

## WITNESSING FOR CHRIST

"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.

For approximately three years Christ had been endeavoring by precept and example to impress upon 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, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The Master did not rebuke them on account of their question, nor did He give them a negative answer, but He simply set it aside as being irrelevant. They wanted earthly dominion whereas 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. 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 organization, numerous plans and excellent programs, but we are woefully 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 a church. It is entirely possible to have a beautiful building, excellent equipment, thorough organization, cultured people, talented members and precise services and still be without power. It is good to have these things, but it is better to have the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our services. While we recognize the fact that we are growing in numbers, in influence and in wealth, it is well for us to recall that no denomination or people has ever become wealthy that did not lose in spirituality and become worldly. It is quite true that the early disciples did not possess influence enough to keep out of jail, but they did possess power enough to pray down the jail walls.

The one hundred and twenty early Christians lacked power before Pentecost. They prayed for ten days, preached for a few minutes, and three thousand souls were saved and added to the church. The reason that happened was because the Holy Spirit gave them power. With this power they went out to shake the wicked Roman Empire to its very foundations. The Spirit of God came upon Saint Francis of Assisi so that, although he lacked both wealth and station, he entered upon the task of winning Italy. Martin Luther, when he was an unknown lecturer on theology in Wittenberg, was so empowered by God's Spirit that he dared to fling down his challenge to emperor, cardinals and pope. The Holy Spirit came upon John Wesley, so that, casting convention and red tape to the four winds, he entered upon the task of evangelizing England from one end to the other. This power came upon Robert Morrison so that he addressed himself to carrying the gospel to China. The captain of the ship on which he sailed asked, "Do you imagine you are going to convert China?" Morrison replied, "No, but I think God can." As I think of the present needs of the world and the apathy 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'." Church members today have worldly wisdom, but the supreme need of every one of us is spiritual power.

## I. The Promise of Power.

"Ye shall receive power." This was the great need of the early believers as they faced the mighty task of winning souls to Christ. They had nothing in themselves that would enable them to accomplish the task or change men from lives of selfishness and sin. But the Lord Jesus did not expect any human being to prove sufficient, so He directed their attention to the fact that it was only through power from on high that they would be able to render service that would be fruitful and pleasing to Him. And notice the fact that He promised power to a group that did not have any social standing, political prestige or financial force. Neither did they have a great house of worship, ornate rituals, 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 wonderful love as He promised, "Ye shall receive power."

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. 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, 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 Divine promise. 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 wondrous 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 promote the interests of God's kingdom, to overcome Satan, and to win the lost to Christ. You cannot separate the Holy Spirit and power. He alone can give us the power which we need for what needs to be done in the upbuilding of God's kingdom. The power of the Holy Spirit is received by us through obedient waiting, earnest praying, humble self-emptying, and whole-hearted willingness. As He comes into our lives He cleanses us from sin, empowers us for spiritual tasks and guides us in service.

### 1. He is a gift to receive.

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2:38. We can never merit or purchase this gift, but we can receive the infilling of the Spirit.

### 2. He is a guest to remain.

He is not a visitor who comes and goes. For the Christian He comes to stay. "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?" It is clear that He is a Royal Guest who dwells within every true Christian.

### 3. He is a guide to rely on.

"He shall teach you all things." "He shall guide you into all truth." Are you depending on the Holy Spirit to guide you? Are you willing to follow His leadership?

4. There is a goal to reach.

God's command is to "be filled with the Spirit!" And He does not give us a command to do the impossible. This is a goal to be reached, and it is one which will satisfy Him and meet the needs of this poor, sin-stricken world. But, if this goal is to be reached, there must be a turning from sin and a readiness to witness for Christ. We must hand over our lives to His control and go His way.

III. The Purpose of Power.

This is clear and definite, namely, "Ye shall be My witnesses." Please permit me to remark that a Christian is not called upon to be either a prosecuting attorney or a defense counsel, but he is to be a witness. The Lord Jesus Christ would have all men hear the good news of salvation through Him, and He will not excuse any evasion of responsibility on our part. How wonderful that the Lord Jesus should ask us to be His representatives! Thrilling as it is to be identified with some great idea, or to tell of the greatness of some achievement, it is more thrilling to tell of Christ's love and to bear witness to His truth. Every believer is expected to be a witness. Our purpose here on earth as Christians is to witness for Christ. It is not only our privilege to know Him, but also to make Him known.

A witness is one who knows something, and who is willing to tell what he knows. A witness is one who tells what he knows. A witness for Christ is one who tells another what he knows about Jesus with a view to winning him to a saving knowledge of Christ. What kind of people were these early witnesses in Jerusalem who won so many souls to Christ? They were people who knew Jesus. They had walked with Him and talked with Him and lived in the closest fellowship with Him. Their lives were in keeping with the Gospel of Christ. There was something of the likeness of Christ in their daily lives. Even the enemies of Christ took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. They knew it by their walk and talk, by the way they lived and acted seven days in the week.

You do not need to sit in a court room very long until you learn that the influence which a man's testimony has with the jury depends largely upon the character of the man. That is doubly true in the realm of religion. The influence that your testimony is going to have will depend very largely upon your Christian character. When one who is living a beautiful Christian life testifies for Christ, that testimony has great weight. In fact, a Christlike life is a testimony in itself, even though a word is not spoken. Henry Drummond was right when he said: "The best evidence of Christianity is a Christian." Nothing can withstand the witness of a godly life.