

Promise to the Powerless

by Ian Murray

The power of God's Word is the foundation of the church's strength, and the church finds her strength in obedience to God's truth.

Duration: 38:46

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:2-35

Topics: "Gods Power", "Spiritual Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that power does not come from personal feelings or experiences, but from the truth that God has given to his people. The book of Deuteronomy is highlighted as a source of God's words that should be in the hearts of believers and taught to future generations. The sermon focuses on Moses' farewell address to the Israelites, where he gives them a preview of their history by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. The preacher also mentions the importance of appealing to people's emotions in order to communicate effectively, but emphasizes that the church should not prioritize worldly interests or desires.

Transcript

Deuteronomy chapter 32, the 32nd chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. Hear, O ye heavens, and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass, because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

He is the rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment. A God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He. They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of His children.

They are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is not He thy Father that hath bought thee? Hath He not made thee and established thee? Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask thy Father, and He will show thee.

Thy elders, and they will tell thee. We have in this chapter a portion of the so-called Song of Moses, and I cannot at this moment read to you the whole of this song, but let me remind you that it is the farewell discourse, the farewell address of the prophet Moses, spoke as he did now on the occasion when he was to see the children of Israel proceed on their journey and to enter into the land of promise, to cross the Jordan, while he himself was to rest from his labors in the hour of death. And thus knowing by the

inspiration of God that this was his position, he speaks these final words to the people whom he had led these many years in the wilderness.

And the subject of this farewell is to give Israel a kind of preview of their history, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. He indicates to them not simply that which God had done. He calls upon them not only to remember what their fathers had told them and their elders had spoken, but he bids them also to look into the future.

And if you read this chapter, you will find here written a record of the changing condition of Israel as it would be in generations to come. They would become, he says, the people who would be self-satisfied and wax fat, who would be complacent and who would grow indifferent and who would become unmindful to the God whom their fathers had known. And in that day, there would come not only a departure from the living God, but they would become an afflicted, burdened people.

And there is the record given of the judgments of God that would be visited upon Israel in the days of their backsliding. That record goes on down to the end of verse 35. To me belongeth vengeance and recompense.

Their foot shall slide in due time, for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. And then in verse 36, there is the commencement of a new statement. And it is to the words of verse 36 of this 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, to these words I call your attention in this hour.

For the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up or left. Now I hope in the days of this week which lie before us, if God will, to speak in the mornings on the subject of revival in the history of the church. I was invited to speak on the subject of church history, as you know, and it therefore at once appealed to me that I should take up this particular aspect of the history of the church.

And I did not wish to commence, as it were, lecturing on church history this Lord's Day evening, but rather I select this text of the Word of God, which brings together in a summary form some of the great features which are embraced in all the revivals which have marked the history of the church. We have in these words a statement that when the church of God, that is Israel as it then was, when that church turned aside from the Most High, when she became indifferent to His Word and complacent in sin, then God's judgment and wrath would come upon them. And we know that it is a truth that candlesticks have been removed from churches and fruitful fields have been made barren by unbelief and by backsliding.

But we also find here in verse 36 that in the midst of a situation of that kind, there is promise made concerning those who are still God's servants and who are still His true people. Our verse says that the Lord shall judge His people and repent Himself for His servants. Now these words we need to be clear we don't misinterpret.

Having read the words of pronouncement of God's condemnation in the previous passage, we might too easily suppose that the word judge in verse 36 is a reference also to that same judicial work of God in condemnation. But it is not that. The word judge, as I am sure you know, frequently means in scripture to deliver, to plead for, to act on behalf of.

It would be a great mistake to read the Old Testament and to interpret the word judge, wherever it occurs, as an act of wrath, as an infliction of punishment. It certainly does mean that in many places. But it also has this sense of God's action in terms of protection and deliverance and defense.

For example, you read in Psalm 10 and the 18th verse of that Psalm that God is the judge of the fatherless and the oppressed. The orphan, the child that has no human parent to defend its rights, God, says the scripture, is its judge. He will act for that orphan.

He will act for the fatherless. Or again in that messianic passage in the prophet Isaiah, the 11th chapter of Isaiah, we read that when Christ comes that He will, with righteousness, judge the poor. He will be the deliverer of the poor and of those that have no helper.

And the sense, therefore, here is that God will act on the behalf of His people for their deliverance. And that is confirmed by the word that follows, and He will repent Himself for His servants. That is to say, after a dispensation of sadness and of barrenness and affliction, He will turn again to His people.

He will repent. He will turn from affliction. He will turn to pity.

