

THE SOURCE OF SUCCESS

"Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Zechariah 4:6.

The Lord of hosts had these interesting and challenging words to say through Zechariah, His prophet: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit." When were these divine words spoken? The occasion was an interesting and impressive one. The Jews were engaged in repairing the walls of Jerusalem and in rebuilding the temple of the Lord. Their enemies were numerous and hostile; difficulties were almost insurmountable; consequently their prospects were very gloomy. They were weak and their foes were strong. At this particular time, through the intrigues of their enemies, a decree had come from the king of Persia, arresting for a time the progress of the work; and we are told by Ezra that an army came and "by force and power" caused the work to cease. Man had sent his force and power, his army and his might; but he had left God out of his calculations. Then Zechariah was directed to encourage the people, and he did this by assuring them that their future was bright with promise. But it would be well for them to remember constantly that their ultimate success did not depend solely on themselves -- their own ingenuity, inventive genius or personal force -- but on the power of the Lord.

As we contemplate, plan and prepare for the beginning of our evangelistic services, it will be well for us to consider on what the success of our work does not depend. God definitely says it is not might or power. It does not depend on material resources, on human patronage and authority, on public favor and support. It does not rely on the wisdom and manipulations of men. Neither does the cause we have at heart depend on the riches, learning or influence of others. All these, when dedicated to the Lord, are calculated to be helpful, but they are not essential. On what does our work for God depend? It depends on the Spirit of God.

How was that truth revealed to the prophet Zechariah? By means of a vision! God gave His servant a very remarkable vision of a golden candlestick, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon. To each lamp seven pipes were attached. Above the structure was a golden bowl which served as a reservoir for the oil. By means of pipes running from the bowl the oil was fed to each of the seven lamps. Two evergreen trees, rich with olive oil, were standing on either side, pouring their golden oil into the bowl which fed the lamps.

To the Jewish people the meaning of the vision was clear. The lampstand was a familiar piece of furniture in their Tabernacle and Temple, symbolizing the function of God's people on earth. Symbolically it summarized God's purpose for the nation of Israel among all the other nations of the earth. The nation was to bear the light of God among the nations. Through His people God was to shine forth, His truth was to be diffused, and His excellency was to be made known unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

The flowing oil is interpreted by the words, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit." That is to say, there was an abundant supply to maintain the flames, and this supply was from God. There was no reason why Israel should cease to function, why the Jews should be compelled, whatever the force and power of the enemy, to abandon the work of the house of the Lord which was at Jerusalem. The supply was from God and it was plentiful enough to maintain the flame.

Now let us see what application this vision and message have to us, for indeed we have here a message most relevant to ourselves in these days in which we live. We know that as Christians we have vigorous and determined opposition from three sources -- the world, the flesh and the devil; and that from either of these sources the opposition can manifest itself in various and subtle forms. It would be the height of folly to belittle the force and power of the enemy, and we do not have any disposition to do so.

I. The Function of the Saints.

This is suggested to us by the candlestick, which is a very comprehensive symbol of the function that we should exercise in the world. The candlestick was to bear the light. Christians, too, are to bear the gospel light. Christ said, "Ye are the light of the world." He also said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Paul referred to "this crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." Peter taught us to show forth the excellencies of Him Who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

II. The Flow of the Supply.

The flame could be kept aglow only by the oil, and there was the bowl with its supply to each lamp. The oil was indispensable; without it the lampstand was useless and an encumbrance. But it received oil in order to consume it. Note that! It received and consumed. It functioned only by absorbing the oil and transmitting it as light in the darkness. Then God has a ministry toward us and in us before there can be a ministry through us and out from us. The lamp received the oil from without, something happened within, and the light went out from it.

There must be, therefore, a work of God toward us and in us. The full supplies of the grace of His Spirit must inflow and inwork before there can be any outflow; or, reverting to the vision before us, before there can be any gleaming of the light. We must be blessed if we would be a blessing. "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing."

Notice two things about this flow:

1. It was continuous.

Through the pipes to each of the lamps the oil flowed, and kept on flowing. Remember that! "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God's work toward us in unceasing.

2. It was abundant.

An interesting fact is revealed by the Hebrew in verse two. There were seven pipes to each of the seven lamps, or forty-nine in all. This suggests to us the perfection of the supply -- how full, how abundant! As those lamps exhausted the oil in them, the residue of the oil poured in from above, and they were kept in the process of filling, burning and shining. On God's side there can be nothing lacking. The riches of His grace by His Spirit for His people are never in short supply.

God continuously working, and an abundant supply! Then why talk about "the force and power of the enemy?" Can such opposition be effective against the people of God, when such a God as He is working continuously and abundantly on our behalf?

Here then was symbolized the guarantee of God's Spirit for the success of work done for Him. God will give the gifts His children need for the accomplishment of the work which He has assigned to them.

This passage reminds us in no unmistakable words that the work of Christianity is not to be accomplished by physical effort alone, nor by human wisdom alone, nor by the force of organization and numerical strength alone; but it is a work that must be accomplished by the operation of the Spirit of God. To this end the prophet Zechariah instructs the people to look to God for results rather than to their own power and wisdom. To this end Christ instructed the disciples on the morning when He took His leave back to His Father's house, that they should return to Jerusalem and wait until that power from God came upon them and endued them. Until He came they were wholly unprepared for their work.

God let His prophet see the truth that success is not by massed might or personal power. How human it is to admire men and women of personality and to be attracted by their personal power. Ability and efficiency bring praise and prominence and pride. People of ability are too often tempted to think of self and to forget God. But the hope of a church is not in man's personal power but in God. It is not in massed might nor in personal power but in spiritual power. The Spirit's strength is far greater than massed might or personal power. Paul wrote: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase." The Holy Spirit will operate through every life fully surrendered to His control.

III. The Fulness of the Source.

Look at the two olive trees, one on each side of the lampstand, and each is there in the interest of the lampstand, and both to minister to the maintenance of the glow of the sevenfold lamp. Likewise, here are the two olive trees, the two anointed ones, one in heaven and one in the heart. These two, the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven and the Holy Spirit in the heart, are ministering in the interests of every true believer continually.

The Holy Spirit is indispensable in our work for the Lord. There are some things in life we want, and there are some things in life we must have and cannot do without. There are certain things in our homes we desire, which are beautiful, convenient and valuable; but they are not indispensable, and if necessary we could live without them. In carrying on the work of our Lord the Holy Spirit is indispensable. It is possible to have a great revival without great singing or without much preaching, but it is impossible to do so without the work of the Holy Spirit. Without Him we will sing, pray and preach to little profit. In Romans 8:26 we are told that we cannot pray as we ought without Him. In John 14:26 we are told that we cannot understand the Bible without Him. In John 16:8 we are told that there is no conviction of sin without Him. Nothing will draw men nor hold men nor lift men like the work of the Spirit of God.

IV. The Fulfilment of the Service.

1. Opposition will be overcome.
"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (verse 7). The unscalable mountain, the impassable obstacle, the force and power of the enemy, are to melt away.
2. Glory will be given.
"He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (verse 7). Glory will be given where it belongs -- to the Headstone, and we know who that is. Christ is the Headstone of the corner. I will give all the glory to the Lord. That is rather difficult, isn't it? Self is always claiming appreciation and applause. But when the Holy Spirit is having His own way in our hearts self is out, and Christ is all.
3. The construction will be completed.
"The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it" (verse 9). Nothing can hinder its completion. God's plan will be carried right through to fulfilment.
4. Righteousness will be revealed.
They "shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel" (verse 10). The construction is going to answer to the plumb-line.