

The Secret of Power

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And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked and, behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps on it, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top of it, and two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side of it. So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? Then the angel who talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these are? And I said, No, my lord. Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. (Zechariah 4:1-6)

This is a day of the display of physical power. It is revealed in the tremendous engines and machines which reshape the face of our earth and launch us into the adventure of space travel. It is seen in the release of atomic energy in the fantastic detonation of atom bombs and the enormous potential of energy from nuclear fission. Research is going on in thousands of laboratories for new sources and avenues of power.

The Conditions of Today

Likewise this is a day of the display of spiritual weakness and impotency, or moral feebleness and flabbiness. The church has lost its influence. Christians have lost their voice. We are no longer an influence in halls of legislation, in the schoolroom, in the business world, or in the social life of our nation. Spiritual power is in inverse ratio to physical power. As physical power increases, spiritual power is ebbing. It is going down and down and down. Christians today are walking like little Lilliputians among the giants of this world system. Believers today are no longer the salt in the earth. They are not even a cup of weak tea – no tang is there at all. Believers today are no longer positive light in the world, but are merely a pale reflection of the times, casting doubts into dark corners. We have lost the optimistic song of victory, and we are playing the funeral dirge of pessimism for a dying age. Someone has described a pessimist as the one who blows out the light so we can see the darkness. It does seem that certain religious leaders are doing just that in our day. No longer are we singing “Onward, Christian Soldiers,” but a cry of alarm has gone up, “Stop the retreat!” What has happened? What is it that is taking place? You will find that question being asked everywhere. It was asked by the editor of a Christian periodical:

Why are we so helpless? Why do we allow our wonderful free countries to be overrun by unsavory libertines who prey upon and pervert the normal desires of ordinary people? Why do we submit to the cultural and social combination of filth-vendors, pimps, addicts, hoodlums, gamblers, barflies, homosexuals, sex maniacs, and power-crazed lawbreakers?

And the church today remains silent and impotent in the presence of all that is taking place. What has happened?

Simply stated, it can be put like this: *We have lost our power.*

The Lesson of Zechariah

We need to learn the secret of power. Let us turn to the little book of Zechariah. It is an unexpected place to look for the answer to our question, but I think we can find it there.

Zechariah was a young man with a vision. In fact, he had ten visions! God raised him up in a day of discouragement and defeat. A small remnant of Israel (fewer than 50,000) had returned from the Babylonian captivity. Jerusalem lay in rubble and ruin, the enemy was pressing them from the outside, and they were discouraged by failure.

To get a picture of that day, we can go back to Nehemiah, who was contemporary with Zechariah. Nehemiah gives us a bird's-eye view. When he came to Jerusalem he made a survey of the city. He was a very practical businessman; he saw the tremendous work required to clear the debris of the city and rebuild it. Then he called the people together and gave them his report:

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and its gates are burned with fire; come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. (Nehemiah 2:17)

Also we get another picture over in the fourth chapter:

And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall. And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. (vv. 10, 11)

This was part of the handicap and the almost insurmountable difficulties that these people had to overcome. So God raised up, among others, this young man Zechariah. He encouraged the people to rebuild. He gave them a vision, showed them there was a purpose behind all of this and that what they were doing was fitting in with God's overall purpose for His people.

Now let us look at one of the visions. It has a message for us also.

And the angel who talked with me came again, and waked me, as a man that is wakened out of his sleep, and said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, I have looked and, behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it, and its seven lamps on it, and seven pipes to the seven lamps, which are upon the top of it. (Zechariah 4:1, 2)

This vision is very simple, as you can see. It is identified with the lampstand in the Holy Place of the tabernacle.

