

A WITNESS FOR CHRIST

"But ye shall receive power upon the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Acts 1:8.

For approximately three years Christ had been endeavoring by precept and example to impress upon all His disciples the great truths He had come into the world to impart. Because they were still looking for a political kingdom they said, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The Master did not rebuke them on account of the question, nor did He give them a negative answer, but He simply set it aside as being irrelevant. They wanted earthly dominion, however, He wanted them to have a spiritual dynamic. So He spoke to them about the power which He considered invaluable.

EXOUSIA and DUNAMIS are two Greek words, and both of them are translated "power" in the New Testament. The former means authority and the latter means ability. It is the latter that is used in our text, and it means ability or strength. It is the word which gives us the term "dynamite". It is not power hidden in authority but power expressed in action. It is comparable not with the power resident in the atom but with the power resolved from the atom. It is the power in the spiritual realm compared with atomic power in the physical realm. The power of the test is not the physical power of nature but energized power of the Holy Spirit—a power resident in and related to and resolved by the Holy Spirit. Man can never be the author of this power but he can be the agent of this power.

Nothing so awakens man's ambition as power. It is sweeter to him than bread to the hungry, sunrise to the benighted, or home to the wanderer. The greatest need of our churches today, and that applies to every member in them, is for power from God. We have physical equipment, educational qualifications, ample organizations, numerous plans, and excellent programs, but we are lacking in power. A certain engine was a monument of human skill and ingenuity. Every part of it was in place and in perfect order. All the coaches and Pullman cars were in their proper places. Everything was exactly as it should have been and yet there was no power, for the simple reason that there wasn't any fire in the furnace or any steam in the boiler. So it can be with the church. It is good to have a beautiful building, thorough organization, cultured people, and talented members, but it is better to have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our services.

As I think of the present needs of the world and the powerlessness of church members, I am reminded of the incident when Thomas Aquinas visited Rome and was shown the gorgeousness of the papal palace, and the Pope remarked: "Well, Thomas, the church in our day cannot say: 'Silver and gold have I none'." "No," replied Aquinas, "neither can she say: 'In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk'." Today, church members have worldly wisdom, but they lack spiritual power.

I. The Promise of Power.

"Ye shall receive power." Christ directed the attention of the early Christians to the fact that it was only through power from on high that they would be able to render acceptable service. His promise of power is as applicable to us as it was to the apostles. It has been fulfilled, but not exhausted. There is an essential difference between the two. A postage stamp once used cannot be used again, but that is not true of a dollar bill. The bill may be soiled and stained, old and torn, but that does not matter; whoever has it can present it at the bank and get its equivalent. So it is with this promise of our Saviour. It may pass

from lip to lip, from age to age, and be fulfilled thousands of times, but it can still be fulfilled in our lives.

II. The Person of Power.

He is the Holy Spirit. "Upon the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you." Those who have wrought wonderful things for the Lord and for the salvation of souls have been the ones who have received the power of the Holy Spirit upon them. He is the only One who gives us power to do exploits for God, to overcome Satan and to lead the lost to Christ. You cannot separate the Holy Spirit and power. For His power comes to us through obedient waiting, humble self-emptying, earnest praying and whole-hearted willingness. If He comes into our lives He cleanses us from sin, prepares us for spiritual tasks, and guides us in service.

III. The Purpose of Power.

This is very clear and definite, namely, "Ye shall be my witnesses." How wonderful that the Lord Jesus asks us to be His representatives! Thrilling as it is to be identified with some great idea, it is more thrilling to tell of Christ's love and to bear witness to His truth. It is not only our privilege to know Christ, but also to make Him known.

What is a witness? A witness is one who has seen something, who has heard something, who has experienced something, who knows something, and who is willing to tell what he knows. A witness for Christ is one who tells another what he knows about the Saviour with a view to winning him to a saving knowledge of Christ.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the early Christians was that they were always bearing witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had saved them, and Who was ever with them. They said: "We can but speak the things which we have seen and heard" Acts 4:20. It would have been a crime to remain silent about the greatest news the world had ever heard--the triumph of Christ over death and hell. If we have had a transforming experience of the grace of God in Christ, and if we love Him who first loved us, we will tell of the grace of God that can save, of the love of Christ that can satisfy, of the power of the Holy Spirit that can overcome, and of the hope of the Gospel that can cheer. Our risen Lord has commissioned us to go into the world with the message of His redeeming love, with the objective of leading others to His allegiance. The Christian witness tells of what he himself has experienced of Christ's grace, and of what he knows of His will and way. He should bear witness not only to what Christ has done for him in the past, wonderful though that may be, but also for what He is doing for him in the present. The grammar of Christian experience is always in the present tense. Because of the richness of an experience of Christ's transforming grace and because of the joy of fellowship with Him, we bear witness for the Saviour.

