

The Power of the Spirit

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers for service and witnessing to the world.

Scripture: John 14:26, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:26

Topics: "Empowerment for Witnessing", "Holy Spirit"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples, contrasting their ignorance and selfishness before Pentecost with the empowered witnesses they became afterward. He highlights that the disciples were initially bound by their limited understanding of Jesus' mission, focusing on a temporal kingdom rather than the spiritual one He intended. Morgan explains that the Holy Spirit provides the necessary power for intellectual understanding, holy living, and unwavering will, enabling believers to fulfill their calling as witnesses of Christ. He asserts that true service to God requires the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which empowers believers to live transformed lives and effectively share the Gospel. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a reliance on the Holy Spirit to manifest the glory of Christ in the world today.

Transcript

THE first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is of great interest, as giving the last glimpse of the disciples of Jesus apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The picture is full of instruction, revealing with clearness the enormous difference there must ever be between man in his fallen nature, and man as he may be through the baptism and indwelling of the Spirit. One cannot look at this picture, incomplete though it may be, without seeing that these men were still ignorant and selfish. There is no comparison between the men of the first chapter, and the men of the subsequent history contained in the book.

They came to the risen Lord with the old question: Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They had made no progress. The events of the past weeks had not been sufficient to reveal to them the great essential verities of the Christian faith. They were still bound by the materialism of Judaism; the spiritual vision had not yet fallen upon them; they did not understand the mission of Christ. They were still looking for a temporal kingdom which should be immediately set up. They had no appreciation of the fact that Jesus was passing to a hidden throne and a hidden crown, and that the work to which they were now to be committed was not temporal, external, and material, but eternal, internal, and spiritual.

They had not yet escaped from the narrow national prejudices which had been the curse of the nation for so long. Dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They had no idea of the world-wide kingdom of the Messiah. Their vision was still limited by the horizon of their own people. The Master had ever looked beyond the confines of the nation. Not so the disciples, neither were they yet able to do so.

They did not understand that the work He had come to do was something- absolutely new. They dreamed of the restoration of the old. Restore was the word they made use of.

Their love was deep, and true, and intense; their knowledge during the days of discipleship was far in advance of that of the men of their age; the Resurrection was to them a fact, for the living Christ was in their midst. Yet they were absolutely unfit for the work they had to do, for they were still looking for the temporal kingdom to be set up in the same way that other earthly kingdoms had been.

To these men Christ said: Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come 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. This word answers and corrects the false idea contained in their question. They said: Dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom? They thought of a return to old things. He replied: Ye shall be My witnesses. He directed their thought to the new Centre. They said: Dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom? Their minds were fixed upon earthly things. He said: Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come. His mind encompassed the spiritual relationship. They said: Dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? They were bound by the idea of the nation. He replied: Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. He included the world in His vision.

This was a new beginning, moving out from Himself as Centre, having the Holy Spirit as Administrator, and the disciples as channels of communication.

There is a sense in which these words of the Master cannot be addressed to Christian people to-day. These men had not yet been baptized with the Holy Spirit; they were not yet born again. Those that are Christians to-day are such by that baptism and new birth; and, consequently, they possess the power promised to these men.

The central principle declared is that fitness for service in the new covenant lies within the realm of the power of the Holy Spirit. This is of perpetual application, and it is therefore important that a chapter should be devoted to its consideration. There are three matters to be noted: first, the power needed; secondly, the nature of the power available; and, thirdly, the purpose for which the power is bestowed.

For the accomplishment of their work these men needed a fourfold force. They needed intellectual power, because of their ignorance and inability to appreciate the meaning of the Master's mission. They needed spiritual power, in the sense of ability to do righteously, notwithstanding the carnal possibilities still resident in their own lives. They needed a new power of the affection and will, because of the tremendous forces which would be arrayed against them in the prosecution of the work that was before them. They needed power for the accomplishment of the results at which they aimed, because the forces hitherto used in great movements would be denied them.