And He will grant them His mercy. And when will He do this? When, we read, when He seeth that their power is gone and there is none shut up or left. When there is no garrison shut up in the city to defend them, when there is no soldier left in the field, when there is none shut up or left, when their power is gone, when they are at their lowest state in abject need, then the God who is their Saviour will plead for His people and He will repent for His servants and He will do it when He seeth that their power is gone.

So that we have in these words a gracious promise, a promise made to the powerless, and a promise which not only has had one fulfilment, but rather which is successively fulfilled in the purposes of God's redemption in the history of the Church. As you know, when the people of God passed through the waters of the Jordan and into the land of Canaan, they were a people endued with strength and power. The Eternal God is thy refuge and underneath of the everlasting arms, as thy days God said, so shall thy strength be.

And in the power of that promise, the children of Israel entered Canaan, they conquered the land and they manifested that strength which belonged to Jehovah and which was given to them. But, as we turn over the pages of the Old Testament, we find a very different scene. We find days when indeed they send away their power.

We see Samson blinded by the Philistines in the prison house of Gaza. We see the Jews languishing in Babylon as it were a great valley of dry bones. Already it seemed in their graves and at an end of themselves.

And their deliverance from that condition came not through any activity of their own, but because God in faithfulness to His own promise did what He said He would do here, that when His own people reached this condition of abject need, then He acted for them and He revived them. And this is the history of the New Testament church. The church which turned the world upside down.

The church which emptied the temples of the Greek and Roman world and which added to the church by thousands under the preaching of the gospel with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. That same church we find, do we not, in later ages languishing and slumbering. You know the parable of our Lord Jesus, how while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

Not only the foolish virgins who had no oil in their lamps, but the wise also. And there have been periods in church history conspicuous for the slumber of the church. It seemed that they were not alive to the realities of eternity.

And not only does the Scripture speak of God's people slumbering, but of God also sleeping. That is to say times, as we read in Psalm 78, when God delivered His strength into the enemy's hands. When God seemed to abandon His own glory and then, after a period when God did not act to vindicate His name, then, says the psalmist, He awoke.

He awoke as out of sleep. And like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine, God began to act in His own cause. And these are not simply metaphors, but they represent truths.

There are periods when the Holy Spirit is poured out in great power and authority. When the church advances in the world, not simply by additions to the numbers in ones and twos, but when it seems as though nations are born in a day. When, as on the day of Pentecost, three thousand were pricked in their hearts and cried, what must we do to be saved? And that has happened not once, but many times in the history of the church.

But then we see also these periods when the church languishes, when great numbers of her members seem to be asleep, and when the truth becomes something that is dealt with coldly. And then God judges and revives His people and pours out His Spirit. This then is the promise of God's Word.

If it were not for that promise, where should our hopes rest in this day? But here it is written, and written for our comfort. Now, as we look then at these words, let us consider in the first place, what is the power that the church is expected to have? You note that these words speak of their power being gone. It is not possible to judge whether our power is gone unless we know what that power actually is.

And it is not enough, I am afraid, in this day in which we live, to speak of the necessity of power in the church. For we may speak of power, and yet we may not understand what that power is that God commands His people to possess. I believe that as we look at this passage, and as we open our Bibles, we find in the first place that the power which the Holy Spirit gives to the church, first of all, is the power of His own Word and His truth.

Power is not initially what you or I may feel. It is not what experiences we have. It is not what feelings we enjoy, but it is primarily the truth which God has given to His people.

And if you read this book of Deuteronomy, you will find again and again that the exhortation of the Holy Spirit is that these words, God says, these words shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt, God says, talk of them as thou sittest in thine house, as thou walkest by the way. It is this Word that shall be taught to children, for then God says, chapter 4 and verse 40, that these commandments which I command thee this day, thou shalt keep that it may go well with thee and with thy children after thee. And in this chapter from which we are reading, chapter 32, when Moses comes to the end of his words in verse 45, he says, verse 46, and he said unto them, set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law, for it is not a vain thing for you, but it is your life.

And as we turn over into the book of Joshua, we find exactly the same truth. As Joshua was commanded to enter the land and to conquer, it was with these words of commission that this book of the law shall not

depart out of thy mouth day nor night, but thou shalt meditate therein, and then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. So that the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, and it is by the truth which God has given us, it is by obedience to that truth, it is by the proclamation of that Word that the church finds her strength.

What advantage then hath the Jew, says Paul? What advantage hath the Jew? Looking back over the long history of the Jew, this he says chiefly, that unto them were committed the oracles of God. This was their first privilege. He hath not dealt so, says the psalmist, with any nation.

He showed his Word unto Jacob. He gave his statutes unto Israel. My friends, we are living in a day when we can no longer assume that everyone believes this.

Not even every professing evangelical Christian. We are not living in a time which is characterized by dependence upon the truth alone. The way in which the church has reasoned in the days of her greatest prosperity, the way in which she reasoned was this, that we have God's Word.

