful people.

They have reminded power of its obligation to serve the weak.

Brothers and sisters, some of us may have the high calling to speak to power. Some of us may write letters, make phone calls, set up meetings, engage in the political process, schedule a meeting with the school board or our boss to address, frontally a situation of injustice. Some of us will call on power to right wrongs.

None of us have the freedom to speak disrespectfully of powerful people. Because of our understanding of God's sovereignty, none of us have the right to speak dishonorably about people in authority over us.

And all of us are to sincerely and genuinely pray for powerful people.

Appendix

I believe that there is no better place to go in the Bible than to the book of Job if we want to see God for the omnipotent sovereign He is.¹⁸

Seeing God as Job was allowed to see Him will equip us to use our own power humbly and to deal with powerful people courageously.

Job's life fell apart due to a series of terrible tragedies. For a while, Job continued to walk with God after his trials hit. But he eventually fell into the blame game and began to see God as his Problem. Then, Job crossed a line and began to speak very inappropriately to the Almighty.

So, God took him on. In the last chapters of Job's book, God speaks directly to Job. He is making a case, as if in a court of law, that He has every right to run the universe - and Job's life - as He sees fit.

Following are a few of God's comments to Job. You're right if it seems to you that God is being sarcastic. He's making a point about His sovereign power to people like Job and me and you.

[Job 38:4] Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, [5] Who set its measurements? Since you know. Or who stretched the line on it? [6] On what were its bases sunk?... [8] Or who enclosed the sea with doors when, bursting forth, it went out from the womb... [12] Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, and caused the dawn to know its place?... [16] Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?... Tell Me, if you know all this. [19] Where is the way to the dwelling of light? And darkness, where is its place, [20] That you may take it to its territory and that you may discern the paths to its home? [21] You know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great!

¹⁸ Interestingly, in our English Bibles, Job follows Esther. In the Hebrew Old Testament, though, Esther is placed in the "writings" after the Song of Solomon and Lamentations.

[22] Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, [23] which I have reserved for the time of distress, for the day of war and battle?

[31] "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? [32] Can you lead forth a constellation in its season, and guide the Bear with her satellites? [33] Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, Or fix their rule over the earth?

[34] Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, So that an abundance of water will cover you? [35] Can you send forth lightnings that they may go and say to you, 'Here we are'?...

[19] Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane?

Job had to answer in the negative to all of these rhetorical questions - and so do so. God is the omnipotent sovereign to whom we yield.

Theologians refer to God's power by the term *omnipotence*. It means that He is able to do anything He wants to do. He does whatever He wants to do. He is the only being in the universe who can do whatever He wants. That's power!

It is God who gives those in power their power. But those in power always have only limited power. They are on a short leash.

He hardened Pharaoh in his rebellion, brought Nebuchadnezzar to power to discipline Judah, and then raised up Cyrus to judge Babylon. And there is so much more that God has done.

His particular ways are beyond finding out (the word is *inscrutable*), but we can be certain that He is still shaping history by dealing with men and women in power in our own day.

From beginning to end, the Bible declares God's holiness, grace, mercy, love - and power. He does what He wishes. He has all authority. He is sovereign. He is the Lord God Almighty.

And a most important PS. This God is also all-good and He is for us.

[Romans 8:32] He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things.