It is not necessary to deal at length with the first phase of this need, having already referred to it; but their lack of understanding of the Cross must be remembered. The apostle in writing to the Corinthians described the Cross as being unto Jews a stumbling-block --that is, something in the way, an obstruction; and up to this point their outlook was purely Jewish. Think how they had followed the Master, and how

they had learned to love Him. Then remember how swiftly doom fell upon Him, their Teacher, their Friend. They had seen Him overcome by the detested Roman power, and nailed to the Cross. It is only as their place is occupied in imagination, and the prejudices of their birth and education are in some measure understood, that it will be possible to appreciate how completely the Cross must have extinguished hope for them, and how sincere and sad was the sigh of the men who walked to Emmaus: We hoped that it was He which should redeem Israel.

Of the mysteries that are the essential grandeur of Christianity,--death, the entrance to life--life won through death; defeat, the way into victory--victory won through defeat; darkness, the price of light--light dawning out of darkness,--they had no appreciation. They saw only the death, the defeat, and the darkness. The Cross was to them a stumbling-block. Afterwards they told the story of the Cross as being the story of love, of liberty, of light; but before they were able to do this, they needed a new intellectual grasp upon the things of God. The power they were to receive, after that the Holy Spirit came upon them was the new power of intelligence, enabling them to comprehend the true meaning of the facts they were to publish.

The second phase of the need is the power for holy living. In the purpose of God the force and meaning of the Cross were to be revealed to men not merely by the words of His servant's lips, but also by the transformation of their lives. Man had been the slave of his own carnality, dominated by the evil forces within him. Henceforth he is to be free from this power; in union with Jesus Christ he is to be master of the things that have mastered him. The essential message of the Gospel is the declaration that through the Cross and Resurrection of Christ a new dynamic is at the disposal of men, in the power of which they may be victorious, trampling under their feet the lust of which hitherto they have been the slaves. Witness to this truth is to be borne not only by a testimony of the lips, but by the triumph of lives, proving the accuracy of the testimony. First, a clear appreciation of the meaning of the Cross; secondly, the personal apprehension of its power; behind the testimony the triumph--the testimony proved by the triumph, the triumph accounted for by the testimony. Such is the Divine ideal of the work that lay before these men. If this indeed be true, it is evident that they needed this power of Holiness that their lives might be transformed. It is this power that He promised to them when He spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Further, they needed new power of the affection and will. Persecution awaited them. All the forces that had been against their Master would oppose them. The doctrine of deliverance which they were to announce was revolutionary, and the powers that held men in slavery would array themselves to silence their voices and stop their progress. If they were to continue bearing witness to Him through darkness as well as through light, when the way was rough as well as when it was smooth, through the perils of popularity as well as through the dangers of ostracism, they needed some new power of the affection and the will, which should make their love burn as a flame, and set their faces as flint.

They had already been in one place of testing, and with what dire results! Oh the tragedy of that simple sentence. They all left Him, and fled! If they had done that while He was yet with them, while the power of His personality was upon them, how would they act when the clouds had hidden Him from view and the sound of His voice was not to be heard? They stood in need of a power that should keep love burning, and the will to accomplish their work unconquered.

They cannot drive the world

Until themselves be driven.

This power is precisely what Jesus promised in the indwelling Spirit. Ever revealing the fact of the Christ to the disciples, He would capture the soul by the vision of love every moment, and make the will to do His work invincible as the very will of God.

Once more, they needed a new working power. Said the Master: Ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. They were to tell the story of His life and death to all men; they were to urge His claims upon the attention of men; they were to win men for Him. And all this was to be done without the aids that human wisdom would immediately think of. The conquests of the past had been the conquests of argument, and policy, and the sword. These were all denied them. They had no commission to persuade men by argument. Policy had no place in their programme. Of the sword the Master Himself had said: Put up . . . thy sword . . . for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

By other methods they were to accomplish their work. The propagandists of the new kingdom were sent forth in the name of an absent King, with no sign of power recognized by the men of the world. They needed some new power, and this is exactly what the Master promised them when He spoke of the coming of the Holy Spirit. Having that power, they should pass into all lands, and do deeds and win triumphs more mighty and marvellous than any that the world had ever seen or known.

