**THINGS THAT MATTER MOST - DEVOTIONAL PAPERS BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**04. SPIRITUAL ABILITIES by JOHN H. JOWETT**

THE apostolic life abounds in suggestions of power. It is not only that there is power in some particular direction, there is basal executive force which gives impetus to everything. The life is filled with "go" and "drive" and strength of character and conduct. Power resides behind every faculty, and every disposition, and every form of service. The life is efficient and effective. It is as though a man had a fine equipment of tools, but his hand is weak and trembling, and suddenly there is given to him a mighty strength of grip, and he is able to seize upon every tool and make it accomplish its appointed purpose. "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you," and that energy empowered everything, and gave intensity and strength in every exercise of the apostle's life. Let us look at one or two directions in which this holy power was revealed.

The apostolic life was distinguished by the strength of its relationship to God. It was powerful in its ability to believe. We can do nothing more vital to any man than to encourage and strengthen his finest faith. When our faith in the Highest is limp and uncertain everything lacks assurance. When there is lameness in the movements of the spirit our conduct can never be firm. And therefore did the Holy Spirit energize the early apostles in their supreme relationships, and steadied them in their faith. Now, faith is first of all an attitude and then an act. It is primarily a spiritual posture which reveals itself in moral obedience. And to be rich in faith is to possess a poise of soul which steadily contemplates and rests in the love of God, in sunshine and in shower, and through all the changing seasons and temperatures of our years. When the soul is thus quietly steadied in this spiritual assurance, its faith is expressed in manifold holy ministries of hope and love. This ability of faith is one of the radiant characteristics of the early Church, and it was the creation of the Holy Ghost.

But just as apostolic life was empowered in its relationship to God, so was it quietly empowered in its resistances to the enemy of God. There are two phrases used by the Apostle Paul, in which this sovereign ability is described, "able to resist the wiles," "able to quench the darts." I do not know any third way in which the enemy of God approaches the souls of men. He draws near to us in wiles, he dresses himself in all kinds of flattering guises, he exercises himself in deceitful mimicries, he uses glosses innumerable. He disguises the ugly by throwing about it a seductive limelight. He hides his destructiveness in bowers of roses. The Boers used to send their ammunition about in piano cases; and this is a fitting symbol of many of the stratagems of our foe. He comes to us as an angel of light, hiding the lightning which is his peculiar equipment. He makes the broad way fascinating, while the narrow way often appears repellent. The entrance to the broad way is marked by a glittering crown, while a heavy cross is hidden not far away. The entrance to the narrow way is marked by a cross, but the crown of life is not far away.

And so, all through the generations, this wily antagonist has been seeking to ensnare the children of God. He uses attractive euphemisms. He deceives us by grand speech. He makes us think we are striding out in glorious liberty when we are really moving in servitude. Now, one of the great distinctions of apostolic life was the power to discern and resist the insidiousness of the foe. Their eyes were anointed with grace, and they were able to pierce the mere appearance of things and to discriminate between the holy and the profane. They could distinguish mere ease from holy peace, and all transient flimsiness from the things that abide. And this vigilance and strength were the equipment of the Holy Ghost. He kept the soul awake and vigorous, and they were not taken by surprise.

But another apostolic ability is expressed in the kindred phrase, "able to quench the darts of the evil one." For sometimes the enemy comes to us in sudden flame, and not in seductive light. He leaps upon us in an irritation rather than steals upon us in some soothing consolation. Some inflammatory suggestion is flung across the threshold of the mind, and our life is all ablaze. The fiery dart finds congenial material and life is consumed with unholy passion. A spark from a passing engine can kindle a fire which can destroy a countryside; and the spark of an infernal suggestion, or the merest hint of criticism, or some transient incident can convert the soul of the unwary into a house of unclean fire. Now, these early apostles had a power to quench these darts. It is a wonderful equipment to be kept so cool and quiet in disposition that when the inflammatory thing is thrown it finds nothing congenial and speedily dies out. This is the ministry of the Comforter.

Breathe through the pulses of desire

Thy coolness and thy balm.

And this "cooling" is the blessed service which the Holy One fulfils in the souls who entertain Him as their guest.

But there is still a third kind of power distinguished in apostolic life in relation to the evil one. It is "mighty to the pulling down of strongholds." Every generation is face to face with established devilry. Castellated wrong rears itself on every side. There are great vested interests built upon iniquity. Vice lifts itself in very proud mien. Wickedness builds itself a lofty palace. Injustice girds itself with legality. Mischief is formed by a law. There are strongholds of iniquity. Every great reformer has levelled his attack upon a stronghold. There were many in the days of the early Church, and a great many still remain; and our power of assault, definite in aim and invincible in attack, is to be found in the indwelling and fellowship of that mighty Advocate who is Himself also the Minister of our peace.

There is a third great relationship in which the New Testament describes the power of those who are in communion with the Holy. Ghost, and that is their power in their relationship to the children of men. "With great power gave the apostles witness." That is an ability which distinguished the early Church, the power to arrest the indifferent by the proclamation of spiritual truth, and by the confession of spiritual experience. Their words were weighted with the significance which crashed through opposition. How empty our words can be! The Turks have been deceived into using empty cartridges, and the ministers of the kingdom are often victims of a like deception. We indulge in empty words, and the men on the strongholds laugh at our impotence. There is nothing more tragical than the employment of forceless speech. But when there is life in the word, how tremendous is its passage! "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." They do not drop like dead lead, or like dead feathers; they go forth like living ministers endowed with the terrific life of God. The Holy Spirit is the indwelling Partner who fills our cartridges, who endows our speech, and makes our words the very vehicles of heavenly power and grace.

Wing my words that they may reach

The hidden depths of many a heart.

There is one other power which I should like to name, which is mentioned in the apostolic record: "Able to comfort." Is there any gift more gracious than this--to have a wallet filled with oil and wine, that when we meet the bruised and the fainting we can minister healing and inspiration? Is there any more beautiful ministry to which any child of man can be called? To be able to speak words that console, to have a presence that heartens and cheers, to give a witness that lifts the despondent into the light of hope; this may be the privilege of all the friends of Christ Jesus. They may have a ministry in time of sorrow like that of sunlight falling upon dark clouds. They may go down the gloomy ways of men, lighting lamps of encouragement and hope. "Able to comfort!" They have the power to apprehend the ailment and the sorrow, and they have the equipment to soothe and to bless. "Ye shall receive such power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

I feel that all this is only as a little handful of the abilities mentioned in the Word of God as distinguishing those who are the companions of the Holy Ghost. I return to the word with which I began. Spiritual power, as given to us by God, is executive power, lying behind all our faculties and dispositions. It is a fundamental dynamic, and in it everything finds its strength. Here, therefore, we must place the emphasis in our quest of a stronger life. We must seek the communion of the Holy Ghost. This is the originating fellowship in which vision is born, and ideals are realized, and in which the soul is adorned with the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.