



Articles and Sermons :: Power for Service - G. Campbell Morgan

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Power for Service

By G. Campbell Morgan

But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Acts 1:8

If we know our Lord only at the Cross we know very much, but not all. And if we know Him only in the place of His resurrection, from external observation, we know very much, but not all. After both the Cross and the resurrection He said to the men with whom He had tabernacled for three years, "Tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high." His first command to them after resurrection--first in the order of their obedience, last in the order of His actual utterance--was not to go, but to wait; not to hasten, but to tarry. And in that fact lies great significance.

How shall we describe these men? Let us first remember that they were lovers of the Lord, and loyal to Him. I do not think their question was so ignorant as we sometimes imagine it to be. They were not ignorant of God's ultimate intention. They were ignorant of God's present method. They did not understand the meaning of the Cross. They had never understood it. They had shunned it from its first mention. Attempting to escape it, they had been scattered like chaff before the wind. But they had been gathered again by that inexplicable mystery of His resurrection, and they were perforce compelled to new loyalty to the One Who stood amongst them. That explains their inquiry whether He was now about to fulfil the prophecy of the ancient Scriptures. And "He said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority." That answer was not a rebuke for their conception of the ultimate. He did not say that the Kingdom was never to be restored to Israel. It is as though Christ had said to these men, I am not authorized of My Father to give you any program, or calendar. The Father hath set the times and seasons within His own authority. Israel will be restored, the Kingdom will be set up, the whole earth must yet be brought into submission to the Kingship of God, and all the beneficent results must come, but it is not for you to know the times of these things.

What, then, was necessary? "But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." From the viewpoint of the disciples at that moment this was a very unsatisfactory thing to say. Let us endeavor to understand what this meant to these men. How strange their experiences had been. He had disappointed them in His plan and method. They had been brought to despair by His Cross. Strange new hopes and expectations had arisen in their hearts in the light of His resurrection. These were all again extinguished when He said that it was not for them to know times or seasons. All He told them was that they were to be His witnesses, and in order that they might be, they should receive power. A program without a program! No details, no arrangements, none of the things we love so much, but only an attitude and an atmosphere, a duty and a dynamic, a responsibility and a resource! Witnesses in the power of the Spirit. Therefore, He said to them, Wait, tarry. He halted them upon the verge of their going, arrested them at the very moment when they would have been away to tell the mystic story of His resurrection. Just as He had demonstrated His Kingship by resurrection so that there could be no doubt to any honest mind, and they were anxious to tell the story, He said, No, not yet, you are not ready, you must wait.

For what were they to wait? The answer is in one word of the text, and that word I desire to emphasize, and deal with some of its suggestions: "power." "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." Now in order that we may understand the meaning of the power let us look at these men, for we shall understand the provision by a study of the lack. What did they lack? First of all, they needed a new intellectual power. The use of the word power in that connection is a perfectly accurate one, for we speak of a man of strong mind, and of the strengthening of the mind. These men at the moment lacked the ability to apprehend truth which it was necessary for them to understand if they were indeed to be witnesses of Jesus. This inability they had demonstrated by their attitude toward Him during His public ministry, and by the question they asked as they stood around Him in the light of His resurrection, power and glory. They were ignorant of the very things that they must appreciate intellectually if they were to accomplish the purpose of their Lord. They did not understand the meaning of the halt in the apparent progress of the King to the Kingdom. They did not understand the nature of the Kingdom. They had a correct idea of what its external manifestation would be; but they did not understand all that was necessary to the production thereof. They did not see that the King Who would set up the Kingdom toward

d which prophets looked, and of which seers sang, must begin, not at the circumference, but at the center. They did not understand that the first movement must be that of spiritual regeneration. They did not understand Him, they did not understand His Cross, they did not understand His resurrection. They did not understand what He was about to do. They needed a new intellectual power. Not long ere He had left them, in those wonderful discourses which are precious to us still, He had said that most remarkable thing, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now," which did not mean merely that He had to tell them of coming suffering, of which they would be afraid, but that the things which He had to tell their minds could not grasp. All through the ministry of Jesus He said things they never understood until the Spirit brought them to their remembrance, and they flamed in new light and meaning.