Christian witnessing is of two kinds--that of the life and that of the lips. The life speaks even when the lips are silent. What we are is far more important than anything we can ever say or do. Was it Emerson who said: "I cannot hear what you say for the noise of what you are"? Actions speak louder than words. Example is better than precept. A converted Chinese said, "I am reading the Bible and behaving it." Orthodox believing should be supported by orthodox behaving. A Brahmin once said to a Christian missionary, "You Christians are not as good as your Book. If you were as good as your Book you would convert India to Christ in five years."

We need a revival of practical Christian living. The life transformed by the power of God and beautified by the grace of God is Christianity's supreme apologetic. It is the argument above all others that none can answer. Henry Drummond was right when he said: "The best evidence of Christianity is a Christian." Nothing can withstand the witness of a godly life.

How can we expect others to accept our offer of the Gospel of Christ unless our own lives provide evidence of what we claim it will do? Would you buy a hair restorer from a bald man? Is your life a living testimony for Christ? Do you follow your prayers with action? A praying father at family devotions asked the Lord to provide for some poverty-stricken neighbors. One morning after the father finished with his usual prayer his little son piped up and said, "Daddy, if I had your piles of corn, I'd answer your prayers myself." It is a good thing to pray for others, but one should follow his prayers with service.

There is no witnessing quite like that of the life. This statement reminds me of two appropriate stories of Phillips Brooks. After preaching one of his wonderful sermons, he was walking down the aisle when one working-man nudged another and said: "I say, Bill, it makes you feel good just to look at him." A Boston newspaper had the following notice: "It was a dull, rainy day when things looked dark, but Phillips Brooks came through Newspaper Row, and all was bright." Does your life advertise Christ in this way?

There is also the witness of the lips. The life should shine, and the lips should speak for Christ. It is strange how eloquent many can be about politics, sports, business, health, the weather, etc., and yet are silent about Christianity, salvation, and spiritual things. Satan is very successful in shutting the mouths of many. It is only when the heart is full of the grace of God that the lips can speak. The things we love most and which we value highest are the things about which we speak freely and most frequently.

We should bear witness to Christ's unique Person. He is so wonderful that it is impossible to exalt Him too much. There is none like Him in the constitution of His Person, in the holiness of His life, in the stupendousness of His claims, in the infallibility of His teaching, in the marvel of His works, in the efficacy of His death, in the triumph of His resurrection, in the glory of His exaltation, and in the range of His influence.

We must bear witness to Christ's saving power. He is the only One who can rescue men from the consequence of their sins and bring them into loving fellowship with God. God is depending on us who have experienced the power of the Gospel to proclaim its message.

We must bear witness to Christ's transforming friendship. He is the One who knows the worst about us, and yet loves us all the same. He is the Friend who never changes, whose love can never die. He is the Christ of the eternal throne and yet He is the Christ of the human road. Some of the friendships which we form drag us down into sin, and bring to us many a heartache, but the friendship of the Lord Jesus lifts us up into the realm of a new life of holiness. He is the Almighty Saviour, the only One who can deliver from the power of sin; and He is the Unchanging Friend, the One who abides with us in adversity as well as in prosperity, in sickness as well as in health, in sorrow as well as in joy, in ill-repute as well as in good-repute.

We shall bear witness to Christ's coming again. He went back to the Father's right hand as the triumphant God-man Redeemer. He is coming back in glory and in power to lead His blood-bought people into all the fullness of His redeeming work. The doctrine of His coming again is an incentive to holiness of life, and a clarion call to world evangelization. May your life and your lips combine to witness to the Saviour Who came the first time, and to the Redeemer Who is coming back again.