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

**35. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT by JOHN H. JOWETT**

WHEN the apostles received the power of the Holy Spirit what difference did it make to them? What kind of dynamic does the Holy Spirit bring to men? What change takes place in the lives of men to-day when they become companions of the Holy Spirit? What infirmities do they leave behind? What new equipment do they gain? I turn to the records of apostolic life and I put my inquiries there. What happened to these men? What kind of power did they receive when they had received the Holy Spirit?

First of all, then, I find an extraordinary power of spiritual apprehension. I know not how to express what I see. The apostles have a certain powerful feeling for God. They have a keen spiritual sense which discerns the realities of the unseen. It is as though their souls have developed latent feelers for the Divine. If we compare their dulness in the earlier days before the Holy Spirit was received, with their alertness afterwards, we shall see that the difference is most marked. The Master Himself describes them as "slow of heart." Their perceptions are blunt. They are dull to catch the spiritual side of things. But now when we turn to the record in the Acts of the Apostles we find this powerful sense of the Divine presence. It is as though a man has been sitting in a room with another man, but was only dimly aware of his presence; and then there came to him a refinement of his senses, and he gained a perfect assurance and a vivid knowledge of the other's company. The spiritual senses of these men were awakened, and they became aware of the "all-aboutness" of God. They have an intimate power of correspondence with Him which makes the unseen Lord a most real and intimate friend. And along with this sense of the Divine presence there is a refined apprehension of the Divine will. Everywhere in the apostolic life there is a tender and refined correspondence with the mind of God. Everywhere communications are being made between the Divine and human, and the human is strongly apprehending the Divine. Sentences like these abound everywhere: "The angel of the Lord said unto me"; "The Spirit said to Philip, Go near"; "And the Lord said to Ananias"; "The Spirit said unto Peter." There is everywhere this suggestion of an intimate walk and an intimate knowledge of God's will. Is not this a power to be coveted, and a power to be desired? And it is a power given by the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

I look again at the lives of these apostles, and I find them distinguished by magnificent force of character. In the early days they were timid, pliable, unfaithful. In supreme crises they deserted their Master and fled. They were as reeds shaken by the wind. The wind that blew upon them from the haunts of desolation, the keen, perilous winds of persecution, made these disciples bend before their blast. The men were negative, hesitant, uncertain, altogether lacking in persistent force. But now the timid and fearful have become positive and affirmative. There is nothing lax about them, nothing wavering, nothing yielding. Their characters have become strong, and steady, and effective. I say they have got force of character, and they have the two elements that are always found in forceful character: they have light and they have heat. They have light in the sense of clarity of purpose. Their outlook is not confused. Their aim is perfectly clear. If we watch them in the service of their Lord we find them never to be diverted from their track. "This one thing I do." They have this primary element in a forceful character, the clarity of an undivided aim. And the second element in a forceful character is heat, the fire of a quenchless enthusiasm. And they certainly had this fire in glorious strength and abundance. The Acts of the Apostles is a burning book. There is no cold or lukewarm patch from end to end. The disciples had been baptized with fire, with the holy, glowing enthusiasm caught from the altar of God. They had this central fire, from which every other purpose and faculty in the life gets its strength. This fire in the apostles' soul was like a furnace-fire in a great liner, which drives her through the tempests and through the envious and engulfing deep. Nothing could stop these men! Nothing could hinder their going! "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard." "We must obey God rather than man." This strong imperative rings throughout all their doings and all their speech. They have heat, and they have light, because they were baptized by the power of the Holy Ghost.

And I look again into the lives of these men who had been redeemed by the power of the Holy Ghost, and I find the energies of a glorious optimism. There is no more buoyant and exhilarating book in the literature than the book of The Acts. If we sit down and read it at a sitting we shall feel something of the swift and hopeful pace of its movement. I do not know that in their earlier days we should have described the disciples as "children of light." They easily lost heart, and the cloudy days filled them with dismay. But now, after they have received the Holy Spirit, we find them facing a hostile world. They are face to face with obstructions, with persecutions, with threats of imprisonment and death. But nowhere do we find a desponding or a despairing note. Ever and everywhere they are optimists in spirit. And what is an optimist? He is a man who can scent the coming harvest when the snow is on the ground. He can "feel the days before him." He can live in the distant June in the dingy days of December. That is an optimist, a man who can believe in the best in the arrogant and aggressive presence of the worst. He can be imprisoned in the desolations of Patmos and yet can see "the Holy City, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God." He can look at a poor, wayward, sinful Samaritan woman whose life is scorched like a blasted heath, and He can say, "The fields are ripe already unto harvest." And this power of optimism is always operative in the apostolic life. I find it in the springiness of their soul. You cannot break their spirit. You cannot hold them down in dull despair. "They laid their hands on apostles and put them in the common prison." And what happened after that? The morning after their release I read, "They entered into the temple early in the morning and taught." And here is another part of the record: "When they had called the apostles, and had beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for His sake." These men could not be held down. The spirit of optimism was ever dominant.

And with their springiness there was a marvellous spirit of joy. Theirs was not a dull buoyancy, but a radiant and a singing one. "And they raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts; and the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost"! "And at midnight Paul and Silas sang praises unto God"! Is not this the very spirit of power? These men had spiritual springiness, spiritual delight, because they had the spirit of Christian optimism, and this power they received when the Holy Ghost came upon them.

Do we wonder, then, that men of this kind, so endowed, have the additional power of witnessing for the Lord Jesus Christ? They witness by the arresting magnetism of their own transfigured character. They witness by their clear and enlightened apprehension of the Gospel by which they have been redeemed. And they witness by the grip of their words; words which were vitalized by the indwelling spirit of God. And we, too, shall receive a similar power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us. The same power is offered to us, to fit us for our condition, to equip us for our life. And what are the terms on which that power is received? They are these: that we are willing to offer our life for God, that the offer be made in all sincerity, made in simplicity, made in humble trust upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It means that we are willing to give up our sins, to lay down our pride. It means that we are willing to receive the Lord as our guest, and to allow Him to rule and to dominate our lives.