

The Holy Spirit and Missions

Andrew Murray:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers, And as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. Then, when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, went down to Seleucia.'--Acts 13: 1-4.

It has been rightly said that the Acts of the Apostles might well have borne the name, The Acts of the Exalted Lord, or, The Acts of the Holy Spirit. Christ's parting promise, 'Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth,' was indeed one of those Divine seed - words in which is contained the Kingdom of heaven in the power of an infinite growth, with the law of its manifestation, and the prophecy of its final perfection. In the Book of the Acts we have the way traced in which the promise received its incipient fulfilment, on its way from Jerusalem to Rome. It gives us the Divine record of the coming and dwelling and working of the Holy Spirit, as the Power given to Christ's disciples, to witness for Him before Jews and heathens, and of the triumph of the name of Christ in Antioch and Rome as the centres for the conquest of the uttermost parts of the earth. The book reveals, as with a light from heaven, that the one aim and purpose of the descent of the Spirit from our glorified Lord in heaven to His disciples, revealing in them His presence, His guidance, and His Power, is to fit them to be His witnesses even to the uttermost parts of the earth. Missions to the heathen are the one object of the Mission of the Spirit.

In the passage we have as our text we have the first record of the part the Church is definitely called to take in the work of missions. In the preaching of Philip at Samaria, and Peter at Caesarea, - we have the case of individual men exercising their function of ministry among those who were not of the Jews under the leading of the Spirit. In the preaching of the men of Cyprus and Cyrene to the Greeks at Antioch we have the Divine instinct of the Spirit of love and life, leading men to open new paths where the leaders of the Church had not yet thought of coming. But this guidance of the Spirit in separating special men was now to become part of the organization of the Church, and the whole community of believers is to be educated to take its share in the work for which the Spirit specially had come down to earth. If the second of Acts is of importance as giving us the indument of the Church for her Jerusalem or home mission work, the thirteenth is of no less interest as her setting apart for definite foreign mission work. We cannot sufficiently praise God for the deepening interest in missions in our days. If our interest is to be permanent and personal, if it is to be a personal enthusiasm of love and devotion to our Blessed Lord and the lost He came to save, if it is to be fruitful in raising the work of the Church to the true level of Pentecostal Power, we must learn well the lesson of Antioch. Mission work must find its initiative and its power in the distinct and direct acknowledgment of the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

It has often been remarked that true mission work has always been born of a revival of religious life in the Church. The Holy Spirit's quickening work stirs up to new devotion to the Blessed Lord whom He reveals, and to the lost to whom He belongs. It is in such a state of mind that the voice of the Spirit is heard, urging the Lord's redeemed to work for Him. It was thus at Antioch. There were certain prophets and teachers at Antioch, spending part of their time in ministering to the Lord and fasting. With the public service of God in the Church they combined the spirit of separation from the world and of self-sacrifice. Their Lord was in heaven; they felt the need of close and continued intercourse, waiting for His orders; they understood that the Spirit that dwelt in them could not have free and full scope for action except as they maintained direct fellowship with Him as their Master, and entered as much as possible into the fellowship of Christ's crucifixion of the flesh. 'They ministered to the Lord and fasted: such were the men, such was their state of mind and their habit of life, when the Holy Spirit revealed to them that He had chosen two of their number to a special work, and called upon them to be His instruments in separating them, in presence of the whole Church, for that work.

The law of the Kingdom has not been changed. It is still the Holy Ghost who has charge of all mission work. He will still reveal His will, in the appointment of work and selection of men, to those who are waiting on their Lord in service and separation. When once the Holy Spirit in any age has taught men of faith and prayer to undertake His work, it is easy for others to admire and approve what they do, to see the harmony of their conduct with Scripture, and to copy their example. And yet the real power of the Spirit's guiding and working, the real personal love and devotion to Jesus as a Beloved Lord, may be present in but a very small degree. It is because a great deal of interest in the missionary cause is of this nature, that there has to be so much arguing and begging and pleading on lower grounds with its supporters. The command of the Lord is known as recorded in a book; the living voice of the Spirit, who reveals the Lord in Living Presence and Power, is not heard.

'It is not enough that Christians be stirred and urged to take a greater interest in the work, to pray and give

more: there is a more urgent need. In the life of the individual the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the Presence and Rule of the Lord of Glory which He maintains, must again become the chief mark of the Christian life. In the fellowship of the Church, we must learn to wait more earnestly for the Holy Spirit's guidance in the selection of men and fields of labour, in the wakening of interest and the seeking of support : it is in the mission directly originated in much prayer and waiting on the Spirit that His power can specially be expected.