So far the first disciples have been under consideration, but the teaching is permanent. No man can do the work of God until he have the Holy Spirit, and is endued with power. It is impossible to preach the Gospel save in the power of the Spirit, because none can comprehend the true meaning of the Cross of Christ unless taught by the Spirit of God. Neither a knowledge of the letter of the New Testament, nor a system of theology, is sufficient to equip for preaching the Cross. Nothing short of the immediate, direct, personal illumination of the Spirit is sufficient equipment. Witness for the Master is impossible save to those who co-operate with the supreme Witness. The keenest intellect and the most cultured mind are unable to understand the mystery of redemption, and therefore cannot explain it to others. Whoever can say light has broken upon the Cross and the eternal morning has dawned, is able to do so through the direct illumination of the Holy Spirit; and apart from that, there can be no witness and no service.

It is equally true that there can be no witness in the life but by this constant indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The nature is still capable of sin; and if it pass from under the Divine government, all manner of evil will follow. Men can only live the life that is in harmony with the teaching of Christ as they are possessed and energized by the Holy Spirit of God.

It is also necessary that the affection and will should be under the dominion of the Spirit. Perpetual love and perennial joy are only possible where the Spirit of God abides at the centre of being, energizing the will that else would fail, and strengthening every step in the path of obedience. Save as the life is lived under the dominion of the Spirit, temptation will prove too strong and the sacred Name will be dishonoured.

Again, in all service for God, the power of the Spirit is still needed. Much has been done since the apostolic days for making the work of the preacher easy. The Canon of the New Testament is complete; theology has been systematized; the necessity for the thorough equipment of the preacher educationally, wherever possible, is realized: these and many other advantages which the early Christian preachers had not, contribute to the smoothness of the pathway of the preacher to-day. All these, however, are insufficient. Beside them all, and as the power which alone makes them of real use, the Holy Spirit must

equip the preacher, or preaching will degenerate into lifeless rhetoric, or heartless argument. This is equally true of every form of Christian service. It is pre-eminently the day of organization. Societies have multiplied on every hand, and the machinery of the Church is complex and multitudinous. This is all cause for thankfulness, but it cannot too often be repeated, that apart from the Holy Spirit's control and direction, all is dead. The advantages of the moment are not to be despised. Those who would go back to primitive simplicity must deny the guidance of God in the centuries. Let all be yielded to the fire and power of the Spirit for cleansing and energy, and the pulpit will be the greatest force in all human life, and every organization of the Church will throb and pulsate with Divine energy.

The nature of the power is evident. It is the coming of God to man for the accomplishment of a Divine purpose in this sacred partnership. Man is helpless apart from this immediate co-operation with God. God chooses to be helpless apart from co-operation with man. Within the next thirty years from Pentecost the whole known world was influenced by this handful of men who had been gathered by Jesus, and taught by Him with such matchless patience and gentleness, preparatory to the Spirit's baptism. Yet the world failed to comprehend the meaning or to explain the mystery of this new movement. The younger Pliny, in a letter to the Emperor about the Christians, said that after enquiries he found that they sang hymns about One called Jesus, and that they paid the taxes. A most excellent testimony. May it still be borne concerning all those who take the name of Christ! Yet what a remarkable analysis for an educated mind to offer! It was simple and sublime, -- simple, in that it revealed his failure to comprehend the deep meaning of Christianity and his inability to do more than read the externals; sublime, in that it unintentionally, yet surely revealed the fact that joy and righteousness resulted from the worship of God in Christ, and the characters of men were so transformed that they sang and paid taxes. As a rule human nature is hardly capable of doing these things; but these men accomplished it, because righteousness itself had become a joy in the power of the name of Jesus. It is not to be wondered at that they were not understood. The usual signs of power were absent altogether. These people had no visible Head. The Founder had perished by the ignominious death of the Cross. They were gathered and marshalled and led, not to arming and battle by the cry of a warrior, but silently and surely, to the undermining of empires, and the downfall of dynasties. This element of mystery lasts until this hour. The man of the world is still unable to account for it. Proof of this is to be found in a perusal of his magazine articles occasionally. The secret of it all is, that within the Church, because within every individual member thereof, God has taken up His abode; and in a perpetual comradeship and co-operation He moves on towards the purposes of His heart, through all the forces that oppose, and the obstacles that hinder. Wherever Christianity has been a real force, working to success, it is because it has been spiritual. The wheels of the chariot are clogged by all attempts to make arrangements to help God. They are speeded when, self forgotten, the Spirit that indwells is permitted to have unquestioned and absolute control.

