

(Service for the King) 1. POWER FOR SERVICE

by A.B. Simpson

Transcript

"That ye may know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe." Eph. i. 19 I.

Man is born the most impotent creature on the face of the earth. The young brute grows into its prime while the infant is still a helpless child. And morally, he is still more weak. His own passions are stronger than he. Every temptation bears him away, and every surrounding influence controls and molds him. Spiritually he is still more weak; not only impotent, but dead. Slowly he learns this humbling truth, and only by many a futile effort and painful fall. This is the meaning of Abraham's falsehood, and David's double crime, Job's long siege of suffering and Peter's sad denial. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fail." The strongest, the most self-confident, are the most impotent of all. And true strength and safety come when at last we learn our utter insufficiency and accept the simple paradox: "When I am weak, then I am strong."

II. But over against man's weakness stands the revelation of God's power.

This is His first manifestation; and He comes in the mighty forces and forms of Creation and Providence. So He appears to Abraham as El Shaddai, "the Almighty God." So He comes in the redemption of Israel, crushing before a little rod the mightiest empire on earth, dividing the Red Sea and the Jordan and leading His people between the parted waves; marching before them in the pillar of cloud of His awful presence; leveling the walls of Jericho by a trumpet blast, and routing the Canaanitish hosts at Beth-horon by the artillery of heaven while the orbs of nature stood still at His servant's word; delivering His people again and again from their outnumbering and overpowering foes; holding nations as the drop of a bucket and the small dust of the balance; weighing the mountains in scales and handling them as man would handle the little ounce weights of the druggist's counter; taking up the isles as a very little thing; carrying the government of the universe on a single shoulder, and asking as He points to the traces of His power in earth and heaven and all the past history of man: "Is there anything too hard for the Lord?" This is the first lesson of His teaching: "Power belongeth unto God." And this power He puts at our service. "I am your God," He says, "All that is in Me belongs to obedient faith." There are two great potencies in the universe—God and the believer. "With God all things are possible." "All things are possible to him that believeth." It is very wonderful that God should thus harness His omnipotence to a human life and put the reins in the hands of humble faith. Wonderful that He should say to a worm: "I am the Almighty God. Take me, possess me, use me. I am thy God."

III. The Power of God is manifested in Christ.

He is called "the power and the wisdom of God." His life was a constant embodiment of divine power; power over Satan in the wilderness and on the cross, whom he left a conquered and disarmed foe; power over demoniacal possession in human souls; power over disease in every form; power over nature in storm and tempest and in the multiplied bread which fed the five thousand on the hills of Galilee; power over death itself in the resurrection of others, and most signally of all in His own resurrection and ascension.

This is the special exhibition of His power which the apostle here emphasises "The exceeding greatness of His power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places, far above all might and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world, but that which is to come." Here is a power that sets all the laws of nature at defiance, sets aside all the ordinary operations and extraordinary forces of the material world and puts its feet on all power, law and dominion. Far above all the forces of the present world, far above the mightier powers astronomy reveals, far above all heavens, indeed, and all the beings that govern their myriad worlds, far above all the rulers of the greater world of spirits even to the throne of sovereign power and universal preeminence, has that wondrous Man ascended, and ascended in our name, as "Head over all things the Church, which is His Body."

So that all this marvelous power is possessed in common with us, and may be shared with the weakest of His members. The least of them can be no less or lower than His feet, yet "He has put all things under His feet," and in Him we may put our feet on the neck of every foe.

O, have we known "the power of His resurrection," and in it "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe," and have we taken this Jesus as made unto us "the power of God?" Surely of Him shall men say: "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." Surely this was what the overcoming apostle meant when he said: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

IV. The Gospel is the Power of God to everyone that believeth.

This divine power, inherent in God and manifested in Christ, is offered to us in the Gospel. It is not only peace, but also power. It is in itself God's mighty instrument for saving men. It has power to break man's pride and reveal man's sin, and win man's confidence and change man's destiny. It has proved stronger than the philosophy of Greece, or the strength of Rome, or the pride of Judaism. It is power. The weakness of God, it is stronger than men. But it also brings power. It offers man the strength of God, and it confers it. It brings in one hand pardon for all the past, and for the future the power of a new, faithful and Almighty Friend. He who fully receives it may live a life of victory and effectiveness. Have we found its power?