When I am told it is necessary for me to go back to the Gospels and confine my attention to them, I say I cannot do it. They are not complete, final, and perfect. These men in the olden days did not understand the meaning of the Cross. And we never find the Christ in all His fulness until we have passed through the preliminary and necessary study of the Gospels into the spacious and far-reaching splendor of the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles. They needed intellectual power, the quickening of the mind which should enable them to see to the heart of the spiritual mystery.

Then they needed also spiritual power, in the first and simplest sense of the word. Spiritual power as against the power of the carnal life and nature. In the Corinthian letter Paul carefully distinguished between these two things. "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ." These men were still in the grip of their own carnal nature, and in order to be witnesses they had to live before the world the life of spiritual victory. They had to manifest to men the fact that a life can be lived, which never answers the call of the flesh; that it is possible for man, and indeed, it is God's first Divine intention for man, that he should see the upper things, and not the lower; that he should--to use the Apostle's great word--keep the body under, which does not for a moment mean that he is to bruise and chastise and mutilate the body, but that it is to be kept in its proper place, that of subservience. These men had to live that life, and they were unequal to it. The desires of the flesh and of the mind were triumphing within them, and fleshly ideals had undoubtedly crept into their estimate of the work of the Christ. But there came a moment, to quote the great apostle, when he said, "Wherefore we henceforth know no man after the flesh: even though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now we know Him so no more." But these men had not yet come to that place of spiritual ascendancy and power. They were still living the carnal life, and they needed a power that should set them above the pull of the base and the low, and make them kings over the territory of their own being by spiritual appreciation and spiritual power.

These men needed a new power of the affection and of the will. They were going out to strange days, and He knew it right well. He had told them in some of His earliest discourses of what they would pass through after His crucifixion. He had told them that He would send them forth as sheep in the midst of wolves, that men would hunt and persecute them from city to city, and imagine they did God service; and they needed a new power of the affection and of the will, for the world would be against them. See how they had evidenced that need in recent days. No one can deny--and I always try to be careful here--that they loved their Lord. They loved Him with all the affection of their nature before the Cross, and yet when the storm burst about His sacred head, and all the malice of hell, expressing itself through men, was let loose upon Him, where were they? "All the disciples left Him, and fled." I am not inclined to blame them. I say it reverently that I am afraid I would have been one of the first to flee. Oh, it was a tragic hour! But they have to face the storm again. The world desiring to crucify Him will desire to crucify them, and if they incarnate His life of truth and perfection the spirit of evil will be against them. They are not going to an easy softness of life, but to heroism, and conflict, and danger; and if the old life was not strong enough to keep them loyal when He was the Center of the storm, how are they to be kept loyal when they themselves become the center of the storm? They need a new power of the affection and the will.

And, finally, they needed a new power which would be with them, and enable them to do the peculiar and remarkable work committed to them, because He had forbidden them to use the things which men usually consider powerful. They were to go and proclaim the Kingdom of God. They were sent forth to proclaim the fact that God's Kingdom centers around God's King, and that God had vindicated the Kingship of Jesus by raising Him from the dead. These men were not sent to preach a theory of God's Kingship. They were sent to bring men into the Kingdom. He did not send these men forth to preach a new philosophy, or a new theory. He sent them to compel wills, and bring men into subjection. And yet--He had already said in the tragic moment of His own rejection, "Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"--they were not to win His victories by the un-sheathing of the sword. And no victory for Christ has ever been won in that way. To use the sword in order to establish His Kingdom is a blunder and mistake. And, moreover, they were not to establish His Kingdom by policy. They were not to seek the help of other forces, or enter i

into alliances with them. What, then, were they to do? Tell a story? That was all. The story of the risen, crucified, exalted, coming Christ. There is no government on earth that would not hold you in contempt if you suggested that they should extend their territory by telling a story. Here I do not desire to be misunderstood. They had a great deal more to do when the people, hearing the story, became obedient to it and submitted to the King. Then there was to be organization; then there was to be the realization of the Kingship of God. But the victories were to be won by the telling of the story. When Paul passed through those Greek cities, they said of him in Athens, "This babbling cometh hither also. The word 'babbling' indicates a teller of stories, and they so called him because he told them of Jesus and the resurrection. That is all these men had to do. They were to establish a Kingdom by telling a tale.

Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

That is the Church's work. It is her initial work. Without banners, or flags, or trumpets, or policies, or sword, she is to go out and tell the story; to herald the evangel.

Now look at these men. Lacking intellectual power, they could not appreciate the meaning; lacking spiritual power, they were not free from the pull of the carnal; weak in their affectional nature, they were not strong enough to stand against the enmity of the world; and devoid of any power upon which they set any value, they were unable to accomplish His work. To them He said, Wait, tarry! It is not for you to have the calendar and the almanac and the program. These things are hidden in the authority of the Father. But you are to be My witnesses, and you will need intellectual power to witness as you should; you will need spiritual power, behind the witness of the lip there must be that of the life; you will need an affectional power if you are to be true to Me amid the storm and stress; you will need a new volitional power in the work committed to you.

We turn for a moment or two, then, to notice the nature of the power promised. We have been attempting to understand it by considering the lack. Now see how this promise of power meets all the need. The power in which these men were to do their work is in no sense of men, and yet it is to be closely united to men. The power in which the Christ triumphed through the testimony of the disciples, and the power in which He still triumphs through their testimony, is entirely apart from the men as to source, but it is closely united to man as to act. And here is the whole philosophy of Christian life, and of service especially. The Spirit of God can do the work of Christ in the world only through human instrumentality. Man can do the work of Christ in the world only through the power of the Spirit. He united forever the souls that trusted Him with the infinite Spirit of power. In them He found a medium for the Spirit to carry on His enterprises and accomplish His victory. In the Spirit He found for them the full and great and gracious equipment which would enable them to do all He was sending them to do. The Holy Spirit, said He, shall come upon you. That promise, so simple, and yet so sublime, stands over against the need of which we have spoken. They lacked intellectual power, but the Spirit knoweth the deep things of God, and discerneth all things. When He came to these men, at once the horizon was flung far back, and the opaque became transparent, and the bloody and brutal Cross flamed into the purple glory of imperial dignity and redemptive power. And no man filled with the Holy Spirit of God ever dares to speak of the Cross in the terms of the human only. These men saw the meaning, and all life was changed in its appearance when God by the Holy Spirit came into intimate and abiding relationship with them. God Himself was new. Christ was new, men were changed, the matters of the moment took on a different appearance. Wherever they looked, they saw the old things, but never again were they the same. Yea, verily.

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes--
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.

These men had been plucking blackberries! But when the Spirit came they saw the flaming bush! It was the same bush, and other men passed it by and saw it only as the scrub bush of the dreary desert, but they saw it flaming with meaning.

And the coming of the Spirit meant, not merely intellectual power, but also spiritual power. It was when their lives became suffused with that spiritual energy which is of God that they reached the plane of holiness of life and character. Holiness is never merely it, it is Him; never merely something into which a man forces Himself by self-will, but something into which a man forces Himself by self-will, but something into which a man comes by the unveiling of God by the Holy Ghost. And these men went out to show other men what human life might be, a triumph every day, not because they had won by struggling, but by yielding to the Spirit. They found a power mastering the carnal when the spiritual took possession of them.