It is my personal judgment that the lampstand in the tabernacle is the most beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ that we have in the Old Testament. It was a work of indescribable beauty. It was beaten out of a piece of solid gold. There was one main branch and three branches going out on each side. It was a work of art done by Bezaleel, the gifted head craftsman. Each branch was fashioned like an almond bough with a great open blossom at the tip in which was placed the olive oil lamp. It pictures Christ in His deity. Because it was of beaten work, it symbolized the fact that Christ was crucified on the cross. This beautiful thing just supported the seven lamps. The lamps in turn revealed the beauty of the lampstand. This is the same thing our

Lord said concerning the Holy Spirit (for those lamps symbolize the Holy Spirit as the lampstand itself speaks of Christ): “He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14). And these lamps revealed the beauty of the golden lampstand.

Now when Zechariah saw it in his vision, it was the same with the exception of two added accessories which were not on the actual lampstand. He sees something here that is unusual. There was a bowl on top, a bowl that was like a great reservoir.

The lamps, as God instructed Moses to make them, each had a wick in them, and they would draw up the oil through the wick. In my generation we had lamps like that. But here in Zechariah’s vision, the oil was supplied to the lamps by gravitation. The oil flows down out of the bowl and is fed to each one of the lamps.

Notice there are pipes that lead from the bowl to each lamp – and not just one pipe but seven pipes, one to each of the seven lamps. It looked like an oil refinery with all the oil pipes around it. And all of this has a message. It symbolizes the plenitude of power that was available. It is that which speaks of the Holy Spirit. This is the picture that is before us in the lampstand itself.

Something else has been added, which we find in the next verse: “And two olive trees by it, one upon the right side of the bowl, and the other upon the left side of it” (v. 3). Again this all augments the abundance of power that is available. The bowl that supplies the lampstand of seven lamps, each one fed by a pipe coming out of the bowl, is in turn connected to two olive trees. The oil comes directly from its source right to the consumer; the middleman has been eliminated here. No one has to go to the filling station to get the oil. It comes to the lamps directly.

I have often thought it would be wonderful to own an oil well and to have a very elastic rubber hose that would stretch as far as I wanted to go, one that I could just stick in the gas tank and it would stretch anywhere I took a trip and keep my gas tank filled up. That would be a marvelous thing! And that is exactly the kind of supply this vision indicates. The lampstand doesn’t move, but there is a direct connection with the source of power.

“So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord?” (v. 4). Zechariah has no inhibitions about asking questions. There was no reluctance on his part, if he didn’t understand something, to say so. You will find that the other men who had great visions (like Ezekiel, Daniel, and John on the Isle of Patmos) all stood back reverently and waited. But not Zechariah – if he saw something he didn’t understand, he’d say, “I’d like to know what that is.” And he is always questioning somebody. He had a vision of a man who came by with a measuring rod, and he said, “Wait a minute! Where are you going, and what are you going to do?” He had a big curiosity bump (and the right kind of one, by the way).

Now exactly what is he asking? He said, “What are these?” Yet he was familiar with the lampstand. He knew what it was and knew the meaning of it. His question is, “What does this total vision mean – this lampstand with all these additions – what is the purpose behind it?” And further, “What is the application for us today as we are attempting to rebuild the temple? What does it mean to *us*?”

Notice how the angel draws him out: “Then the angel who talked with me answered and said unto me, Knowest thou not what these are? And I said, No, my lord” (v. 5). In other words, the angel said, “You mean to tell me you don’t know what this means?” This man Zechariah is as honest as the day is long, and he says, “Well, I don’t know, and I’d like for you to tell me.” And I am of the opinion that a great many of us, if we didn’t have an explanation, would still be in the dark as Zechariah was until the explanation was given to him.

Here is the explanation: “Then he answered and spoke unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (v. 6).

Notice that this is God’s message to Zerubbabel. Now who is Zerubbabel? He was the head of the tribe of Judah at the time of their return to Jerusalem after the seventy-year Babylonian captivity. He is the one who led the first group of his people back to their homeland, as described in the book of Ezra. Zerubbabel’s great work was that of rebuilding the temple, but the work was dogged by danger from the outside and discouragement from within. God is giving this vision to strengthen the faith of Zerubbabel.

