"***Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings***" - Marvel's first Asian superhero movie - is the top film at the box office for three straight weekends and after this weekend would probably earn an estimated $350+ million worldwide.

The triumph of Shang-Chi, like the rest of the superhero movies, is a tale of good over evil. We all have that innate yearning to have power to stop any injustice, to right every wrong as much as we are capable of doing!

We feel relieved, if we know that the story ends well and that our negative or painful experiences have meaning and purpose, because such knowledge gives power to present living!

Our discontent with present evil and our longing for a pleasant future reflects the importance of life having purpose and hope produces staying power.

As C.S. Lewis says,

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.

Today we are continuing our series, "Signposts of Hope in a Suffering World"; we are going to talk about the theme of power in the Gospel of John.

John is crystal clear about the fact that God the Father has sent Jesus to set in motion of the making the world right, to bring together heaven and earth, as well as to commission His followers to participate in this world restoring mission.

Jesus' power and authority leaps out in the beginning sentences of the story. Now take note of the lofty depiction of Jesus:

Jn. 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was ***with God***, and the Word ***was God*** … **3** ***Through him all things were made***; ***without him nothing was made that has been made***. **4** In him was ***life***, and that life was the ***light of all mankind*** … **14** ***The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us***. We have seen his ***glory***, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, ***full of grace and truth***.

"In the beginning" echoes Gen. 1 and reflects the language of status, power, authority, purpose, and

goal of God's creation of humankind (cf. Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8).

So here is the good news:

Everyone created in the image of God has power.

Human beings, the crown of creation and stewards created in the image of God, are given power to harness their abilities and strengths to do meaningful work, as co-regents with the Creator.

But also keep in mind the warning given long ago by Lord Acton, a 19th century British historian:

Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Our first parents, Adam & Eve …

fell for Satan's deception,

lusted to be gods,

disobeyed God's only command,

and failed to carry out his vocation/calling as God's emissary.

But Jesus the Living Word …

was with God the Father "in the beginning,"

is now the God-in-flesh representative of new humanity who ushers in a new creation,

embodies the Heavenly Father's kingly authority and rule,

sets into motion the work of world restoration,

and becomes the perfect model of exercising divine power as God intended (cf. Heb. 1:3).[1]

One of the key Greek words that relates to the theme of power and Jesus' authority in this Gospel is ***exousia*** **(ἐξουσία)** which means one's freedom of choice, the right of action, ruling power and authority.[2]

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[1] "The initial biblical answer to the question about power, then, is that power undoubtedly has an important place within the Creator's purpose for the world, but that … it can be, and regularly is, corrupted in ways that seem to undermine any chance of its being a signpost to ultimate truth about God and the world. But in fact power really is a signpost of that kind, since it points to the fact that the Creator intended, and still intends, that his world should be ordered, not chaotic; fruitful, not wasteful; glorifying to him, rather than shameful. And the central design the creator God has put in place to accomplish this is his delegation of his power to his image-bearing human creatures." (N.T. Wright, *Broken Signposts,* p. 168.)

[2] See O. Betz, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* II:600-611.

John 5:27 And he [i.e., God the Father] has given him authority (*exousian* - ἐξουσίαν) to judge because he is the Son of Man.

John 17:2 For you [i.e., God the Father] granted him [i.e., the Son] authority (*exousian* -ἐξουσίαν) over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.

These two verses express the enormous authority and power of Jesus the Sent One from the Father:

He executes judgment on God's behalf,

He aligns His words and works with God's will,

He determines the eternal destiny of every individual,

He brings just judgment on the forces of evil,

He brings heaven to earth!

I'd mentioned earlier that Jesus' power and authority captures our attention right at the beginning and on every page of the Gospel story.

In fact, we can say with confidence that the rest of the Gospel is simply the elaboration and illustration of the key themes found in the prologue (1:1-18), telling the story of how Jesus reveals His divine power and carries out the will of the Father.

Of course, as uncle Ben said to Peter Parker in ***Spiderman***:

With great power comes great responsibility.

Jesus never abuses or abdicates His absolute power but exercises divine power as God intended.

So how does Jesus use His power as a signpost of hope?

When Jesus performed miracles, signs and wonders, He brings the future joy of wholesome living to the present.

1. Turning water into wine in Jn. 2 is the first of seven "signs" found in this gospel.
   "Sign" points to the heavenly reality when heaven and earth intersect with each other, indicating the transforming power of God's love is bursting into the present world.[3]

[3] N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone,* I:21-22.

This story serves as **a mark of joy in this new creation** Jesus has brought into the present (cf. Jn. 10:10); and it anticipates the **future celebration** in the marriage banquet/supper of the Lamb in Rev. 19:7-10.

2. Jesus' healing of an official's son, the lame man, the blind man, and the raising of Lazarus (4:46-54; 5:1-9; 9:1-12; 11:1-44) manifests **the ultimate eradication of physical infirmity, pain, suffering and death** as well as a pointer to the **future physical resurrection** as the renewal of human bodies in the new heaven and new earth.
3. The feeding of the 5000 shows Jesus' compassion toward the needy but it also declares **the power of Jesus' death to satisfy the spiritual hunger of humanity**.

So Jesus' power, first of all, is not used for His own sake, or for self-glorification or aggrandizement, to show off His abilities. He brings forward the future wholesome life in the present, i.e., what it will be like when everything is made right in the new heaven and new earth.

When Jesus shows personal attention to saints, sinners, and seekers, He embodies the power of grace and acceptance.

