

The Strength that Wins.

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Judges 6: 14-16.—"And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee? And he said unto Him wherewith shall I save Israel? behold my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house. And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee and thou shalt smite the Midianite as one man."

Such was God's commission to Gideon to save Israel from the oppression of Midian. Israel had been untrue to God. God, therefore, allowed the Midianites to oppress Israel. Six successive seed-times they had sown the seed, hoping in due time to garner the golden grain. When the harvest was ready for the sickle the marauding Midianites would sweep over the land destroying the ripened harvest or stealing what had been garnered. Hope has well nigh died out of the lives of Israel.

In the seventh season God proposes that this oppression shall cease. While Gideon is threshing some of the first fruits of the harvest, God appears to him and commissions him in the words of our text as Israel's deliverer. "Go in this thy might. . . . Have not I sent thee? Surely I will be with thee." These words reveal

THE STRENGTH THAT WINS.

This strength is Christ indwelling in the believer's life in the person of the Holy Spirit. I shall waste no time explaining how Christ can dwell within the believer, or how He is there in the person of the Holy Spirit. God's Word teaches that He does so well. Experience confirms that teaching, that is sufficient argument for me. In this capacity He is the strength that wins.

"Ye shall receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon you." How familiar the words! How rare their realization!! May it not be truly said as a matter of practical experience with most Christians, "you do not so much as know that the Holy Ghost has been given."

But when we forget the Holy Spirit we are shorn of all power. Christ promised the apostles that if they believed in Him they should do greater works than they had seen Him do, because when He returned to the Father He would send the Holy Spirit upon them in power. The Acts is a partial record of those greater works—leading sinful men to believe on Christ being the greatest of them. These "greater things" are all ascribed to the Holy Spirit using believers as His agents. Fifty-two times is the Holy Spirit mentioned as the doer. How many times should we mention Him in writing "our acts," in continuation of the apostolic mission.

Some have, however, specially sought this power. The Presbyterian church knows few richer names than that of Robert Murray McCheyne. Few ministries have been so marked with power as his brief one. He died when but thirty years old. At his time a prayer meeting was scarce known in the Presbyterian church. He at once established this weekly meeting, and many of the greatest displays of power of his matchless ministry were at these meetings for prayer and praise. He opened these meetings by giving the people a Scripture passage to be hid in the heart, a promise of the Spirit or the wonderful effects of His outpouring. But, speaking of himself, he says, "I need much the living spirit to my own soul. I want my life to be hid with Christ in God. At present there is too much hurry and bustle and outward working to allow the calmer working of the Holy Spirit upon my heart. I seldom get time to meditate, like Isaac, at eventide, except when I am tired; but the dew comes down when all nature is at rest, when every leaf is still."

That was the secret of the most fruitful ministry the Presbyterian church of Scotland has seen in this century.

Such, too, was the secret of the religious life of General Gordon, whose white flag upon his tent for one half hour every morning told all that he was then engaged with God and must not be disturbed. He was very emphatic as to his belief regarding the intimacy of the Christlife and the Christian. He says, "We have need of God, so God has need of us; and He created man that He might have a dwelling place in the body, the heart and the conscience of man." Bold words, but true! Everything great, good and beautiful in human life he attributed to this "indwelling." His words are, "God the Son, took man's nature and became man. What God, the Son, did it is not derogatory for God, the Holy Spirit, to do." And He does live in the believer. "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost." Again Gordon writes, "The union of our God in Christ is our force and only force. Self must die. We must never indulge the thought of our utility. It is only His utility in us. I try to keep my mind situated at the foot of His throne. We must keep up a continual telegraphic communication with Him; that is our strength."

These are not the words of some mystic theologian hidden away in cloistered cell, who knew nothing of the struggles of busy men, but of one of the noblest generals who every led an army to victory. You busy man or

woman must find your strength just where Chinese Gordon found his, in the indwelling Christ.

Who that is desirous to do anything for Christ will not cry, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit saith the Lord of hosts."

This strength that wins is for you, my brother. But it is yours on the conditions, submission, love prayer.