Note also that the answer is an abridged and abbreviated sentence. In fact it is no sentence at all. If you want to talk about the grammar the angel is using, he is not using good grammar. This statement has neither subject nor predicate. It is not a sentence. This reveals to me one of the wonders of the Word of God. He did not finish the sentence because he is going to let us supply the remainder.

Let me give it all to you now as it applied to Zerubbabel: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts, will the temple be rebuilt.” This is the meaning to Zechariah and to those of his day. If you want to bring it up to date, you can fill in the sentence: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord, will anything today be accomplished for the glory of God.

Also this verse is eschatological, that is, it is for a future day. It has an application for the future that has not yet been fulfilled. But it was also for Zechariah’s day in the past and for our day in the present.

That leads me to make this statement: There is always a great danger in studying prophecy. The danger is that you feel it is so far out, it has no application for you. My beloved, let me assure you that prophetic teaching is not to tickle the curiosity of the saints. It is not to provide an intellectual titillation where we can get a little excitement. It is not to satisfy our ego in knowing something which someone else may not know. Prophetic teaching is given to us in order that you and I might have a hope. And we are told that the one who has this hope purifies himself (see 1 John 3:3). My friend, if prophetic study does not affect your life, it is not worth even the snap of the finger. Prophecy is to be geared into our lives. That is the great meaning here.

Therefore there is a threefold application that we want to note. First, it is directed to the people in Zechariah’s day. Second, it is destined and deferred to a future day for its final fulfillment. Third, it is delivered and defined for any day, including our day. Now let us notice these three.

Directed to People in Zechariah’s Day

The two olive trees were identified in Zechariah’s day. Zerubbabel, who was the king in the line of David, is one of the olive trees. The other olive tree was Joshua the high priest. They would be the two instruments God would use to bring light back into the nation Israel and to make it a light to the world.

The olive oil as I have already indicated (the word in the Hebrew is beautiful: *golden oil*) represents the Holy Spirit. Hengstenberg, one of the greatest scholars of the past, said, “Oil is one of the most clearly defined symbols in the Bible. It is a type of the Holy Spirit.” That is exactly what it pictures here. The Lord says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.” The word for “might” illustrates physical strength. The word for “power” is human strength –

either mental or material. Let me give you my translation: “It’s not by brawn nor by brain, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.” That’s the picture.

God would see to it that the temple would be rebuilt by His Spirit, totally apart from all human resources. I find it is very comforting to know that God says in effect, “I’ll do it. I will not have to depend on your weakness. I will not have to depend on your ignorance. I’ll not have to depend on *you*. I will do it. It is not by brawn. It is not by brain. But it’s by My Spirit.”

Destined and Deferred to a Future Day

Now this prophecy is also destined and deferred to a future day for its final fulfillment. The final fulfillment will be during the Great Tribulation Period. This is clearly identified for us in the book of Revelation:

And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. (11:3, 4)

Out yonder in the Great Tribulation Period there will be no witness on the earth because the Antichrist, with the power of Satan (since God withdraws His hand for that brief moment), will have stopped the mouth of every witness on topside of the earth – with the exception of two. God says that always in the mouth of two witnesses a thing is established. Also God says He will never leave Himself without a witness. During that period there will be these two men who will witness for Him. Who they are is speculation. I think Elijah may be one of them, but whether the other is Enoch, whether he is Moses, whether he is John the Baptist, or somebody else, I do not know. But their identity is not the important thing. God will have two witnesses, and they will speak in the power of the Holy Spirit in that day. They will be God’s witnesses. That is His promise for the future just as He used Zerubbabel and Joshua in Zechariah’s day.

There are other related matters here concerning the future which we will pass over at this time, but let me lift out just one of them. In the future God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, according to Joel 2:28. This is pictured here in Zechariah’s vision of the lampstand, the abundant, unlimited power of the Holy Spirit in constant supply. God says, “I will pour out My Spirit upon *all* flesh.” This has never yet been fulfilled. It will be in a future day.