If we honor that Word wholly and fully, then no matter what men may do, no matter what disfavor we may incur from men, then we will know that God Himself will honor His own Word. I do not believe that that is the prevailing conviction in our churches today. Just a few weeks ago, there was, as some of you may know, a great Christian book-selling congress.

Booksellers were represented from far and wide the Christian and evangelical booksellers. And before that congress met, there was a publication which prepared people for the meeting and the great sales of books. And part of this published material was taken up with an article on the art of Christian book-selling today.

And the thrust of that article was to say this, that we are living in a time when people are not really moved by what they think. It's not after all what people think that matters. People are emotional beings and they have to be appealed to emotionally.

We must get through to their senses. And therefore if we are to sell books, we are to think in these terms. Perhaps if we show the attractiveness of literature in terms of, I believe it listed, even financial help, certainly how to achieve a reputation for oneself, how to get confidence, or if there is a romantic note about it, these are things which interest people.

Now that is certainly a good pagan observation, but it's not what the church believes. And then when you, if you went to this congress, you were told, well, come to our bookstall and see what we publish and you can get free candy from us and look at our books or buy free balloons or get free balloons and also look at our books. Let me contrast that with this statement by an American writer of the last century, a Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia, who in this lengthy book, as you see, wrote a history of the log college presbytery in the Pennsylvania area, the Chamonix Creek, the area which was so greatly blessed by revival in the 1740s.

This man was a minister in that area and he traced the presbytery records of all the churches in that area over a period of about 80 years after the revival. And then when he comes to the end of his book, he draws up certain lessons which he believes were underscored by this history. Now let me give you some of his words.

This is his great conclusion. Be it therefore the inflexible purpose of every Christian, every church, and every body of churches to cling with a grasp that will not be relaxed to the truth, to the truth alone, to the whole truth, to the truth in doctrine, in worship, and in practice. We can afford to be branded with old fageyism if old fageyism can do what this history shows us has been done.

We may well say, especially to those who are at the commencement of their course, cling to the truth, pure and simple, to the truth and not to mere feelings or impressions, to the truth and no tampering with falsehood, to the truth it is heaven born, to the truth it is from God, and He knows best what we should believe and what do, to the truth it has been well tested by many a generation, to the truth it is a rock upon which our all, both for time and eternity, may be rested, to the truth it is sure to bring after it the rich blessings of its author. God has given us His own word. And God says of His word, is not my word like as a fire and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? We need to add nothing to the word.

We need no entertainment. We need no humor mixed with the word of God. We need the unvarnished word of God preached.

And when that is done, that word is able to convict and to cleanse and to purify the life of the church. When you read of any great revival period, for example, of the reformation in Europe in the 16th century, and when you see so many men and women ready to consign themselves to death, to execution, to poverty. When men and women, as it was said of some of those martyrs, at their funeral stake, they embraced the flames like a cool breeze on a hot summer's day.

They did so out of the persuasion that they had and possessed the truth. They knew that Christ justified ungodly sinners. They had no doubt as to God's word.

And they gave their all that that truth might not be compromised. I say that this, in the first place, is the power which the Holy Spirit gives to the church. When 3,000 were converted at Pentecost, it was through nothing other than the preaching of God's word.

And I believe, with regard to the day in which we live, that we have wandered so far from the truth in all its purity and fullness, that what is needed before we can expect scenes of great revival, what is needed is a recovery of the fullness of the word of God. And I hope and pray that it is one of the most encouraging signs of our day that there is such a work of recovery going on. There is a love for the truth.

There is to be seen amongst the young a hunger to know and to understand and to fear and to love the God of whom we read in history and in scripture. Let us say something then, secondly, on the power of faith. And this, of course, is connected with the word and with truth.

If we really have the truth, that is to say, if it is in our hearts, then there is inevitably a response of faith and that activity of faith gives to the church all the energy that she needs. We read of those in Hebrews chapter 11 who through faith subdued kingdoms and wrought righteousness and obtained promises and quenched the violence of fire and out of weakness were made strong and so on. We do not read of any other great experiences that they had, of any great feelings or excitement that they were possessed with, but that in faith they acted upon the word of God and with that faith they overcame and did the work of God.

And this is the emphasis of the scripture. If thou canst believe, said our Lord Jesus Christ, all things are possible to him that believeth. And this is the victory, says John the Apostle, that overcometh the world, even our faith.