Submission is first and foremost. God can find in us a fit home only in proportion as our wills make way to the Divine will. See this beautifully illustrated in Gideon. No craven heart is his after he has accepted God's commission. At his trumpet blast 32,000 men assemble beneath his banner. In yonder valley lie 135,000 Midianites, fierce, warlike, powerful. And yet, Gideon, thou hast too many men. Let all who are fearful and faint-hearted return to their places; and 22,000 slink away, 10,000 now against 135,000. Still, Gideon, thou hast too many men, for this battle is the Lord's, and at the test of drinking 9,700 more are weeded out and stationed on the neighboring hills. With three hundred men God sends the submissive Gideon forth and with the battle cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," they put 135,000 enemies to flight.

God is going to do it all and He shall do it in His own way. That is submission. Oh, for this grace when God deals with us as He did with Gideon. It is hard when we would go forth 32,000 strong to be reduced to 300. But we must learn that "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon" with 300 submissive followers behind it is a more powerful battle cry than would be "The sword of Gideon and of the Lord" with 32,000 men, the majority of whom are faint-hearted and craven behind.

Love is essential to the indwelling of Christ. God is love and he that dwells in love dwells in God and God in him. Where such love dwells there is no place for jealousy and party spirit. First Corinthians pictures a church shorn of its power by jealousy and party spirit. Some said I am of Paul, and some I am of Apollos, and some of Cephas, and some scorning all other sects, themselves the most sectarian of them all, said they were simply of Christ. They forgot that it was Christ only who died for them, and so they were shorn of their power. But Paul gives the correction of all this in this indwelling love. It is the key to his epistle. Its crowning chapter begins, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but have not love I am become as sounding brass or a clanging symbol," while he crowns the eulogy with, "now abideth, faith, hope, love, these three, and the greatest of these is love."

If you would have the strength that wins live in love, Love gives power with God and with men. It was this love which so opened Adoniram Judson's soul to the fulfilling of the Holy Spirit. When called to the pastorate of the largest church in Boston, and urged by friends to accept it, he said, my work is among the heathen, and if God permits me to see a native church of one hundred converts I shall die content. To this man so filled with love God was one hundred times better than he asked. He saw 8,000 Burmese gathered into churches, the whole Bible printed in the Burmese tongue and the work begun in other lands.

One more condition for the strength that wins is prayer. That is what Gordon in his soldier-like fashion called, "keeping up a continuous telegraph communication with God." We need to live in the atmosphere of prayer. A life governed by this principle has its regular seasons of prayer like Gordon's, whose white flag told all that he must not then be disturbed. It has also its ever recurring seasons of ejaculatory prayer, when the aspiration of the moment is breathed out to God.

The following incident will illustrate the place of prayer in the victorious life: A gentleman was privileged to ride from New York to Albany in the engine of the Empire State Express. The engineer motioned him to his seat, made everything ready, at the signal seized the lever and the train rolled out. The gentleman writes: "For exactly three hours the telegraph poles sped past and we rolled and thundered onward, through towns, villages, cities; over switches, crossings, bridges, culverts; through tunnels and viaducts, at the terrific rate of a mile a minute. The little man at the throttle looked straight out ahead at the two lines of glistening steel; one hand on the throttle, the other ready to grasp the air brake. I was not afraid for I saw he was not. He spoke not a word nor looked at me nor at the fireman, who worked like a Titan, but I saw that his lips kept moving as he forced the flying monster forward. At last we reached Albany. What a relief it was! My nerves were unstrung. I had enough for a life time. The little engineer left the cab and was tenderly feeling the bearings. I turned to the fireman.

"Bill, why does he keep his lips moving while at the lever?"

"Who, the old man? Why don't you know? He allus prays on a fast run. Twenty years he's run on this road with never an accident—the pluckiest man that ever kicked a gauge cock, he is."

Believe me, more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Shall we then depend on special seasons of prayer, or shall we make more of the regular devotions? No one who knows the value of special seasons will dispute their use. But Jeremy Taylor's rule is the wise one, "If thou meanest to enlarge thy religion do it rather by enlarging thy ordinary devotions than by

thy extraordinary." Only be very sure that you have the ordinary to enlarge.