Delivered and Defined for Any Day

Now let us move on to that which is for us today. Since prophecy is to be practical, the application is for any day, including our day. The nation Israel was the olive tree, but God has set Israel aside temporarily. Paul says this in his epistle to the Romans:

For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more shall these, who are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? (11:24)

Now God has set Israel aside and raised up the church (by which I mean the body of believers in Christ) as the second olive tree, which is today to exhibit God’s power in the world.

Now the whole operation reveals a great principle, and this is the secret of power. God's will and God's work is instigated, promoted, and carried through to a successful accomplishment by the Holy Spirit (apart from man's ability and help). Oh, if we only recognized that we can do nothing in our own strength for God! It would cause us to cast ourselves upon Him and get connected with the real powerhouse, the Holy Spirit. God utterly and entirely repudiates the work of the flesh of man. He will have nothing of it. Let's look at this again: God says it is not by brawn, not by the display of the physical. The day in which we live is impressed by brawn, that which reveals muscle. Well, my friend, the dinosaurs were big, but they are not here today. But the little lowly flea is still with us! Powerful nations flex their muscles. So what? The time will come when God will put them down, my beloved.

It is man who made the din of the city with its nerve-shattering noises. It is man who made the horn and the siren, the gaudy and garish lights that illuminate the brick and cement canyons of our cities. In contrast, God made the silent depths of the forest with its pleasant shadows.

It is the spring of the year as I write this, traveling through Illinois – oh, what a carpet of green has been laid down! And in Missouri the trees are beginning to leaf out. In Kansas the grain is coming up. Then out on the desert the flowers are unfolding. It is beautiful. Today, my friend, the nitrogen is silently crawling up the stalks and up the limbs, making leaves and flowers. There is enough power being released to blow this little earth to smithereens! God is doing it without any show, without any display. It is not by might; it is not by brawn. "It is by My Spirit," saith the Lord.

You could characterize the greatest national force the world has ever seen, which was Rome, with one word: Power! It was the greatest power machine the world has ever seen. The legions of Rome marched on every frontier. They were invincible and victorious. But one day they took into custody a Man who seemed to be very weak. Pilate said to Him, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?" The Lord Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above."

My beloved, today we have a perspective of that. The legions of Rome have marched into oblivion. As Kipling said, "The tumult and the shouting die, the captains and the kings depart." They are all gone. But the gospel of that Man who died on the cross is still being carried by weak men to the ends of the earth – by men who are as weak as you and I. His death was a victory, my beloved. God is not impressed by brawn and a display of muscle.

God's purposes are not being accomplished by brain. This is a day when we attempt to do God's work by committees. Someone has said that committees are made up of the incompetent, appointed by the indifferent, to do the unnecessary. That characterizes the work of the church today! We have complex organizations, new methods, boards, committees, programs, plans, drives, contests, budgets, sponsors, rallies, pep talks, psychological approaches, and high-powered advertising. The church has it all today and it is going nowhere. The machine is out of gas. The church goes forward today like a little Samson shorn of its locks of power. It parades up and down, boasting of its accomplishments, and, like Samson, it knows not that the Spirit of God has departed from it. The thing that makes this so tragic is that the church could go forward like a little David with a simple slingshot of the Holy Spirit to meet the enemy with all of his stratagems and come off with a victory! Oh, how we need the power of the Holy Spirit! God's work in the world is not done by brawn; it is not done by brain. It is accomplished only by His Spirit.

Now let's bring this down to the life of the individual. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to even become a Christian. Do you know that none of us can make ourselves Christian? We

cannot do it. God says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” and we can’t reverse it.

Do not misunderstand me, you can improve the flesh. You can educate it. You can teach it culture and refinement – it needs that. But after you have given it an education, after you have given it culture and refinement, and made it polite (and, believe me, the flesh in our nation could stand a little of that!), after you have done all this, it is still flesh.

Therefore one dark night our Lord said to an outstanding ruler of the Jews, a man religious to his fingertips, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). God could not save him by his own righteousness or his own efforts. The Holy Spirit regenerates. You see, God justifies the sinner when he confesses his sin and receives Christ into his life, but that does not change him inside. The minute that sinner trusts Christ, he stands justified before God, where no one can condemn him. But he is changed on the inside because the Holy Spirit comes in at the time of justification and regenerates. By this he is born again. “Not by brawn, nor by brain, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord.

