

THE POWER OF WORDS

"Your words have kept men on their feet." Job 4:4 (Moffatt)

This text was spoken to Job by his friend Eliphaz. His friends were a poor lot and much of what they said turned out to be false, but no one could talk as continuously as they did without saying some things that were true. Even a clock that is stopped is correct twice every twenty-four hours. Eliphaz remembered the time when Job was in his prime as a helper and encourager of other people. He reminded Job of how he had helped others by what he had said. He had been in the habit of saying kind things, things that kindled courage and hope and faith. His words had rallied men's spirits.

Words can hurt or heal. They can help people to stand up to life, or they can kill the spirit of hope. The right word can be like a beam of sunshine and the wrong word like a withering frost. Long ago Jesus warned men that to speak is a great responsibility. He said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Matthew 12:36-37. That means we must exercise constant supervision over our words.

What kind of words are those that keep men on their feet?

1. Words of encouragement.

When Paul and Barnabas were on their first missionary journey, they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and were greeted by the elders thus: "If you have anything encouraging to say to the people, speak." Paul readily accepted the invitation. He was always eager to witness for Christ. It would be a great blessing if the modern apostles of depression could be silenced. If you have nothing encouraging to say, it is better not to speak at all.

True encouragement blesses both him who gives it and him who receives it. It is wholesome and reviving, like water from a mountain spring. Think back over your life and you will discover what a steady influence words have had in your own experience: words of encouragement, words which showed that people thought you had it in you and that they had faith in you, words which opened up new possibilities. There are always vacancies in the Ministry of Encouragement.

Our Lord was always an encourager of others. He spent many of His precious days just talking to people. He talked with a woman by a well and that talk changed her entire life. Can we not say with the prophet of old: "The Lord God has given me the tongue of a disciple, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary"?

2. Words of love.

Let us speak words that make men feel that we really care about them. Love in the New Testament means caring about people and caring for people. We live in the light of the love of others. The thought of their love will hold us in temptation. It will keep us on our feet when we feel like giving in. Dr. Norman Macleod once passed a little crossing sweeper and put his hand on the boy's head and said: "Are you cold, my lad?" Quick as a flash came the answer: "I was until you spoke to me." That word of love kept him on his feet.

J. H. Jowett had decided to be a lawyer, but on the day before the articles were to be signed he met his Sunday School teacher and told him what he was about to do. His teacher looked very disappointed, and remarked, "I had always hoped that you would go into the ministry." That word set him thinking, changed the whole course of his life, and gave to the world one of its finest preachers. It was a word of love. What we are comes out in what we say. As Jesus put it in that profound statement: "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh."

3. Words of faith.

The most effective words in keeping men on their feet are words of faith, words that lead to belief in God. We can't keep hope and courage alive without faith in God. If we have a firm faith in God we can impart strength and peace of mind to others. They may not share our faith, but they should hear of it. We are exposed to a world in which there is no help for us except in God. So, speak a good word for Jesus wherever you go.

In these days people face the task of maintaining their interior stability, keeping on their feet, standing their ground and holding on. Many are having a great difficulty in maintaining their footing. They are tempted to lose the convictions which formerly kept them on their feet.

In an Illinois village a lady, in the enthusiasm of her housecleaning, sold to a traveling ragman for ten cents some old books which she did not want. Hours afterward she remembered that she had hidden four thousand dollars in one of those books. But, it was too late! She had sold something which was very valuable very cheap.

That kind of loss is being suffered spiritually by multitudes of people. Many have morally and religiously parted with old things which they thought useless, only to wake up too late to discover that they have sold something very valuable very cheap.

Among the things which knock men off their feet are low standards and customs. Oftentimes the scum of the world originates customs and standards which are soon adopted by multitudes of professing Christians, and even by some churches. But one thing is certain, when a church adopts the customs of the world it loses the respect of the world.

Again, material prosperity knocks people off their feet. We lose our houses in depressions, but we lose our homes in prosperity. Things have been so emphasized that we have too often lost sight of lives and souls. There is such a scramble for money to live with that multitudes have forgotten God, for whom we should live.

Let us recall some words which have kept men on their feet!

I. Life Is A Trust.

That sounds simple but it runs deep. Life is not an accident. Life is an entrustment. Jesus said, "The Father hath sent Me." To Him life was a trust, not to be thrown away, not to be misused, but to be spent rightly. Life is something sacred with which we have been trusted. What a powerful motive to keep one's footing!

To be sure, there may be treachery against trust. Judas betrayed Jesus, but afterwards in remorse for doing it he hanged himself. The reason he committed suicide was that he awakened to the fact that he had been false to his trust, so he could not go on living. The noblest living which the world has ever seen has underneath it the basic idea that life is a trust.

Words have kept men on their feet in both personal and national crisis. When Lincoln, against the advice of his friends, decided to make the speech which caused his defeat in his race for the Senate in 1858, saying, "If it is decreed that I should go down because of this speech, then let me go down linked to the truth," he was dealing with life as a trust. General Jackson was in the thick of the battle. Someone pointed to him and exclaimed, "There stands Jackson, like a stone wall." That day clothed him with immortality. Carey's words have put churches on their feet: "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

Life is a trust. Because God has entrusted you with it, say, "I will not desert it, surrender it or betray it." Life is hard. To be sure, it is! Life often seems to be unjust to individuals. But underneath, life is a trust which one should carry well until he can lay it down. That word has kept many on their feet.

II. No One Needs To Be A Failure.

Some have wanted to be optimistic, and so they have said, "You can win; have faith and courage and nothing is impossible." That message does not go deep enough. Sometimes we cannot win outwardly. Instead of saying, nothing is impossible, we should say, that even in defeat a man can win the kind of victory which means the most to the world. The supreme successes of the world have been called defeats.

When the Wright brothers were experimenting with airplanes in Dayton, one citizen in Ohio exclaimed: "Nobody's ever going to fly; and if anybody ever did fly it wouldn't be anybody from Dayton." That is typical of the cynical words that knock men off their feet. How indispensable faith is -- the faith of creative confidence. Nothing worthwhile is ever done in any realm without it.

Let us say it to ourselves now. It might put some of us on our feet: I myself do not need to be a failure. No matter what happens on the outside, I need not be a failure. If defeated outwardly, win an inner victory.

III. Ample Power Is Available.

That conviction lies at the heart of Christianity. In Christianity there is an experience which keeps us on our feet. We are strengthened inwardly with spiritual power ample to see us through. To some professed Christians Christianity is a set of ethical principles to live by and social causes to live for. But these two things require power which they do not furnish. Such a religion demands something of them without supplying anything to them. How can one live without feeling the deep need of the power of God?

A few years ago, a man was lost in the fog on the Welsh mountains. For two nights and a day he wandered lost. Sitting fatigued and discouraged, suddenly out of the unseen he heard a voice say, "I wonder if by chance he could have come this way." He was being searched out of the unseen. May some one here hear a word out of the invisible that will put him on his feet and keep him there.