

Articles and Sermons :: We Stand At The Crossroads Of Destiny -munger**We Stand At The Crossroads Of Destiny -munger - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2008/5/8 13:50****We Stand At The Crossroads Of Destiny***by Robert Boyd Munger*

"And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing" (2 Kgs. 2:9-10).

The Mantle of God

It was a hard thing; it was an exceedingly difficult thing. In fact, Elisha was asking for a humanly impossible thing, a supernatural thing. Yet there was no consciousness of presumption on the part of Elisha as he voiced the request. His prayer was born of desperation and terrible need, for this hard thing was a necessary thing.

Out beyond was a nation sunk in the low levels of idolatry and moral degradation, abandoned to the worship of lust and licentiousness, fallen from the high heritage of their fathers into the degenerate perversion of self-indulgence. No human argument, however logical, could convince their sin-dulled minds. No human tongue, however eloquent, could persuade their stubborn wills. No human power, no energy of organization or program of enlightenment could blast their granite hearts.

The young prophet, confronted by the abysmal depths of sin and the grip of ingrained iniquity holding sway over the nation, knew that his own efforts to call them to God and righteousness would be like the voice of a child in a roaring hurricane— the hammering of baby fists upon stone battlements. Certainly he asked for a difficult thing!

Prayer Born of Desperation

These are days when the servants of God must ask for the hard things, nothing less than a double portion of the Holy Spirit. If Elisha in his generation must demand a mantle of divine boldness and power to fall upon him, how much greater is our need!

In this grim and terrible hour of humanity's last chance, when we stand at the crossroads of destiny confronted by a chaotic, half-savage world on the brink of self-destruction, our weapons and equipment must be adequate to the demands. An awful urgency drives us. We cannot count on successive centuries in which to complete our mission, nor even a normal life span. We dare not depend on the accepted procedures and plans for evangelizing the world or combating the forces of unrighteousness. We must meet the issue now, matching this nuclear age with the super-nuclear energy of God.

Finite and Feeble

The Church as we know her, creaking along like an oxcart on a modern-day speedway, must be renovated, renewed, empowered, and you and I who are part of her, and speak for her, must tear up our old garments of human, fleshly energy, and seek and receive like Elisha a mantle of God, the Spirit and power of our risen Lord.

To preach and teach the word of truth is not enough and never has been. To contend for the faith is not enough and never has been. To labor and toil, to serve and sacrifice is not enough, and never has been. To offer one's life a living sacrifice unto God, to suffer for the name of Christ, to be willing to go to the ends of the earth is not enough, and never has been. The truth upon our lips and the devotion within our hearts must be quickened and endued with the living power of the Holy Spirit.

Our Attitudes and Actions

It seems to me that we who are orthodox, Bible-believing Christians are often guilty of gross presumption. Our attitude and actions would imply that we assume that our faithful proclamation of the Gospel, coupled with our consecration to

Christ, are sufficient to win the resisting heart and to honor the Savior among men. Where did we get the idea that our finite brain, our feeble effort, our faulty devotion were ever sufficient to proclaim in redeeming power the everlasting Gospel?

Charles Haddon Spurgeon gave this plea: "The preaching that kills may be, and often is orthodox— dogmatically, inviolably orthodox. In the Christian system, unction is the anointing of the Holy Ghost separating a person unto God's work and preparing him for it. This unction is the one divine enablement by which the preacher accomplishes the peculiar and saving ends of preaching. Without this unction there are no true spiritual results accomplished. The results and forces in preaching do not rise above the results of unsanctified speech. Without unction the former is as potent as the pulpit— ...without it the Gospel has no more power to propagate itself than any other system of truth. This is the seal of its divinity. Unction in the preacher puts God in the Gospel."

Let us have nerve enough to face the facts. Our stature beside that of the prophets, apostles and forebearers of our faith is stunted and shriveled. We know little of the power of God. Our sin is presumption— depending on our human energies to perform a superhuman task.

Trying to teach the Word of God and impart the risen life of the Savior to others is an impossible task to attempt without the Holy Spirit. My discouraged Christian brother and sister, seeking futilely to witness to others, to overcome self and sin in your life, to walk in victory— you need a miracle— nothing less than the mantle of God to clothe you and to endue you with power.

Commissioned and Equipped

Scripture sets forth the primacy of the Holy Spirit for service. Every line testifies that it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zech. 4:6). The mighty men of God in the Old Testament, the patriarchs, deliverers, saviors, were all commissioned and equipped for their heroic leadership by the Spirit of God.

