Power for God's People

"But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord and with justice and might…." (Micah 3:8)

1. Introduction

One of the distinguishing features of the New Testament church was the great power and effectiveness of its witness in very difficult times. One of the clear characteristics of the 21st century church is its impotence and ineffectiveness. Why the difference? The early church turned the world upside down! What is the secret of spiritual power?

2. We long for power

We live in a power-hungry age and a power-conscious age. We crave power. We long to control everybody and everything. As believers, we long for power for holy living and successful service. Our motives may be partly selfish – for self-glorification and control – but they are real.

Power can be divine or it can be devilish. Many outreach activities such as beach missions etc. may be lively and exciting, but they are often inadequate and powerless. Do you feel weak, inadequate? Are you longing for effectiveness? How can you model abundant life even for a few hours or a whole week let alone a whole lifetime? We dream of what we could become!

3. Our lack of power

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to a consciousness of our weakness and impotence. It is the Holy Spirit who creates in us a yearning for spiritual effectiveness. Other people notice our weaknesses but often we don't see them ourselves. We work and not much happens. We seem to be powerless. We are confused by compromises and disappointments. We sometimes feel betrayed by leaders.

Some of the disciples didn't go to the Mount of Transfiguration. They had tried to deliver a boy who was demonised. They had failed! The boy's father said to Jesus, ***"I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not!"*** (Lk. 9:28-45)

Later the disciples asked Jesus privately, ***" 'Why couldn't we drive it out?' He replied, 'This kind can only come out by prayer.' "*** (Mk. 9:28-29) Their powerlessness was obvious and tragic. The great thing is that they were conscious of it! They confessed it to Jesus.

God's work needs God's power. Many people lose their cutting-edge but they still continue the work.

4. The promise of power

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses …." (Acts 1:8)

The Lord Jesus promised power to His disciples. Jesus claimed that He had given them all power in heaven and on earth. That power is personally given by the Holy Spirit to the believer who acknowledges that Jesus is his Lord and who walks in fellowship with Him.

The Old Testament vocabulary is **'anointing'**. We must remember that the 'anointing' power of the Holy Spirit operates in the believer **only when the believer is united with Jesus**. It is never earned and it is never self-generated. If you break the union, the power stops. So the key is to abide in Christ.

An illustration might be a man with a withered arm. The arm is still attached to his body but there are no nerve connections. As believers we may appear to be 'connected', but in reality we are powerless and paralysed!

5. The nature of power

The spiritual power the Holy Spirit gives works in many different circumstances. A speaker may speak with such spiritual intensity and zeal that he is like a bugle call waking up sleepy soldiers. Drowsy, sleepy Christians wake up and are called to action. Sometimes it is quite overwhelming. It is a power that motivates the will.

It isn't just the power of personality. Many a quiet person speaks with great authority. It isn't the power of oratory. It isn't a skill learned in seminary. It is often something unconscious. It isn't something that we can control by turning it on and off nor is it waking up something that has lain asleep in us.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit. His presence in person brings power. The power is the personality of the Holy Spirit. If you like you could say that Jesus is the power station and the Holy Spirit is the wires through which the power comes when you are plugged in. If you cut the lines there is no power. You may be a very ordinary person, but if you give yourself entirely to Jesus and do what He tells you to do, the power flows.

The demonstration of power or the evidence of power

It is often assumed that power will be felt through an emotional experience, but this is not usually so. We usually become conscious of power when we use it! Spiritual power is evident when spiritual needs are being met – especially when reaching the hearts of others. ***"You will receive power and you will be my witnesses."*** (Acts 1:8)

A man called Henry Moorhouse was a pickpocket and a petty criminal. He had a long record of imprisonment. Eventually he believed in Jesus and received salvation. From then on he had a ministry for many years just standing on the streets of Belfast saying over and over again John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His One and Only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Huge crowds heard him. Great conviction of sin came over people and thousands were saved. We are not all great preachers but we can all be equipped and enabled to do what God wants us to do.

Examples of power

The Lord didn't start His public ministry until He was filled with the Holy Spirit and power. This happened at His baptism in the River Jordan. The Holy Spirit came on Him as a dove. So He needed power for service! We need it many times more! We can never be content to do without that which Jesus knew was essential.

For 30 years Jesus never made a big impression in Nazareth although He was a very good carpenter and was very kind. His cousin, John the Baptist, was shaking the nation from the king on his throne to the poor in the streets. So Jesus had no great ministry until the Holy Spirit came on Him.

He had probably read in the synagogue many times, but after His baptism a new authority was in His words. We read***, "The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. … all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked."*** (Lk. 4:18-21) The difference was the power of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem **until they were clothed with power from on high**. (Lk. 24:49). They didn't have any more knowledge at Pentecost, but they were given power. We need to remove any blockages that hinder the path to power.

Conditions of power

God only gives us His power when we prepare our hearts to such an extent that it is safe for God to give us an increasing measure of His power. He gives us His power on certain conditions:

- **Renunciation of revealed sin**

  "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." Psalm 66:18

  We need to ask ourselves if we are holding on to – cherishing – feeding and caring for – any sin in our hearts. Do we have a secret sympathy with any sin? Have we wronged others and never confessed it to them? Have others wronged us and we have never forgiven them? Have we paid back in restitution anything we should have paid back? Do we have a harmful hobby?
  The Holy Spirit, who reveals sin in our lives, will also enable us to forsake it.

- **A willingness to do God's will**

  If you want spiritual power and anointing, then you must not want it in order to enable you to do your own will! You can't demand that your will to be done. You can't hold anything back from God. You can't bargain and make conditions. Whatever God asks you to do, do it. Power is given only for the purpose of you doing God's will, never so you can do your own will.

- **A passion for Christ's glory**

  God will delight to give you His anointing of power if you are willing to be made invisible! When you long neither for your pleasure nor for your prominence, but only that His name be glorified, then the power will come. If we seek God's power for self-glorification or selfish motives then our search will be in vain.

- **Prayer and appropriation**

  As Jesus was praying in the River Jordan, He was anointed.

  As the disciples prayed, the Spirit descended.

  As you work for the Lord, it is your privilege and duty to claim the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to do His will and fulfil the task He has given to you.