



Power is dangerous. It can blind us.

Recently I reread one of my favourite books, Paul Tournier's *The Violence Inside*. I first read it twenty-five years ago and I have never forgotten his claim that "the weak are very conscious of their weakness and the powerful are rarely conscious of their strength". The successful tend to believe in the present order of things and become insensitive to weakness and failure. The powerful often hurt people without intending to. I have seen this borne out often in my own life. I often find it difficult to understand why the weak just cannot "get their act together" after all, "life wasn't meant to be easy." [That must be the classic statement of a strong and powerful person.]

We all know that power can corrupt and I often try to examine my conscience in that regard. But I think the more insidious effect of power is that it can blind us. We just cannot appreciate the point of view of the weak and worse still we cannot see what power and prosperity are doing to ourselves. Tournier suggests that a person's moral conscience or sensitivity was often in inverse proportion to their power. In his experience as a medical doctor he found that the powerful were the hardest to deal with because they were the most fearful and vulnerable, dissatisfied but impelled towards a constant effort to increase their power still further. Power and affluence seemed to stifle the spirit.

That is why most of Jesus' warnings were reserved for the rich and powerful. He tried to warn them how dangerous wealth and power can be for the spirit. One incident in Luke's Gospel both illustrates this and presents a way forward. It is the account of Jesus at the home of Simon the Pharisee [Lk 7:36-50]. Simon could not appreciate the suffering or the love of the sinful woman. But Jesus points out to Simon his self-righteousness, the shallowness of his love and how judgemental and insensitive he is. He suggests that Simon could learn a lot from this sinful woman. A sinner could save a successful, religious man.

Power and prosperity are dangerous for our spiritual lives and perhaps it is only the weak who can save us.

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