V. The Holy Ghost is the Great Agent in imparting this power.

"Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you." He is the Spirit of power. Not only does He give the newborn soul power to receive Christ and turn from sin, but He also enters the consecrated heart as a personal guest and guide. The gift of the Holy Ghost is a distinct experience from regeneration. It is one thing for me to build a house, and another to go and reside in it personally. In regeneration the Holy Spirit builds the house. In consecration He enters it as a personal guest and makes it His permanent abode, directing and using the whole being as it is offered to Him. His coming brings power:

1. Power for the Spirit of Sonship. "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe in His name, which were born not of men nor of the will of the flesh or of man, but of God." We are sons of God by second birth. But there is more than thisâ€"even power to enter intoâ€"to know and claim and enjoy our lofty sonship. There are high born heirs who do not know their birthright. And so, "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father." Then we know what is the hope our calling, and walk worthy of God as dear children.

2. Power over Sin. "The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

This is the power that sanctifies. Holiness is not a condition wrought in us. It is simply the Holy One in us ruling, fillingâ€"the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus" controlling with the power and uniformity of a law. This, and this alone, can give power over sin. This battle is too great for man. It must be the Lordâ€™s.

3. Power for the Passive Virtues of Christian Character. "Strengthened according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." This is the victory over self, and it is the secret of power over others. The first battlefield is the heart and the home, and he who would have power to do must first receive power to endure, yea, even "with joyfulness." Nor is there a mightier evidence of the power of God than just such triumphs over temper and provocation, nor a stronger testimony and service for Jesus than the sweetness of the subdued and quiet spirit which has so learned Christ.

4. Power for Deeper Christian Experiences. "Strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints the height and depth, and length and breadth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God." These words describe the highest possibilities of Christian life, an experience exceeding abundantly over all we are able to ask or think." But this we cannot enter until we are first "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." We could not bear such a blessing in our natural strength. We have not capacity to receive it. Our being must be enlarged; our spirit must be raised to a mightier manhood. Our understanding must grasp more clearly, and our faith appropriate more firmly the things that are freely given us of God. Thus we need power to take more power. And just as the sea wave that washes in and fills the little basin on the beach, washes a larger, deeper basin by its force, and leaves larger room for the next wave, so the Holy Spirit enlarges our heart to receive still more of Himself.

5. Power to Resist Temptation. "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places; wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." How large a place temptation has in every Christian life! And the nearer we get to God the more severely it presses us. The "principalities and powers" of evil are "in heavenly places." And we have no power to resist them. We must have His power or fall. Nay, we must have Himself for our power and our overcomer or we shall be overcome. "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Happy they who have learned the secret of strength and victory. In all these things they are more than conquerors through Him that loved them. Hence few know much of what temptation or victory means until they have the Life of Power.

6. Power for Aggressive Conflict against Satan. "Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you." This was Christ's commission to the seventy, and it is His message to every true worker in the great harvest field to which He sent them forth saying, "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that He would send other laborers into His harvest." Therefore this prayer is for all true servants. It is power over all the power of the enemy. This is not for our defense against temptation merely. This is aggressive war. This is power to cast out demons and destroy the works of the devil. Thus the Holy Ghost came to the apostles. Filled with the Holy Ghost, Saul said to Elymas: "O, full of all subtlety and malignity, thou child of the Devil, thou cease not to prevent the right ways of the Lord?" And God's judgment upon him. Thus he flung from his hand the viper, and thus he triumphed over all the power of the enemy, and cried as he pressed on: "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom." We need this power in the conflict still and we may have it. So good Pastor Blumhardt prayed all night long by the side of a wild demoniac, and ere the dawning light had broken, the victim arose, shouting, "Jesus is Victor!" and went forth to a life of blessed liberty and service.