1. In His encounter with the Samaritan woman and the woman caught in adultery Jesus **breaks down walls of separation**, i.e., culture/ethnic, social customs, religious traditions, moral taboos, gender, etc., **shows unconditional acceptance, exposes moral deficiencies, and quenches spiritual thirst of the soul** (Jn. 4, 8).
2. Jesus shows His **forgiveness, tenderness and compassion** toward the disciples and in the "re-commissioning" of Peter (Jn. 21).

Jesus' power is not generated or required by any pre-conditions – He removes every obstacle for a grace-initiated relationship and triggers a love-based faith journey.

When Jesus engages in dialogue and debate with religious leaders, He reveals truth and opens the eyes of faith.

1. Jesus' provocative answers to Nicodemus' questions and addresses his **need of spiritual rebirth into God's family by the power of the Spirit** further provokes his curiosity and eventually would lead him to become a courageous follower of Christ (Jn. 3; cf. 7:32-47; 19:38-42).
2. Jesus challenges the religious leaders who reject His messiahship and expands their understanding of the great "I AM" (Jn. 5, 7-9).

Here we see Jesus' power brings light, reveals truth, expands people's understanding of His word, and draws the closer to God.

When Jesus chooses to lay down His life to save and to serve, He enables life transformation and flourishing.

1. From Jesus' teaching about the Good Shepherd in Jn. 10,[4] we can see clearly that His power is **not forceful domination but a deliberate self-giving, sacrificial love** for the well-being of the sheep - the Good Shepherd has taken on upon himself the fate that would otherwise fall upon the sheep whose lives are endangered.

John 10:18 No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of ***my own accord***. I have authority (*exousian* - ἐξουσίαν) to lay it down and authority (*exousian* - ἐξουσίαν) to take it up again.

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him ... Having loved his own who were in the world, ***he loved them to the end***… **3** Jesus knew that ***the Father had put all things under his power***, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; **4** so he got up from the meal, ***took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist*** … **5** he poured water into a basin and began to ***wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him***.

These passages show how the self-giving love of God manifested in-the-flesh becomes "**the**

[4] Cf. Jesus as a Friend who lays down his life: **Jn. 15:12** My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. **14** You are my friends …

most dramatic inversion imaginable of the normal concepts of power."[5]

We mustn't forget that there were power struggles in Jesus' time:

> Judea was ruled under tyranny of the Roman Empire and there were rebels and revolutionaries [and Simon, one of the twelve disciples, was a zealot];
>
> there were fractions and division amongst the Jewish religious leaders [Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes, Essenes].

But Jesus, a poor craftsman and a crucified criminal, shows us what true power is and how it effects life transformation!

I love what Peter Scazzero says:

"While the world practices a 'power over' strategy characterized by dominance and win-lose competitiveness, Jesus taught a 'power under' strategy characterized by humility and sacrificial service."[6]

Let me do a quick recap: Jesus uses His power as a signpost of hope …

When Jesus performed miracles, signs and wonders, He brings the future joy of wholesome living to the present.

When Jesus shows personal attention to saints, sinners, and seekers, He embodies the power of grace and acceptance.

When Jesus engages in dialogue and debate with religious leaders, He reveals truth and opens the eyes of faith.

When Jesus chooses to lay down His life to save and to serve, He enables life transformation and flourishing.

This is the moment we must ask the question,

"**How can we follow the way Jesus uses power as a signpost of hope?**"

[5] N.T. Wright, *Broken Signposts,* p. 173.

[6] Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader,* p. 254.

John 1:12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who ***<u>believed in his name</u>***, he gave ***<u>the right</u>*** (*exousian* - ἐξουσίαν) to become children of God …

This verse is instructive for practical applications:

1. Power for hope-filled living and wholesome community impact depends on **our relationship with Jesus**. The authority and power that Jesus has is given to those who believe in his name – faith in Jesus is required and it is not static but an ongoing relationship, a deepening understanding of Jesus in and through trust, commitment, and obedience.
   It's not because we want power so we believe in Jesus; rather, our faith in Jesus gives us the power we need flourish as God's children.
   Maybe now is the time for you to consider where you are at in your faith journey and take Cornerstone's Discipleship Pathway Assessment (https://cornerstonechurch.ca/discipleshippathway/).
2. **Prayer** expresses the vitality of our faith – **our prayer life leans into Christ's power to produce good fruit and to keep evil in check** (cf. Jn. 15). Imprint upon your heart: **A prayerless Church is a powerless Church, and a prayerless Christian is a powerless Christian.**
   Check out Cornerstone's prayer webpage to download prayer guides, sign up to join our monthly prayer gatherings, and join our prayer team. (https://cornerstonechurch.ca/prayer/)
3. Know that we **embody Jesus' presence**, bringing light and life, truth and grace whatever we do and wherever we go. Always ask, "**How can I draw people closer to Jesus?**"
4. Exercise your **power to serve**: **Attend the Ministry Fair - Sunday, Oct. 3** - Online and in-person. See and learn more about the specific roles that need to be filled in different areas, including time commitments, etc.

Pray and sign up to help as the Lord leads and as your schedule and situation permit.

"[Power] is what enables us to make things happen or not. In this sense, everyone has power…"[7]

Since we are commissioned to participate in a world restoring mission with Jesus, **we must examine how we can harness our God-given power to draw all to Christ**.

This is by no means an easy assignment and our character will be tested;[8] but it is **a high calling**, a lofty vocation God intended for all image bearers since the beginning of time!

[7] Richard Gula, *Just Ministry: Professional Ethics for Pastoral Ministers,* p. 123. [Cited in Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader,* p. 242.]

[8] "A good test of a person's character is how they deal with adversity. But the best test of a leader's character is how they deal with power." (Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Leader,* p. 254.)