And so when William Carey with just some 13 pounds sailed to India in 1793 and when men said it was absurd and impossible and yet he went and by God's strength accomplished that work in that vast land, it was through no other power than the power of receiving and believing the word of God. You know how beautifully John Bunyan puts it when he speaks of Christian and hopeful falling asleep and falling asleep on the ground of giant despair and awaking at last to find themselves in the clutches of this fearful giant who drags them into doubting castle and throws them into that dungeon and how they languish there through the week and are terrified by the threats of the giant and as he shows them the bones of pilgrims which he says he has broken in previous years and all this goes on until that Saturday night when Bunyan says Christian and hopeful began to pray and towards the dawning of the morning he said Christian jumped up as a man half amazed and he said to hopeful Oh, what a fool I've been!

I have in my bosom a key called promise which is able to open every lock in doubting castle and hopeful said that's good news brother pluck it out of thy bosom and try and so they did but that is all that faith does we have the word of God we are to obey that word in living faith and God will do his own work and he will open every door that is necessary for the furtherance of his kingdom and of course with that must be indeed linked the power of prayer these three things are all bound up together when Moses tells the people that their strength and their power lies in obedience to God's precepts he is also one who reminds them by his personal example that through prayer they could overcome through prayer they overcame the Amalekites through prayer Jacob Atheniel had his name changed for as

a prince he wrestled with God till the breaking of the day and the book of Hosea says by his strength he had power with God yea he had power over the angel and prevailed we cannot understand the mystery which is involved in prayer but we know that when hearts are poor and needy we know that when the Holy Spirit makes intercession with groanings which cannot be uttered then it is that God acts and works for his people as they pray if ye abide in me and my word abides in you and notice that that comes first if you love me and if you cleave to my truth then said Jesus ye shall ask what he will and it shall be done unto you leaving then that consideration what is the power that God expects us to have these three things it is commitment and cleaving to his word and doing that in faith and in

prayer and in dependence upon God's own strength and power and in every age of revival in every time when the church has reached those high water marks of influence and authority in the world it will ever be found that these characteristics were most prominent in her life and similarly in ages of departure these things have been progressively less seen now I must pass over my second head but let me mention it to you and you can work it out perhaps yourself from this 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy we might have considered what happens when this power leaves the church what happens when this power is gone and you will see here that when that happens then sinners perish then God himself as we read laments that men are not wise and do not know their latter end secondly we read also in this

passage how when that power is gone the church becomes weak and effeminate and men pleasing and worse than all that when that power is gone God himself is dishonored for the church represents God in the world when the church is weak and powerless the name of God is involved in that weakness my friends we can't this day divorce ourselves from the countries to which we belong we belong to great countries our nation in the British Isles has been favored by God and God says those that honor me I will honor and those that do not honor God shall be likely esteemed and there has come upon us shame and contempt by reason of our sin against God and when the world thinks today of Britain and when the world thinks also I'm afraid of America they think do they not of pleasure loving materialistic

society it was not ever thus ours were lands once where the truth was honored where men feared God's name when the world knew that we were lands where his name was sanctified and where his commandments were upheld and why is it that our societies have so greatly changed it is not that there is any change in the natural man not at all it is that the change has come in the church that the church has no longer been able to command the attention of the people of our lands there was a time and I hope to indicate something of that to you there was a time in the history of your own nation when the church was growing faster than the population when men were added to the church in such numbers that the influence of the gospel was making great strides in the whole earth that is not so in our day

however much we have to thank God and to observe his hand in the conversion of individuals, we are not living in days when the world is being reaped in our lands and before we imagine that the primary thing to do then is to begin more earnestly to evangelize we need to ask ourselves well what is the church really meant to be and what is the power that God has given to the church to do his work and does that power characterize us is that our position and the promise of this verse which we cannot dwell on now is that God will judge his people and repent himself for his servants not when he sees that they begin again to surrender themselves to him or when they begin to repent but he will do it, says our verse when he seeth that their power is gone, that is to say it will be his own glory

that will prompt him to act it will not be that we come to a position when again God can look upon us with favor, it will be that we undeserving and helpless as we are, without strength, will be looked upon by a gracious and omnipotent God who will pour out his Holy Spirit and by the Gospel will again build his church and reap the world which is ripe to harvest, that is the promise of our verse God will do this when he seeth that their power is gone let us then look only to him and pray him to have mercy upon us, shall we pray O Lord our gracious God enable us to bow before thee knowing that we are truly deserving of nothing in thy presence and yet grant us that faith and that hope in thee which comes through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ we thank thee that thou hast raised him

to glory at thy right hand we thank thee that thine arm is not shortened, that thou cannot save and we pray that in this day we may see the evidence of thy glory and of thy majesty in our midst do thou O Lord revive us again in the midst of the years and bless this night the preaching of thy word amongst all nations continue with us here grant that we may have hearts to hear and to obey thy word and pardon all our sins as we ask it in the merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Amen

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/3/SID3366.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ian-murray/promise-to-the-powerless/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net