

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

The close of Christ's earthly ministry had come. For three years He had been endeavoring by precept and example to impress upon His disciples the great truths He had come into the world to impart. He led His disciples to the mountains side and they realized the supreme moment had come. They said, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He neither rebukes their question nor gives them a negative answer but simply sets it aside as irrelevant. They wanted earthly dominion whereas He wanted them to have a spiritual dynamic. Many times during His life the Lord had talked about faith, hope and love. He had often mentioned brotherhood, service and sacrifice. But here at the end of His life and just before His ascension His thoughts circles round the idea of power. So He mentioned none of these other things but thinks and speaks about power which He considered was worth striving after.

There are two Greek words exousia and dunamis in the New Testament, both of which are rendered by our word "power". The one refers to power in the sense of rule or authority, the other means ability or strength. There is nothing which so awakens man's ambitions as strength or power. It is sweeter to him than bread to the hungry, or home to the wanderer, or sunrise to the benighted. Of all the Divine attributes, power is the one that men most intensely and incessantly covet. Our great need at this present moment is power. We want and need power to stay the tide of sin; to make men consider the end of the downward path; to awaken those asleep in their sins; to make Jesus live again in our lives; and to make Him so real and so charming that men shall be drawn away from their sins and find freedom, forgiveness and purity in Him. In our text we have:---

I. THE PROMISE OF POWER

This promise is sure and steadfast. "Ye shall receive power." This promise of Jesus was made to His disciples just before His ascension. Notice that He promised them power and not pep, spirituality and not spizzerinktum. He made this promise to a band who had no social standing, no political prestige and no financial force. They had no great house of worship, no ornate rituals, no complex organization, nor any of the other things we sometimes consider essential to success in Christian work. Can't you picture Jesus standing there with more than usual brightness in His eyes, a wonderful halo about His head, and that last look of tenderness and love as He exclaims, "Ye shall receive power". This promise was gloriously fulfilled in a few days after His ascension, that is, at Pentecost. On the day of Pentecost the disciples were such marvels of fervor and earnestness that some of the people thought they were drunk. However, they were not but the power of the Holy Spirit was working within them. They had simply received power, genuine power from God. This power was not temporal power like they had coveted but it was a spiritual and supernatural power. This power of the spirit came upon them as a result of their patient waiting upon God and their praying to Him for it with all their hearts, souls, and strength. We note that when the disciples received the fulfillment of this promise of power that there were some changes in their lives. At least there were three, namely:

1. An amazing refinement of spiritual apprehension

They became mysteriously and marvellously aware of the presence of God. Before this promise was made and fulfilled Jesus described them as blunt in their spiritual perceptions. After they received the power they could not get away from the sense of God's presence and thereafter they were conscious that on the old road they had a new Friend.

2. A magnificent force of character

During the days previous to the making of this promise the disciples were pliable, frail, and uncertain; but when this promise was fulfilled they became steady, positive, and effective. The force of character which they then possessed had two elements that always belong to the really powerful character--the clarity of an undivided aim, and the fire of a quenchless enthusiasm.

3. The energy of a glorious optimism

When the power came they became optimists. An optimist is simply one who can believe in the best in the arrogant and aggressive presence of the worst.

Need. I say that this promise of power is as much ours as it was the apostles'. It has been fulfilled, but not exhausted. There is an essential difference between the two. It is like this, a postage stamp once used cannot be used again, but that is not true of a dollar bill. The dollar bill may be stained and soiled, old and torn, yea, even torn in halves and pasted together. That does not matter; whoever has it can present it at the bank and get its equivalent. So it is with this and other Divine promises. They may pass from lip to lip, from age to age, and be fulfilled a thousand times; still and true Christian may present them and plead them before God in the assurance of success.

II. THE PERSON OF POWER

The person of power is unmistakable, the Holy Spirit. "Upon the coming of the Holy Spirit unto you." The gift of the Holy Spirit is the greatest gift that Christ has given His church since His ascension. The Father is the source but Christ is the dispenser of this Person of power. All power whether spiritual, electrical, chemical, or what not proceeds from the same will and source. This power spoken of in our text consists in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is supernatural in its character, natural in its operations, employing man's ordinary faculties, and adequate in its measure, meeting all the necessities of those who serve. As we go back along the pathway of Church history we frequently come upon men who served as great spiritual power-centers for the times in which they lived. If we look for the explanation of their pre-eminent spiritual power, we shall find it in the fact that they believed the Source on which they had to draw for power was as constant as the stars, and they kept themselves in constant communication with that Source. The men who have wrought wondrous things for the Lord and for the salvation of souls have been those who have received power because the Holy Spirit was upon them. The secret of their success was the power of the Holy Spirit. This same Person of power is offered and promised us to fit us for living and to equip our lives for service. If we will receive the Holy Spirit into our lives, the power derived therefrom will melt down all our icicles of indifference, change our natures into impetuous torrents of loving enthusiasm, and make us irresistible as the messengers of the Son of God. The terms or conditions upon which this Person of power can be received by us seem to me to be as follows:--

1. Obedient waiting

"And eating with them, He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father." Acts 1:4

The disciples did not force the hand of God, but waited obediently upon Him.

