

# The Powers of the Age to Come

by Watchman Nee

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding and experiencing the powers of the age to come, which are the fruits of the Cross and resurrection of Christ, and the need to reclaim territory from Satan in order to fulfill God's eternal purpose.*

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 31:34, Matthew 12:28, Luke 18:30, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:23, 1 Corinthians 15:14, Hebrews 4:9, Hebrews 6:5, 1 Peter 1:5, Revelation 11:15

**Topics:** "Kingdom Of God", "Spiritual Warfare"

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## Description

Watchman Nee explores the concept of 'tasting the powers of the age to come' as mentioned in Hebrews 6:5, emphasizing that while Christians experience a foretaste of God's future kingdom, the fullness of these powers is yet to come. He highlights the significance of Christ's victory over Satan and the authority given to believers to reclaim dominion over the earth, which was originally intended by God. Nee asserts that the church's responsibility extends beyond salvation to actively engaging in spiritual warfare against the enemy, reclaiming territory for God's kingdom. He encourages believers to live in complete allegiance to God, as this is essential for overcoming spiritual opposition and experiencing the powers of the age to come. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deeper commitment to God's purpose and the realization of His dominion through the church.

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## Transcript

What does the writer to the Hebrews mean when he says of Christians that they have "tasted ... the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:5)? We would all readily agree that there is a splendid future age to which we look forward. In it the kingdom that is now "in the midst" of us in terms of the mighty acts of the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28) will then become universally visible and unchallenged. The kingdom of the world will have become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ (Rev. 11:15). But what, we may wonder, are these "powers" that now we only taste but cannot as yet feast upon? Clearly they are to be received and enjoyed, for the word "taste" implies not merely a doctrine to be thought about and analyzed, but something subjectively experienced and made our own. These powers are the preliminaries of a feast of which there is much more to follow but of which we already eat just a little.

We could list a number of such things to which Scripture looks forward. There is a salvation to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:5). There is a fresh aspect of eternal life in the age to come (Luke 18:30). There is a rest remaining to the people of God (Heb. 4:9). There will be the raising and renewal of our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:14). There will be a day when everything that stumbles men will be removed

(Jer. 31:9; Isa. 57:14; 62:10). There will be a time when all shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:11) and indeed when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). Of all these things we have now a real foretaste in Christ, but we do not yet see them in completeness.

More directly related to our present study are the following considerations. The Epistle to the Hebrews applies to our Lord Jesus the words from Psalm 8: "Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet," and then goes on quite frankly to express what experience generally must compel us to admit, namely, that "we see not yet all things subjected to him" (Heb. 2:8). But alongside these two contrasting statements we must place also that of Jesus in Luke 10:19, where he already gives to his disciples "authority ... over all the power of the enemy." Surely this promises to us a present foretaste of that future day that we do not yet see.

Again, in the same Gospel passage, Jesus is recorded as saying, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven" (10:18). This event John, in Revelation 12:9, seems to place far in the future. Yet clearly Jesus implies that from the standpoint of the witnessing Church it is already in some sense a present fact. Furthermore, in a later chapter of Revelation John is shown a day when Satan is to be bound with a chain for a thousand years (20:1-4). Yet Jesus speaks of "the strong man" as already bound, so that we may even now break into his house and despoil it (Matt. 12:29).

These are significant statements; for surely if we possess salvation and eternal life in the present, as we most certainly do, then we should also be knowing some foretastes today of the rest of these future "powers." For though not yet manifest universally, they are quite evidently fruits of the Cross and resurrection of Christ that must be, at least in principle, the Church's present possession.

God's eternal purpose is bound up with man. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," he said, "and let them have dominion." God intended man to wield power, to reign and rule, to control other created things. We cannot say that redemption was God's design-or even a part of it-for man was never intended to fall, still less to perish. Genesis 3 represents man's history, not God's purpose for him. A workman may fall from the fifth story of a building under construction, but that was never in the architect's plan!