Moses first must meet his Maker at the burning bush and have in his hand the rod of Jehovah. When it was time for him to ascend Nebo's lonely summit he placed his holy hands on the faithful Joshua. Joshua, filled with the Spirit, began his victorious march.

The Book of Judges is full of stories of ordinary men made extraordinary conquerors by a mantle of God. The Spirit came upon Othniel, Gideon and Jephthah, and garbed with the Spirit, they put to rout the enemies of Israel.

The Spirit "came mightily" upon Samson, and he was as strong and bold as a lion (Judg. 15:14). With his bare hands he vanquished the Philistines. But when the Spirit departed from him he was weak and helpless. The Spirit came upon Saul, the son of Kish, and he was "turned into another man" (1 Sam. 10:6). But the Spirit departing from Saul left him simply a man. David was anointed for kingship by the horn of oil in the hand of Samuel and by the power of the Holy Ghost which came upon him "from that day forward" (1 Sam. 16:13). These wore the mantle of God!

The prophets of Israel who called the nation from sin and idolatry to serve the living God were Spirit-endued men. Isaiah "saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple" (Isa. 6:1). Lips were fired by a coal from off the altar. The mouth of Jeremiah was touched by the hand of the living God. Micah testified, "Truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (Mic. 3:8). These all wore the mantle of God.

Christ's Gospel Proclaimed in Power and Demonstration of the Spirit

And if the men of old required an unction of the Lord to speak forth in courage and power the word of law and judgment, how much more are we dependent on the Holy Spirit to proclaim boldly and effectively the everlasting Gospel of the grace of God?

The Holy Spirit was prominent in the life of Christ. Turning to the Gospels, it is awesome to read that even the incarnate Lord of glory, sinless and omnipotent, remained in silent seclusion until at the river Jordan the Spirit of God descended upon Him. Full of the Spirit He was led into the wilderness to win His contest with the adversary. In the power of the Spirit He returned to begin His public ministry.

His opening words in that inaugural message at Nazareth were these: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He

hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). This from sinless lips and a divine heart! Ah, the presumption that is ours to voice the same Gospel from sinful mouths and corrupt hearts without the anointing of the Holy One!

Church history demonstrates the divine potential. It was this mantle of God falling upon the disciples which transformed them from feeble, frightened followers of the Master to apostles sent forth from the living presence of Christ to turn the world upside down. The Holy Spirit now came upon them in a new and more powerful manner, uniting them vitally to the risen Savior and indwelling and infilling them with all the plenitude of His resurrection life.

Greatness and Glory of the Task

The artist Eugene Bernard has a significant painting of Christ entitled, "Go and preach!" Our Lord with outstretched hand is pointing toward the great harvest field of the world. The beloved disciple, youthful, slender and delicate beside the Master, strains with troubled eyes to see the goal on the far horizon.

One can almost hear the words, "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). But as the Master lifts the gaze of His disciples to see the greatness and glory of the task, His arm is about the slender shoulders of John and His mantle draped from His own shoulders falls about the youth and covers him with the shelter of its folds.

The artist caught the magnificent truth. John alone was neither ready nor able to see or to fulfill his Lord's commission. But with an omnipotent arm about him and the mantle of the Savior clothing him, he was equipped as an ambassador of the King. So the son of thunder became the son of love, a faithful and true witness to the end.

The apostle Peter could tell us in words of force and feeling the transformation wrought in his own life by the endowment of the Spirit of Pentecost. The contrast between the Peter before Pentecost and the Peter after Pentecost is striking. It was there that Simon became Cephas—a rock of courage, strength and power.

Spirit's Enduement

There never had been any question about Peter's faith. He confessed early in his association with Jesus, "Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God!" (John 6:69). Neither was there any doubt about the measure of his devotion. He forsook all to follow the Master. He was ready to go with Him to prison and to death. He would have died for Him in the garden. In resolve and purpose, Peter's love and loyalty were total.

But alas, Peter lacked the inner resources, the spiritual stamina to maintain in all situations his earnest resolution. There were crevasses in his armor. There were moments when his courage drained from his heart and left him helpless and contemptible. But how often you and I, having made our bold affirmation of loyalty to Christ, have found ourselves with Peter around a fire in an outer court, not only silent before those who mock our faith, but denying Him in craven conformity to the godless world.

