

THE POWERFUL CHRIST

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Matthew 28:18.

Without Christ we are impotent in power and paralytic in service. Through His power we can transcend today and transform tomorrow. His conquests make those of Hannibal, Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, Wellington, Foch, and Eisenhower appear as sham battles.

The powerful Christ constitutes a star of hope which shines through the rift in the black, thunderous storm clouds of the world's midnight. He is like a spring morning after a cold, bitter, icy winter. He is brighter than the brilliant sun, luminous, warm, and peaceful. He is the vibrant note in a songless night. He is our voice of hope in an age of despair. He causes victorious certainty to pulse thru our veins. He changes the static into the dynamic; the inferior into the superior; the vanquished into valiant victors.

We have had enough shocking, suffocating chaos; enough ungodliness, enough empty mockery, enough vain glory, enough world cataclysms, enough catastrophes to cause us to seek the Christ of God. We are impotent. He is all-powerful. Let us proclaim to all the world that Christ is the one remedy for the world's needs. Let us announce that "the pierced hands are no myth, the broken heart is no accident, the substitutionary death is no theory, the open tomb is no fancy." Christ is no idle dream. The hope of the lost is centered in Him. This is glorious and significant.

I. The Powerful Christ Will Vitalize Our Churches.

What is more needed in the world today than awakened, quickened, vitalized churches? Christ's message to the church at Ephesus was, "Remember repent, etc." Are our churches living, throbbing, burning, vitalized dynamos of power? We can see their pomp, but can we feel their power? Not only are many churches tepid; they are frigid. They are apathetic, when they should be aggressive. They are possessed more by the spirit of caution than they are by the spirit of conquest. When we have said all that can be said for our churches -- and much can be said -- we must admit that we have too much lukewarmness, self-complacency, backsliding, formalism, apathy, indifference, and spiritual destitution.

The apostolic churches were different. They were alertly alive, compassionate, and throbbing with power. Through Christ they undertook the impossible. They gave themselves to Christ with such abandon that they dared risk their lives for His cause. Miracles, which have staggered the ages, resulted. If our present churches can possess the vitality, life, spirit, and compassion of the apostolic churches, we can repeat their achievements. Only the churches which busy themselves with the infinites will dare the impossibles. Whenever churches shrink from the impossible, they shrink into a state of the infinitesimal.

A lukewarm atmosphere has muffled the church's voice, retarded its progress, dimmed its light, weakened its influence, compromised its testimony, deadened its spirit, shifted its emphasis, and rendered impotent its efforts.

"He that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." Sleeping Christians, sleeping churches constitute tragedies which cannot be described. Many Christians are asleep -- asleep, when heathen voices call as one called to Jonah; asleep when it is harvest time and criminal to sleep; asleep when dark, tragic hours are upon us. One of earth's most pitiable sights is an apathetic, lukewarm, compassionateless church.

We will have vitalized churches only when we have vitalized individuals. Christ has led His church against bitter opposition, appalling indifference, frigid coldness, glaring human weakness, bloody wars, world darkness, sickening lukewarmness, limitless depravity, hottest fires of destruction, floods of cynicism, and bitter criticism. His followers have faced lions' dens, braved fiery furnaces, suffered burning fagots, exposed themselves to disease and suffering, endured privations, made sacrifices, and died as they have moved on to victory.

Christ is powerful to strengthen us in our weakness, to enlighten us in our ignorance, to cheer us in our gloom, to hearten us in our defeats, and to give inspiration for our tasks. When His power permeates a church, it is not a weakling to fall before any infidel's sarcasm. It is not a coward to fold up its banners at every criticism. It is not a weakling to be defeated in battle for right against wrong. It is not a powerless institution to be cuffed about and trampled underfoot by every scorning, carping critic and wicked bigot. But we must be alerted. Many of God's children are proud and need prodding, asleep and need awakening, have eyes and do not see, ears and do not hear, minds and do not understand. When worldliness creeps into the churches they are too tepid to be triumphant, too complacent to be courageous, too dull to be dynamic, too cautious to be conquering. They reveal more of the spirit of a compromiser than they do the spirit of the crusader.