No, God's plan is concerned with man's dominion, and it is well to note the special sphere of this, namely, "all the earth" (Gen. 1:26). Heaven has no problem; the problem is on earth. Man is told to "subdue it" (verse 28) and we ask ourselves why. If there were no forces to be subdued, why this need? Furthermore we are told that the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and "to keep it" (2:15). This is more than the usual Hebrew word for "to keep." Adam is to guard God's Paradise, and again this implies the proximity of an enemy to be kept at bay.

It is interesting to note the wording of Genesis 1:26. Man is to have dominion "over all the earth," and the clause is expanded to cover, among other things, "every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." But in the event the first thing that man failed to control was a creeping thing, a worm. And by man's failure Satan obtained, in a new way in man himself, legal rights on the earth. True, the dust of the earth was the lowly sphere appointed to him. "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat" (3:14). But what is dust? It is the substance of which Adam was made! Thus man in the flesh is now morally subject to Satan. God's foe has secured a clear title to all that by natural birth man has and has. Natural human life is the foothold here on earth of Satan's activity. Satan's world springs from and finds its strength in his rights in man, and even God does not dispute these rights. He has acquired by Adam's default a full title to all that

is of the old creation.

If Satan is to cease to act in us, then his ground in us must be taken from him. So God meets the situation in redemption, not by dealing with Satan directly but, as we have seen, by taking the whole of the old creation—the man himself, his world, everything—clean out of the way, and thus removing from Satan his legal stand. Satan's overthrow is compassed not by a direct blow aimed at him, but indirectly by the removal from him in the death of Christ of all that gives him the moral right of control. "Our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, so that we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (Rom. 6:6).

Praise God, Satan has therefore no longer any rights in us. But that is a merely negative fact. There is a positive one also. God has not only removed all that was in the way of his eternal purpose by removing the old creation; he has also secured all that is necessary to realize that purpose by bringing in a new creation—his new Man. "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over him" (verse 9). The purpose revealed in Genesis 1 and lost in Genesis 3 is not lost for good. What God could not secure in the first man he obtained in the second; and that second Man is on the throne. No wonder the New Testament writer dares to reapply the psalmist's words: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou crownest him with glory and honor." Thus he quotes the psalm, and then he exclaims: "We behold him ... even Jesus ... crowned!" (Psalm 8:4-6; Heb. 2:6-9). If the creation of mankind was intended to meet the need of God, that need has now at last been met. God has got his Man. Genesis 1, Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2 are thus uniquely linked. Psalm 8 is of course poetry and sings of God's plan for mankind, but the significant thing is that in spite of the Fall the singer does not deviate. He only reaffirms the original plan of Genesis 1: "Thou madest him to have dominion." It has not changed. Moreover, he not only begins but ends his chant with the exclamation of praise: "How excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

The enemy has done his worst; man has been trapped into blaspheming God, and if you or I had composed this Psalm we would surely have followed the eighth verse with a cry of distress: "But alas, man has fallen; all is lost!" Not so the psalmist. It is as though he had forgotten the Fall completely, for he does not even allude to it. He leaps in thought across the whole history of redemption, and cries again, "How excellent!" Adam and Eve could fall, but they could not alter God's purpose that man should eventually overthrow Satan's power. His purpose stands unaltered and this excellence is to be known where? In all the earth.

Nor is it in the Son of man merely that this purpose is realized, but in the sons of men those "many sons" whom God is bringing to glory. The psalmist is at pains to underline this fact. Though the enemy do his worst, the rights he has gained through the Fall have not proved inalienable. Still among men there are those he cannot touch. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings halt thou established strength, because of thine adversaries, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger" (verse 2). God does not depend on great military leaders. Little children, yea, very babes, are sufficient to quell the hosts of his foes.