Gospel Preached with the Holy Ghost Sent Down from Heaven

But behold Peter garbed with the mantle of God, standing before those who murdered the Son of glory and without fear or self-consciousness confronting them with their awful sin, and preaching Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Behold the power, the bold, penetrating, convincing power, that surges out from him to overwhelm his hearers with the truth until the hardest heart cried aloud, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37).

There was fire that day, holy fire falling from heaven, and Peter continued to blaze with the fire of God until he was stretched upon his cross and rode it as a chariot of fire to glory. His testimony is simple. We preach "the Gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" (1 Pet. 1:12).

If the apostle Paul were to add his word, it would be exactly the same. "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

If the greatest intellect of his generation deliberately discredited his own wisdom; if the masterful logician forsook his own logic; if the most ardent and persuasive spirit had no confidence in his own eloquence, but rather with ruthless determination stripped the Gospel of all human adornment that faith might stand in the power of God, and crucified self that the Savior might be seen in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power—then surely we who are of lesser breed must cast away our old garments of the flesh and be clothed with a mantle of heaven.

Receive Ye the Holy Ghost

The mighty acts of the Holy Spirit continue. Again and again, servants of the living God have come to a Jordan of redemptive urgency and have cried, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" Then casting aside their own human abilities they have appropriated by living faith the spirit and power of an Elijah.

It was the mantle of God falling upon Savonarola that shook the wicked city of Florence with a thunderclap of divine judgment. The words of the preacher burned like fire until strong men fell upon their faces on the stone flagging of the cathedral, crying out to God for forgiveness.

It was this mantle of God clothing an earnest monk in Wurttemberg that picked him up and used him like a hammer in the hand of God to break the shackles of superstition and darkness from the millions of Europe. It was this Holy Spirit strangely warming the heart of John Wesley that broke out in the spiritual conflagration of the Wesleyan revival. It was the definite and decisive endowment of power falling upon Moody that prepared him for his outstanding ministry in Britain and America.

Indeed turn through the pages of Church history or the contemporary record, find any man standing like an Elijah among the prophets, and you will discover one who sought and received power from on high.

Oh, that I myself might speak of these things with such a mantle resting upon me! Oh, that together we might this day receive a heavenly baptism, a chrism of truth, an endowment of power, opening up within us rivers of living water! Why should we fear anything promised and given of God? Why should we delay to seek anything so indispensable? What are the prerequisites for power?

Four Prerequisites for Power

First, perseverance born of a desperate need. Nothing would turn back this determined disciple of Elijah. He followed him to Gilgal, and heard his master say, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel." At Bethel, at Jericho, at Jordan, the same persistency is manifest. No ridicule or argument could dissuade him.

The sons of the prophets at Bethel came forth to Elisha and said unto him, "Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head today? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace" (2 Kgs. 2:2-8).

This is the attitude God wants. "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me!" (Gen. 32:26). This is the determination of one who says, whatever the distance to be traveled, whatever the discouragements to be surmounted, my heart is fixed, my face is set, my will is determined. I will seek, and I will know power adequate for the task.

Second, prayer that dares to ask for wonderful things. There must be a heart reaching up through the human frailties and inner corruption to divine grace, willing to stand in naked faith upon the promises, and calling day and night to the Savior, "Give me of Thy Spirit!"

Third, preparation that casts away the old self-life and all its garments. One of the strange customs in the Bible is that of tearing up garments. Sometimes it was done out of anger, or humiliation, shame or sorrow. Sometimes, I suppose, the old garments were torn up simply because they were worn and had no further purpose.

In this case Elisha was given a glimpse of the glory of God—chariots and horsemen of fire! One long look at the glory, magnificence and power of heaven, and he saw his own garments as filthy rags. One glimpse of the infinite holiness and power of God and he was forever dissatisfied and discontented with himself and his own things (2 Kgs. 2:11-12).

Even so, one long look at the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and we are ready to tear up as worthless our pitifully inadequate spirituality, our so-called consecration, and whatever else we may have had of confidence in

the flesh. It is in the light of God's holy presence that we see sin and self, and desire to discard both.

Finally, an appropriation of faith that lifts up and exercises the promised provision of the Spirit of God. As we think of the mighty enablement and endowment with which the Spirit of God has visited men in the past, as we think of the tremendous world needs confronting us today, we place ourselves and all that we have before the Savior and pray, "O Lord, do it again!"