7. Power for Service and Testimony. "Ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto Me." "Ye are witnesses of these things, and behold I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." "My speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be forever and ever. Amen."

The Apostle Paul devotes a whole chapter, I. Cor. Xii, especially to explain and illustrate the gifts of the Holy Spirit for service. He begins by declaring our absolute dependence upon the Holy Ghost even for power to bear the simplest testimony to Jesus Christ. He then shows the diversity of the Spirit's gifts, but declares that to every one some manifestation of this divine power is given for improvement and service. He specifies the various gifts of knowledge, wisdom, faith, miracles, healing, prophecy, tongues, discerning of spirits, and clearly intimates that they may all be expected in the Church of Christ through the whole Christian age. These charismata, or spiritual gifts, were clearly recognised in the early Church and designed to be zealously sought, cherished and cultivated. Service for Christ was understood not as the exercise of our natural powers and talents, but the use of the special gifts of the Great Paraclete. The wisdom of nature was regarded as foolishness with God, and Christ was received as wisdom and utterance. The talents and the pounds were not natural endowments, but spiritual endowments. Our good works were declared to be "prepared for us that we should walk in them," so that the weakest and humblest saint could minister "according to the proportion of faith," and as of the ability which God gave." Indolence, timidity and unfruitfulness were left without excuse. In themselves all were equally insufficient even to think anything as of themselves and all had equal claims to His all-sufficiency, and equal right to say: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me."

This power reached out alike in every direction of Christian life and service. It was as necessary for a deacon in administering the finances of a church, of a private member in giving his means to God, as to an apostle to his ministry, or a saint on his knees. Every service for the Lord must be in the Holy Spirit and in the strength of Jesus, or it could not be acceptable to God. He only is acceptable to the Father, and only His life and work in us can be accepted above. All our service, therefore, is simply partnership with Christ. It is Christ working in us His work. This was His promise when He went away. "He that believeth in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto the Father."

That does not mean that we shall do the works that He used to do, but that we shall do the works He is still to do, the works that He is now carrying on in His resurrection life as our Living Head, through us, the members of His body. He is the power; we are the executioners of that power. Our works are but the complement of "all which Jesus began both to do and to teach."

This power, therefore, can never exalt the possessor into self-importance. It is not his power at all, but simply Christ in him. It differs entirely from mere human power. It is not oratorical power or personal magnetism, that subtle influence which some possess in a marked degree. It is not intellectual power or logical force, the power of persuading other minds. It is not sympathetic power, the exquisite capacity to move human sympathy, kindle feeling, excite emotion and sway human hearts at will. It is not even moral power, the power to rouse the conscience, to alarm the guilty soul, to persuade men to reformation of life and conduct. All this may be merely natural. Spiritual power is far deeper and higher. It is the power of God. It brings men to feel the presence and the fear of God. It leads men to know God, to love God, to obey God, to be like God, to receive God. It is God in man leading man to God.

Some elements in this gift of power are:

1. Knowledge of the Word of God, especially the plan of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit carries the truth with great vividness and power to the mind and enables us so to see and reveal Jesus that the sinner cannot but accept Him.
2. Wisdom and tact that is holy and divinely taught discrimination and fitness of appeal, counsel and exhortation. This is "the word in season to him that is weary," with "which He openeth our ear to hear as the learned." This is "the word of wisdom," and "the word spoken in season," so good and wholesome. This is the power to know and speak the Lord's own message, one sentence of which is worth a volume of our well-meaning opinions and ideas.
3. Faith. This is indispensable to all power. "We believe and therefore speak," must be true of every man who would speak with the power of God. We must have the same faith for our message and our work as for our own souls. The men of power in apostolic times were the men of faith. "Full of faith and power," "full of faith and the Holy Ghost," are their brief biographies. This is no common faith. The faith of effectual service is the very faith of God, and God's own omnipotence.
4. Love, including all its accompaniments, fervor of spirit, compassion, tenderness, sympathy, concern for souls, affectionateness of manner, intense longing for the salvation of men, travail of spirit for the unsaved and that deep heart power which is the greatest of all spiritual forces. Many persons lack this essential element of power. Great courage, wisdom, earnestness and force are neutralised by hardness or lack of love. Arctic explorers kindle fires from the sun by ice lenses, but he who would kindle hearts from above must be himself on fire. "Thy heart must overflow if thou another's heart would reach." The Holy Spirit brings to us this element of power, even Christ's own love to men.