Robert Browning said, "Make no more giants, Lord, but elevate the race." So say I, Lord. Make no more giants of prayer but elevate the brotherhood. Give us a brotherhood whom the Spirit has taught to pray, who are constant in drawing supplies from the throne of grace, and we shall see as matchless displays of the Holy Spirit's transforming power as men have ever witnessed. If our hearts are dry and barren it is because supplies of grace are stopped. Prayerlessness and lifelessness go hand in hand. We must lay hold on God like wrestling Jacob and cry, I will not—I will not—I will not let thee go except thou bless me. Such prayer is the guarantee of the strength that wins.

Submission, love prayer, these are the conditions of the indwelling of Christ in the believer's life, the conditions of power for service.

"Go, then, in this thy might," Christian worker who-soever you may be, and there is no mountain of difficulty so high but you can surmount it; there is no vale of disappointment so deep but you can ford it; there is no cloud of perplexity so dark but you have a light to guide you through. This might can never fail for it is not yours alone, but God's.

"Go, then, in this thy might" and you will discover the truth of Paul's paradox, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

"Go, then, in this thy might" and you too will say, "I can do all things in Him that strengthens me." Amen.

Covenants.

The Convention has recommended the adoption of certain articles of faith known as the New Hampshire Confession, and some time back it recommended a form of covenant for use in the churches.

This followed upon investigation by a committee. I should like to ask if the committee considered the wisdom of using these covenants. I submit that there is nothing in the New Testament which requires from the members of a church subscription to a covenant. If that is so, then it must be shown that the practice is expedient in order to justify it.

It is inexpedient if it is immoral, and it is immoral to make promises when the person making them knows at the time that they will not be kept. Take the following promises from a covenant purporting to be made in the presence of God and with Him and with the members of the church:

"We acknowledge our everlasting and indispensable obligations to glorify God by living a holy, righteous and godly life, etc." "We engage by the assistance of the Divine Spirit to improve our time, strength, talents and advantages to His glory and the good of our fellow-men, promising by Divine help to walk in our houses as becomes those professing godliness." "We also give up ourselves to one another in covenant, promising to conduct ourselves towards each other as brethren in Christ, watching over one another in the love of God, reproving, rebuking and admonishing one another for good as occasion may require, etc." "And to watch not only against the most gross evils, but also against all foolish talking and jesting, which are not covenant, vain disputing about words and things which gender strife, regarding promises and not fulfilling engagements, talking and backbiting, spending time idly at taverns or elsewhere, and vain and unnecessary conversation on the Lord's Day and whatsoever is contrary to sound doctrine according to the glorious gospel of Christ, promising to hold communion together in the worship of God and in the ordinances and discipline of His church, according as we are or shall be guided, etc."

Unfortunately the proof of the statement as to the possibility of keeping these promises is easy. Let any layman answer if he has kept them for a single month of his membership. The confessions in the church meetings as to the performance of duty prove it. We have not the form of confession used by another church; "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." But it fairly represents the humble cry of the Christian wherever he worships.

Comparing the requirements of the covenant, which seems to embrace all our duties with the conduct of the best men, it is not too much to say that it has not been kept—that it cannot be kept. Nor do I see how the matter can be helped by leaving out some of these provisions. If a covenant is to be used at all for governing the individual in respect to his duties to God and to his fellow-man it must, I think, embrace every duty. Because experience of the human race has taught that if the requirement is to "love his neighbor" he will add "and hate his enemy." That has been the history of governing by laws.

If the promises have not been kept in the past, if they are impossible of performance, then admittedly they are made with knowledge that they will not be kept. And there is the spectacle of a layman making promises at the first meeting of the month which at all others he is obliged to say he has not kept. Moreover it is the same covenant for the very weakest children and those at the mercy of the sins of their ancestors. If they cannot keep those same requirements as are laid down in the Scriptures, and it was seen that they could not, they know that they have an Intercessor. There is adjust-