Yet let it be remembered that, if the force of Christianity is not of man, it operates through man. God has so chosen to work. This was symbolized on the Day of Pentecost by the cloven tongues of fire: There appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. Tongues, diversities of gifts; fire, the one Spirit. Tongues, the human instrument; fire, the Divine energy. Man the instrument; God, the Worker.

Much of the lack of power in service to-day is due to the fact that the true conception of what service should be has been lost. The only reason that those who are born again of the Spirit are left in the world is that they may be His witnesses. Paul distinctly teaches in his Letter to the Ephesians that the supreme vocation of the Church lies not in the present age nor in present circumstances. Her final work will be the

manifestation of the wisdom and the grace of God to principalities and powers in the heavenly places. The reason why the Church is not at once removed to this higher service is, that in the midst of the darkness and death around, she may witness to her absent but living Lord.

Light is thrown upon this work by a consideration of the word witness. The word actually used is martyr. This word is used to-day almost exclusively of those who suffer persecution for the truth. That use of the word, while dignifying it, is in danger of obscuring its first intention. A martyr is one, convinced of truth, manifesting that truth in life. The fires of persecution never made martyrs--they revealed them. A man who was not already a martyr never laid down his life for truth. The noble army of martyrs died, not to become martyrs, but because they were martyrs. This is the distinctive service of all believers in this age. They are to reveal in transformed and transfigured lives the glory and beauty of the teaching and character of Jesus Christ. This ideal of service flings men back at once into the place of conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit, for, none can witness of Christ save in actual co-operation with Him. Two simple sentences will be helpful in order to understand the law of that co-operation:--

The Holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus only.

Only the Holy Spirit witnesses of Jesus.

It is very important to remember the first of these. The Spirit has nothing to say of Himself. His whole mission and message has to do with Christ. Many people to-day are waiting for a manifestation of the Spirit Himself. They are doomed to disappointment. When He obtains full possession of any individual, it is not His own Person and personality He makes real, but that of Jesus.

The second point is of equal importance. Everything that is known of the Saviour is known as the result of the illumination of the Holy Spirit. He is the Revealer of the Revealer. There can be no communication with Jesus until the Spirit reveals Him to the heart. There is no vision of the loveliness of His face save as the Spirit anoints the eyes. Herein lies the blessedness of this Pentecostal age. The power for witnessing is the birthright of every believer. The Spirit reveals Christ to the consciousness. This new sense of the Master captivates the will and transforms the entire being into likeness to Himself. This development of character is also increased capacity for the reception of revelation. To that increased capacity the Spirit is able to make still more glorious revelation, which yet further increases capacity, and prepares the way for still more glorious revelation. Thus, in a proportionately increasing ratio, life under the control of the Spirit is manifesting the glory of the Master, and thus witnessing for Him.

For such witnessing the world waits to-day. Humanity amid its sobbing, and its sighing, needs a manifestation of the sons and daughters of the King; and in proportion as the temples of the Spirit are yielded to the Spirit, that great need of the race is being met.

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