5. Earnestness, or the intense concentration of all one's power to the work of saving men. A soul fully alive to its great business, to men's interests and perils, and using all its powers and energies to do them good. There is no power without earnestness so deep and strong as to raise even enthusiasm. The very word means God in a man, and the power of God in us will kindle all our powers to a flame.

6. Unction. This is finer and diviner still. It is that inexpressible yet unmistakable influence which so melts and mellows the whole being, and baptises both thought, feeling, word, expression, and even our very tones, looks and gestures with the Spirit of God and with His life, love and power, that men are irresistibly impressed, subdued, attracted and convicted. We may be so pervaded by God Himself that God can constantly show forth in us the "sweet savor of Christ, and make manifest His knowledge by us in every place."

7. Conviction. There is yet another element of power. The power to lead men to conviction and decision, the power to reach their conscience with the sense of God, to awaken their fear of God and consciousness of sin, and to lead them to act, to decide, to choose, to be definite, immediate, and thoroughly committed to the one urgent, all-important step of receiving the Saviour. This power we see in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, Paul's message to the Philippian jailer, and all the specially useful evangelists of later times. It is indispensable for all true Christian workers. He who neglects to receive and use it will have often cause to say of the fruits of his work "While Thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

THE SECRET OF POWER

But how shall we obtain the gift of power?

1. Conscious weakness. "To them that have no might he increaseth strength." Utterly to know and realise our insufficiency, we must come to the end of all our resources, power, love, thought, even faith itself, then He comes and lives in us, our all in all.

2. Consecration. Give your weakness to Christ to use for Himself. Dedicate to Him your power to be filled and used. Lay on His altar the gift He is about to bestow. Take it as a sacred and unselfish trust to be employed for His work and glory. And He will give abundantly. He will take the offered vessel and use it. He will feel the consecrated hand, and of His own you will serve and glorify Him.

3. Appropriating and acting faith. Take hold of His strength. Attach your little wheel to His great engine, and it will run with heavenly power. Sometimes we see such advertisements as this.

"TO LET WITH POWER"

That means that a store is for rent, with connections for steam power. All the manufacturer has to do is to move in his machinery, and attach to the great revolving rod or wheel that passes through the premises, and use the power that is there at his command. God gives to each of us a house "with power." He puts within our reach the great engine of His omnipotence and bids us attach our wheel of need for strength or service, and take the power that is running to waste and freely at our disposal.

During the Philadelphia exposition one of the most extraordinary objects in the great hall was the Corliss engine, a steam engine with sufficient power to drive all the machinery which the building could hold. All over the immense building were scattered almost all possible apparatus of industrial machinery. Not one of them had any self-moving power, but all that was necessary to put every wheel in swift and powerful

motion was to attach it to the great engine. Then the little knitting machine went as freely as the great printing press, each taking from the same source of power all it could contain and use. Even so in God's great work of life, some of us are little knitting and sewing machines and some great presses but none of us have any power of our own. But in our midst is that Great Engine—the Holy Ghost—and we have only to attach the connecting band of faith; then the power passes into each life according to our need and in proportion to our use of it, and the humble seamstress at her sewing machine receives it as abundantly as she can take it in, as well as the author who sends his great thoughts to the world through the printing press or the voice that speaks to listening thousands the messages of truth and life. The power meets us, helps us, carries us wherever we are and whatever our service if it be but His will. And all we need is to make the connection and then to use the power for Him. So may He enable us to take hold of His strength and give it back to Him.

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