As we saw, Hebrews 2 draws its inspiration from this Psalm. Yet it goes a step further. While reaffirming God's purpose in creation and the goal to which it points, it does more than this. Looking back realistically over the course of fallen man's dark history it establishes now that God's purpose in redemption and recovery is directed to the identical end. In all the new circumstances that redemption has called into being, the plan is still unchanged. God has not abandoned his goal. Moreover, from the writer's viewpoint beyond the triumph of the Cross he can confidently reaffirm the psalmist's affirmation of faith. So, far from

all being lost, it is true to say that in Christ the end has been secured.

Oh, yes, it is still the same plan: "He left nothing that is not subject to him" (verse 8). Appearances would tend to deny this, so that "we see not yet all things subjected to him." Yet true as this is, the writer disregards it and at once proceeds triumphantly: "But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste death for every man" (verse 9). And then, almost defiantly he adds: "that he might bring to nought ... the devil" (verse 14).

What man was to do on earth for God, and failed to do, our Lord Jesus has accomplished. He "tasted death for everything" (as the original Greek implies-not just "for every man"). That is to say, it was not for man's redemption alone that he died but for that of the whole creation, and, going back further, for the recovery of the Father's purpose in the complete oversetting of the Satanic world order.

Thus it comes about that today the Church has a definite responsibility before God to register the victory of Christ in the devil's territory. If there is to be a testimony to the principalities and powers, if the impact of Christ's sovereignty through his Cross is to be registered in the spiritual realm, it can only be as the judicial foothold in our hearts of the "pretender" in the race is met and, by the same Cross, removed and repudiated. For God's object is still that man should "have dominion." Our work for him does not stop with proclaiming a Gospel that was designed merely to undo the effect of Genesis 3, marvelous as was that undoing. God wants also to take us back further to Genesis 1 itself. He wants us in Christ to regain the moral dominion over his foe that was there in view, and thus effectively to restore the earth to him. This is surely why, as Paul tells us, "the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God" (Romans 8:19).

The Gospel of salvation is necessary and vital in order to meet man's need. But if as God's servants we are only laboring for others we are missing God's first aim in creation, which was to supply not merely man's need but his own. For as we have said already, the creation of man was to meet the need of God. Thus if today we are going to meet God's need we must go a step further and deal with Satan himself. We must steal back from him his power, evict him from his territory, spoil him of his goods and set free his captives-for God. The question is not merely, Of what account are we in the winning of souls? Rather is it, Of what account are we in the realm of principalities and powers? And for that there is a price to pay.

It is often possible to move men when it is quite impossible to move Satan. The plain fact is that it costs much more to deal with Satan than to win souls. It demands an utterness of spirit Godward that in itself effectually deprives Satan of any moral ground in us he may claim to possess. This is the costly thing. God in his merciful love for the lost can often bypass and overlook in his servants what one might justly feel to be appalling weakness and even failure. But while he may do this for the soul-winner, when it comes to our dealing with the devil it is another matter.

Evil spirits can see right through the witness of man. They can tell when it is compromised by being halfhearted or insincere. They are aware when we are holding back a part of the price. Looking at us they are under no illusions as to whom they can safely defy or ignore; and conversely, they know perfectly well against whom they are powerless. "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" (Acts 19:15). Because they believe, they know when to tremble. And let me say this: since our most important task is their overthrow, it is better always that we should have the witness of evil powers than the praise of men.

But the price of this witness to the principalities and power is, I repeat, an utterness of allegiance to God that is unqualified. To entertain our own opinions or desires, or to prefer our own variant and contrary choices, is simply to present the enemy with his advantage. It is, in short, to throw the game away. In any other sphere there may perhaps-I do not know-be room among our motives for something of selfinterest, without appreciable loss. But never, and I repeat never, in this. Without such utterness for God nothing can be achieved, for without it we make even God powerless against his enemy.

So I say it once again: the demand is very high. Are you and I here on earth, utterly committed, utterly given to God himself? And because this is so, are we tasting even now the powers of that future glorious age? Are we reclaiming territory from the prince of this world for the One whose alone it rightly is?

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