

WITNESSES 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.

These are almost the last recorded words which were spoken by our Lord to His disciples on the Mount of Olives just before He ascended from the earth. As was the case with His utterances, He went to the very heart of the matter here as He set forth the duty of every Christian. Before people can become witnesses for Christ, they must receive Him as their personal Saviour and they must receive the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Because Christ wanted His disciples to become effective witnesses for Him, He spoke to them about the power of the Holy Spirit which He considered to be an absolute necessity.

There are two words in the Greek New Testament which are translated "power." They are "exousia" and "dunamis." The former means authority and the latter means ability. It is the latter that is used here in our text, and it means ability or strength. It is the word from which we get the term "dynamite." It is not power hidden in authority, but it is 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 mentioned in our text is not the physical power of nature, but the energized power of the Holy Spirit --- a power resident in and resolved by the Holy Spirit. Man can never be the author of this power, but he can be the agent of it.

Nothing so awakens men'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 every born-again church member today is power from God. Our churches have physical equipment, educational qualifications, ample organizations, numerous plans and excellent programs, but they are lacking in power. It is good to have a beautiful building, a thorough organization, a cultured people and talented members, but it is far better to have the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the church members. To all church members whom the Lord has saved, but who are lacking in spiritual power, Christ says, "But ye shall receive power upon the coming of the Holy Spirit upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me."

The early Christians were aware of their lack of spiritual power. Christ reminded them that it was only through power from on high that they would be able to introduce lost sinners to the Saviour and to render acceptable service for Him. It is interesting to note that He promised power to a group that did not have any social standing, political prestige or financial force. Can't you picture the Lord Jesus standing there on the mountain with more than usual brightness in His eyes, a wonderful halo about His head, and that last look of tenderness and wonderful love as He promised them: "Ye shall receive power."

His promise of power is as applicable to us as it was to the apostles. Even though this promise of our Lord has been fulfilled in the lives of millions, it can still be fulfilled in our lives. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives, cleanses us from sin, empowers us for spiritual tasks and guides us in service.

It must be quite evident to anyone who reflects on it that the life of the average Christian today is weak. To make it more pointed and personal, let

me ask you some questions, Do you have the victory over sin that you should have? Are you living a triumphant life? Surely, every one of us is conscious of shortcomings, weaknesses and failures. Power is a conscious need of all of us.

What is the purpose of the power which Christ here promised? It is very definite and clear, namely, "Ye shall be witnesses." It is not only our privilege to know Christ as our Saviour, but also to tell others about Him. One reason why God has given us the power of speech is that we might be witnesses for our Lord. Certainly the faculty of speech is never more nobly exercised than when in one way or another we are bearing witness to our relationship with Christ. If a person does not have the desire and the inclination to tell others what Christ has done for him, it is a certainty that the Lord does not mean much to him.

What is a witness? A witness is a person 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 is one who tells what he himself has seen, has heard or has experienced. When one speaks out of a first-hand experience people will listen. A witness for Christ is one who has had a very definite and personal experience with Him in salvation, and then tells another what he knows about the Saviour with a view to winning him to a saving knowledge of Him also. Those early Christians simply told the story of what Christ had done for them; they bore a personal witness to an experience.

Those early witnesses for Christ in Jerusalem, who introduced so many to the Saviour, were just ordinary, everyday men and women. They knew Christ as their Saviour, and loved Him because He had saved them. They had undergone a spiritual purging. They had walked with the Lord, talked with Him and lived in the closest fellowship with Him. These Spirit-possessed and Spirit-led men and women had been cleansed of their selfish ambition for place and preferment, cleansed of their resentments, self-righteous pride and crippling fears.

During the first three centuries of the Christian era the churches had simple organizations, few buildings and small financial resources. Their members were unpopular and persecuted. Nevertheless, the gospel of Christ was propagated with remarkable success and the number of Christians increased rapidly. The chief reason for this was the fact that every Christian witnessed to the lost and sought to win them to faith in Christ.

It is the will of our Lord that every believer in Christ shall be a witness for Him. He does not want a single drone in His family, who does nothing about winning others to a saving knowledge of Christ. If you have a personal knowledge of Christ and a genuine love for Him, you will certainly strive to win others to Him. The Dead Sea, where the waters are bitter because they do not have an outlet, is a warning to all who would keep their experiences with the Lord to themselves and fail to make any effort to share them. Every church should be a society of faithful witnesses for Christ. Of all the weaknesses that church members have today, I believe they are the weakest in this realm of witnessing for Christ.

If a man has a good thing to sell, he will let the public know it. Without any hesitation he will proclaim its merits. He will try his best to persuade people that they need it and will never be happy until they get it.

If you are a child of God, you have the best thing in the world, salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. You have what everybody needs, so you are under an obligation to offer it to them. Regardless of what others may do with Christ, you are responsible to witness to them for Him. If you should have the remedy for some disease, it would be criminal for you to withhold that knowledge from others. What would you think of a doctor, if he should discover a sure cure for cancer and then keep that knowledge to himself? Since you, as a Christian, have the cure for all the ills of the soul, which is something that everybody needs, it is a terrible sin for you to remain silent about it. The depth of your experience of grace in Christ may be measured accurately by your ability or inability to remain quiet about it. Vocal and aggressive Communists certainly put professing and silent Christians to shame. Are you witnessing for Christ to those who do not know Him as Saviour?

What kind of persons ought witnesses for Christ to be? They should know Christ as their personal Saviour and be living in accordance with His will. You do not have to sit in a court room very long until you learn that the influence which one's testimony has with the jury, if it is a self-respecting and honorable jury, depends largely upon the character of the witness. That is doubly true in the religious realm. The influence that your testimony is going to have on others will depend very largely upon your Christian character. Henry Drummond was correct when he said, "The best evidence of Christianity is a Christian."

How can you expect others to receive Christ as their Saviour unless your life provides evidence of what you claim that He can do for a person? Is your life a real testimony for Christ? Do you follow your prayers with action? Repeatedly at family devotions a praying father asked God to provide for some poverty-stricken neighbors. One morning, after the father had finished 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. Doubtless, during our revival meeting, you will hear brethren pray for the salvation of the lost, but unless these brethren go and witness personally to the ones for whom they pray publicly their prayers will be a farce. Neither the Lord nor right-thinking people have any respect for such downright hypocrisy. People are saved when Christians lovingly witness to them and they receive Christ as their Saviour, but they are not going to be saved simply because somebody stands up in a revival service and asks the Lord to save them and then refuses to witness to them personally. Are you willing to witness for Christ? If so, the Holy Spirit will give you the ability to do so effectively.