Distracted and rife the world is reaching its hands out through the darkness for certainty and security. It is beginning to long for reality. It has grown tired of make-believe. It needs the help of vitalized churches.

II. The Powerful Christ Will Signalize The Preacher.

Among all the needs of the preacher the need for the power of Christ is paramount. The preacher may have personal magnetism, educational superiority, intellectual acumen, but unless he has the power of Christ he is impotent and helpless. Preachers, empowered by Christ, are a mighty blessing. Christ is the explanation why Saul became Paul, when Cēphas became Peter, why a monk became Luther, why a discouraged, down-and-out man on the verge of suicide became William Cowper. Clothed in Christ's power, preachers through the centuries of Christianity have gained victories against deviltry and demons; learning and ignorance; genius and talent; sin and iniquity. Christ will give power to our efforts, quality to our work, purpose and promise to our plans, breadth to our vision, depth to our consecration, and intensity to our efforts. He gave meaningful success to Paul's missionary journeys, hope and heart to Judson in Burma, sustenance to Bunyan in Bedford Jail, and turned the Diet of Worms into a toy for Luther. Preachers need Christ as they need nothing else. Unless we have His presence and power, our efforts will be but feeble gestures and our message no more than the carping of a parrot.

Christ-led and Christ-empowered preachers have faced and conquered in dark, troublous times, when all forms of sin and godlessness were rampant. They have battled with and conquered lukewarmness, worldliness, stubborn opposition, overwhelming and inveterate sloth. They have unbolted locked doors and opened highways to new fields of conquest. If we back off from declaring the whole truth because it cuts across popular trends and customs, we become weaklings. Who wants to be a devotee of a religion that cannot face such times as we are now in and solve them?

It was the power of Christ that impelled Spurgeon through his long and devoted life of service. His power gave birth to the eventful achievements of Whitefield; led Shaftesbury to turn aside from the attractiveness of a brilliant social career that he might minister to the riffraff in London. It caused David Brainerd to write, "I cared not how I lived, nor what hardships I went through, if only I could win souls for Christ." When the compassion of the pulpit is pronounced, the church glows with new light, pulsates with new life, and throbs with new power.

There is all the difference in the world in seeking to do the Lord's work in our own strength and in doing it in Christ's power; in knowing about Christ and in knowing Christ. Saul of Tarsus knew about Christ when he was persecuting the church. He met Christ face to face, and then planted churches through the lands. Peter knew about Christ when he denied Him; at Pentecost he received His power and three thousand souls were saved in one day. William Carey knew about Christ as a shoe cobbler; in Nottingham he knew God, and he awakened a sleeping Christendom. John Wesley knew about Christ on his first missionary journey; after his vital experience at Aldersgate, he knew Christ and awakened a corrupt, drowsy, indolent church.

In Boston there is a statue of one of America's great preachers, Phillips Brooks, made by the great sculptor, Saint Gaudens. The figure is of heroic size, and behind and above it stands the figure of Christ, His hands restin upon the great preacher's shoulders. You see what it means. By those two figures in marble the sculptor portrays the thought that Phillips Brooks' power came from Christ; Christ inspired him.

III. The Powerful Christ Will Evangelize The Lost.

Wherever Christ's power has gone, people have seen a new light, found a new hope, possessed a new compassion, and cherished a new destiny. The world needs salvation more than it needs anything else. Think of one lost soul! It means, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

We are to point souls to "The Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." Nothing can atone for our failure to win the lost. The lost called forth the deepest solicitude of Christ. The parable of the lost sheep is an example. Ninety-nine out of one hundred sheep were safe in the fold; only one was lost. Yet the unmistakable burden of the shepherd was for the one that was lost, not for the ninety and nine within the fold.

The churches main business is that of evangelization. There are many duties incumbent upon the church. There are many calls coming to the church. There are many things expected of the church, but the biggest business of the church is to evangelize the lost. Everything else done, and evangelization neglected leaves us majoring in minors. Everything else may be stripped away, but if we have Christ and His message, plus His power, we can win the lost to Christ.

I know a land that is sunk in shame, ---
Of hearts that faint and tire;
But I know a name, a Name, a Name
That can set that land on fire!