

THE IMPOSSIBLE REALITY

- **Philippians 3:4b-14**
- **Matthew 21:33-46**

From the alpha male in the pack fighting off his rivals to nations trying to gain the upper hand in cyberspace or outer space, and in hundreds of instances in politics, business, international affairs, even in schools, homes and small groups every day, the struggle is on. People use superior power to dominate – physical, intellectual, political, financial, military, moral and religious power.

So, it is not surprising that, for many, the mention of the word God suggests superior power. After all, we refer to God as the Almighty, don't we? Then, that has led, at times, for the Church to claim the right to control governments and all sections of national and community life. That idea has been successfully challenged by democratic and humanistic developments in history so that, by and large, the Church no longer makes that claim.

Amidst all the power contests going on in the world, we point to Jesus as the hope of the world – Jesus, crucified by religious and political powers of his day, rejected as God's active agent for world renewal, and treated, by many, as irrelevant in everyday life. We dare to say, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

In his resurrection, God abolished the power-grab approach. Power is, in itself, not enough to renew the world; it has to be under the influence of love. Yes, God is powerful, Almighty, but, more importantly, God is love. Paul could say that all that he had gained as an adherent of his religion he counted as rubbish compared with that which he gained through Christ, and so may we say that all that we might attain by the exercise of superior power we consider to be garbage compared with the excellence of knowing the gracious love of God and to live a life inspired by God.

- Give some examples of how people use power to control or dominate others.
- How has the church tried to control political and community life?
- If not by the exercise of power, how can the church bring God's influence to bear on politics and community life?
- Give examples of love accomplishing more than power could.

PHILIPPIANS 3:4B-14 4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

MATTHEW 21:33-46 The Parable of the Tenants

³³ “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵ “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

³⁸ “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

⁴¹ “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes”?

⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them.

⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.