Let no one fear, when we speak thus, that we shall lead Christians away from the real practical work that must be done. There is much that needs to be done, and cannot be done without diligent labour. Information must be circulated; readers must be found and kept; funds must be raised; prayer-meetings must be kept up; directors must meet, and consult, and decide. All this must be done. But it will be done well, and as a service well-pleasing to the Master, just in the measure in which it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit. Oh that the Church, and every member of it, might learn the lesson! The Spirit has come down from heaven to be the Spirit of Missions, to inspire and empower Christ's disciples to witness for Him to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The origin, the progress, the success of missions are all his. It is He who wakens in the hearts of believers the jealousy for the honour of their Lord, the compassion to the souls of the perishing, the faith in His promise, the willing obedience to His commands, in which the mission takes its rise. It is He who draws together to united effort, who calls forth the suitable men to go out, who opens the door, and prepares the hearts of the heathen to desire or to receive the word. And it is He who at length gives the increase, and, even where Satan's seat is, establishes the cross, and gathers round it the redeemed of the Lord. Missions are the special work of the Holy Spirit. No one may expect to be filled with the Spirit if he is not willing to be used for missions. No one who wishes to work or pray for missions need fear his feebleness or poverty: the Holy Spirit is the power that can fit him to take his divinely appointed place in the work. Let every one who prays for missions, and longs for more of a missionary spirit in the Church, pray first and most that in every believer personally, and in the Church and all its work and worship, the power of the Indwelling Spirit may have full sway.

'Then when they had fasted and prayed, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, went down to Seleucia.' The sending forth was equally the work of the Church and of the Spirit. This is the normal relation. There are men sent forth by the Holy Spirit alone; amid the opposition or indifference of the Church, the Spirit does His work. There are men sent forth by the Church alone ; it thinks the work ought to be done, and does it, but with little of the fasting and praying that recognises the need of the Spirit, and refuses to work without Him. Blessed the Church and blessed the mission which the Spirit originates, where He is allowed to guide, and where the blessing is waited for from Himself alone. Ten days' praying and waiting on earth, and the Spirit's descent in fire: this was the birth of the Church at Jerusalem. Ministering and fasting, and then again fasting and praying, and the Spirit sending forth Barnabas and Saul: this was at Antioch the consecration of the Church to be a Mission Church. In waiting and prayer on earth, and then in the power of the Spirit from the Lord in heaven, is the strength, the joy, the blessing of the Church of Christ and its missions.

May I say to any missionary who reads this in his far-off home, Be of good cheer, brother ,The Holy Spirit who is the Mighty Power of God, ,who is the Presence of Jesus within thee, the Holy Spirit is with thee, is in thee. The work is His depend on Him, yield to Him, wait for Him; the work is His, He will do it. May I say to every Christian, be he director, supporter, contributor, helper in prayer or in any other way,in the great work of hastening the coming of the Kingdom.

Brother! be of good cheer. From that time of waiting before the Throne, and that baptism there received, the first disciples went forth until they reached Antioch. There they paused, and prayed, and fasted, and then passed on over to Rome and the region beyond. Let us from these our brethren learn the secret of power. Let us call on every Christian who would be a mission friend and mission worker to come with us and be filled with the Spirit whose is the work of missions. Let us lift up a clear testimony that the need of the Church and the world is, believers who can testify to an indwelling Christ in the Spirit, and prove it too. Let us gather such together in the antechamber of the King's Presence, the waiting at Jerusalem, the ministering and fasting at Antioch; the Spirit does still come as of old in power, He does still move and send forth; He is still mighty to convince of sin and reveal Jesus, and to make thousands fall at His feet. He waits for us: let us wait on Him, let us welcome Him

O God! Thou didst send Thy Son to be the Saviour of the world. Thou didst give Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. And Thou didst pour out Thy Spirit upon all flesh, commissioning as many as received Him to make known and pass on the wondrous blessing. In the Love and Power in which Thy Spirit was sent forth, He likewise sends forth those who yield- themselves to Him, to be the instruments of His Power in glorifying Thy Son. We bless Thee for this Divine and most glorious salvation.

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0 our God! we stand amazed, and abased, at the sloth and, neglect of Thy Church in not fulfilling her Divine commission; we are humbled at our slowness of heart to perceive and believe what Thy Son did promise, to obey His will and finish His work. We cry to Thee, our God! visit Thy Church, and let Thy Spirit, the Spirit of the Divine Sending forth, fill all her children.

0 my Father! I dedicate myself afresh to Thee, to live and labour, to pray and travail, to sacrifice and suffer for Thy Kingdom. I accept anew in faith the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of Christ, and yield myself to His indwelling. I humbly plead with Thee, give me and all Thy children to be so mightily strengthened by the Holy Spirit that Christ may possess heart and life, and our one desire be that the whole earth may be filled with His glory. Amen.