"We wait, O Lord, Thy power to know,
Before we forth to service go,
Or else we serve in vain.
We trust not human thought or might,
Our souls are helpless for the fight,
Until that power we gain.

2. Earnest praying

"These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer." Acts 1:14
We shall get power if we follow this example and earnestly pray.

3. Humble self-emptying

"Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus who emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, becoming in the likeness of men."
Phillipians 2:5-7

4. Whole-hearted willingness

- (1) To lay down our pride and give up our sins
- (2) To receive the Lord as our guest
- (3) To allow the Lord to rule and dominate our lives
- (4) To offer our lives in sincerity to God for service.

When we meet these conditions then the Holy Spirit will come into our lives to:

1. Cleanse us from sin
2. Empower us for spiritual tasks
3. Guide us in service

III. THE PURPOSE OF POWER

The purpose is clear and definite. "Ye shall be My witnesses." I think it is very significant that immediately following the assurance that to the disciples upon whom the Holy Spirit was bestowed there should come mighty power, Christ said; "And ye shall be my witnesses." It suggests that the testimony itself is given added power and made effective by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who bear witness. The Holy Spirit is promised and sent to enable those who receive Him to witness for Christ. The gradation of honour to which our Lord calls His children is somewhat as follows:

1. "My disciples"---that they shall learn in His school
2. "My friends" ---that they shall be able to share His secrets
3. "My witnesses"---That they shall be able to speak in His behalf

The word rendered 'witness' in our New Testament is the Greek word which we have lifted unaltered into the English and called a 'martyr'. The word originally meant one who testifies; and it was natural that in times of persecution it should come to mean one who suffered for his testimony. What we need today is living witnesses for Christ--men and women full of faith and the Holy Spirit, who in season and out of season shall bear their glad testimony to what Christ has done for their souls. The Holy Spirit is the power we need today for the giving of clear witness to the truth. No amount of education, training, culture, or human attainment will ever enable and qualify any of God's people for effective witness-bearing or service for Christ. The Holy Spirit alone can do that. Jesus said, "Ye shall be my witnesses." That means you are witnesses chosen by Me to take My place, to represent Me when I am not there to represent Myself. We can witness for Him in:--

1. Our Words

This is the way the apostles witnessed at Pentecost and elsewhere. This is the way Stephen witnessed, and he did it so effectively that the only way they could stop his influence was to kill him. It was by this method that Philip witnessed when he went down into Samaria, and by his words there was started such a great revival that Peter and John had to go and help him.

In our day many are getting away from this form of testimony. In spiritual matters many are tongue-tied; while in other things their tongues seem only to be tied in the middle, but wagging at both ends. People will always talk upon the things in which they are interested.

2. Our Works

The reason why many do not have more interest in religion is because they do not have much capital invested in it upon which to draw interest. The world will never be satisfied with mere professions and theories, they want results. If we permit the Holy Spirit to enter, fill and control our lives then time and eternity will both have great surprises for us because of the works we can do. A Christian man and woman heard an orphan boy singing on their door step. They adopted him. The old people had no idea of the great thing they were doing. How repaid they must have felt later, as he developed into Martin Luther.

3. Our ways

People are tired of a lot of loud profession, they want to see samples of the real Christian, Spirit-filled life. Jesus said men were to be His witnesses where they were and were known, then in the neighboring territory and then everywhere, even unto the ends of the earth. He made it clear that to witness truly we must be "Doers of the Word and not hearers only." We must live lustrous lives, be valiant for the truth, wrestle bravely with individual and national sins, strengthen feeble knees and encourage fainting hearts. One time a Christian man said to a friend of his. "Under whose preaching were you converted?" He answered, "It wasn't anybody's preaching, it was my aunt's practicing." Nothing can withstand the witness of a godly life. Skeptics may answer your arguments, or ridicule your profession, but invincible as Gibraltar, and irresistible as the fiat of the Almighty is the testimony of the genuinely Christlike character. We owe to all men the communication of whatever truth we are living by. So as we seek to witness for Him with all the power that we have and can acquire let us remember there are none of us so small or of such small influence but that if we are faithful to God and bear our testimony for Christ with a tender and loving heart, we may be of great blessing to those who come in contact with us.