And did they need a new power of the affection and the will? The coming of the Spirit meant this, that the love of God was shed abroad in their heart. Is not that another of the phrases that we have done despite to because we have treated it in a temporary and superficial and small way? The love of God was shed abroad in their heart, and when the Spirit came and dwelt in them, He brought God's love for Christ, and made it their love for Christ. And, oh, the change. I need not stay to illustrate it. The Acts of the Apostles is full of revelation. Peter had said, in the presence of the Cross--Spare Thyself! Not that, anything but the Cross. In this new book I turn to the fifth chapter, and I read that he counted it all joy that he was counted worthy to suffer for the Name. I do not read any more of men running from danger. I read of men telling indeed of their troubles, telling how they have been in peril from false brethren, and robbers, on land, and sea, receiving stripes forty save one again and again, being left mauled and half dead by brutal hands; but instead of hearing them speak of suffering in terms of complaint, I hear them say, I glory in my affliction. What is the reason? The Spirit has taken hold of their own weak though loyal affection, and has merged it into the affection of Deity, and the tides of God's love, flowing through them, make them stronger than all the forces that could be against them.

And finally mark this. They have no sword save the sword of the Spirit. They have no program save the orderliness of the Spirit. But when presently I watch these men begin that missionary progress, which has never been completed, and which we are so slow about, I see a group of men who do not impress their age by what they are in themselves. Brethren, remember this, the one thing that puzzled, supremely puzzled priests and Pharisees and rulers was how these men did these things. How do you account for it? was the question asked, and I hear their own answers, "We are witnesses of these things; and so is the Holy Ghost." That is the answer. One almost trembles as one reads the words. We have wandered so far from the apostolic conception that we dare hardly use them. I wonder if we dare open our next month's church meeting with the words, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us." I am here for contemplation rather than application. But this is the ancient picture, and I look at the beginning of things, and I see Peter, rough, magnificent, impetuous Peter--I love him with all my heart--as he begins to talk, and I watch the curious multitude of Hebrews gathered from all the district around, listening to him, with their prejudices and pride, and I watch until I see them swept by the wind of God, and the cry goes up, and men and women are being gathered into the Kingdom.

See how great a flame aspires:
Kindled by a spark of grace,
Jesu's love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze.

To bring fire on earth He came;
Kindled in some hearts it is...
Oh, that all might catch the flame,
All partake the glorious bliss."

How was it done? "We are witnesses, and so is the Holy Ghost." The saints in fellowship with the Spirit need neither sword, nor policy, nor patronage of earthly power. Their victory is an assured victory.

Did I say a moment ago I was not here for purposes of application? Suffer me one or two words by way of application. Christ's word to us here gathered, whether of this particular fellowship or of another, is exactly the same as to these first disciples. I cannot apply it in all its details. I need not. But He is saying to us, "It is not for you to know times or seasons." There are some who are always trying to arrange times and seasons. I have had a letter from San Francisco which tells me the Lord is coming in seven years, and I am to be ready for Him. I do not like to think He is seven years away. He is at the door. He may disturb me at my preaching. Whether He disturbs me at work or play, oh that I may be able to shout, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus." Burn your almanacs, and give up trying to deal with God's arrangements. What is your work? You are My witnesses, so says the King. Yes, but He is also saying this, You shall be endued with power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you. There is a difference between these men and us. They had to wait, for the Spirit was not yet given. You and I have not to wait. The Spirit is given. Yes, we must wait, unless we have the fulness of the Spirit. Unless we have put out of our life the things He forbids, I had better quit my preaching, and you your Sabbath-school Class, and every form of service. Unless we know the power, we had better tarry, but we need not tarry. The upper room at Pentecost was not more full of the Spirit than is this chapel this morning. O'er all the assembly He broods, close to every life is He. Oh, soul of mine, admit Him. And I can admit Him only as in absolute loyalty I crown the Christ, and give Him right of way o'er all the territory of my being. And if I do that, this Spirit, without sound of mighty rushing wind, without sign of fire, will fill and equip, and I, even I, oh, matchless grace of God, may be His witness too.

Re: Power for Service - G. Campbell Morgan - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2011/2/13 16:38

Quote:
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This is a needful burden of topic that we need again foremost in our minds. There is a great need of the power of God in the lives of frail flesh so that God would get the glory!