How God Saves

God does not save us by our own efforts. Nothing man can do can atone for his sin. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. It is ugly, it is sinful. In the beginning of the human family, He put down that principle:

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. (Genesis 6:12, 13)

If God looked down at the time of the Flood and saw the violence in the earth, what must He think as He looks down at our earth today? Did you ever hear so much talk about peace? Yet there is violence and bloodshed on every continent. Fighting is going on everywhere. Many parks in this country are so dangerous no person, man or woman, will walk through them at night. The streets of our great cities are more dangerous than the jungles of Africa today. Flesh is flesh. As God looks down on it, He must ultimately judge it.

Let me give you another definition of a Christian: A Christian is one who has no confidence in himself, and his entire confidence is in Christ. “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Where is your confidence today? Are you trusting yourself? Or have you seen yourself without brawn or brain, helpless before Almighty God? And have you turned to Christ for salvation?

My beloved, listen to our Lord: “It is the spirit that giveth life, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). The flesh profits nothing. God is not accepting anything from you when He saves you. He will do it all, if you will let Him. The trouble with us is we think we can do something to merit salvation. God says we cannot.

God saves those who will believe in Christ.

For the Jews require a sign [they want to see the brawn], ***and the Greeks seek after wisdom*** [they want to know about the brain power]; ***but we preach Christ crucified,***

unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

If a Jew will come to the place where he is no longer looking for a sign, and if that Gentile is no longer looking to wisdom, but both of them are looking to Christ, God by His Spirit will make them His children through faith in Jesus Christ. You cannot be a Christian in your own strength or your own wisdom. Only the Holy Spirit can make you a child of God.

We need the power of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. Listen to Paul speaking to the Galatian believers: “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Galatians 3:3).

A great many people today think, *Yes, God can save me only through faith in Christ, but after He has saved me, He expects me to live for Him. So I'll grit my teeth, I'll pull myself up by my bootstraps, and I'll keep the Ten Commandments.* My friend, you never kept them before you were saved, and you will never keep them afterward in your own strength. If you began in the Spirit, and God saved you by the power of the Holy Spirit revealing Christ to you, then by the power of the Holy Spirit you are to live for God.

You cannot live the Christian life. You cannot show me a verse of Scripture where God asks you to live the Christian life! And we have a lot of “fundamental” believers who are super pious, and they think they are living the Christian life. Yet they are carrying animosity, bitterness, and hatred in their hearts. My friend, that is all hypocrisy. Yet God has made a way for us to live the Christian life. Again, it is so simple that most of us miss it, and we keep stumbling along trying to live like Christians by our own efforts.

God's plan and program is by yielding: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:13).

This concept has been developed into the so-called “surrendered life.” Surrender is sort of a “giving up” process, but to yield to God is an act of the will where you definitely yield yourself to Him. It is not something that is done when you are out of gear – you know, this flabby, emotional sort of thing. It is when you actively, objectively, definitely, and positively go to Him and yield yourself to Him. That is necessary not only to live the Christian life, it is the only way to truly serve God. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). The word present” is *yield*. It is the same word in the original language.

My beloved, it is only as you and I yield and our will moves out of the way that the Spirit of God can move in and bring God's will to bear in our lives.

Impatient, like a little child, I find myself to be;
Not waiting for the Lord to work His perfect will in me.
I try with my poor skill to push the bands of time ahead,
And reap far less than if I were at all times Spirit led.
Oh Lord, to whom a thousand years are sometimes as a day,
Give me the patience that I need to walk in wisdom's way.
Teach me to rest in Thee, and wait, so that Thy best may be
My portion throughout all my days, and for eternity.

– Author unknown

How comforting to know that all I need to do is yield to Him.

May I be personal? It has been my privilege to preach the Word of God for over forty years. Before I stand behind a pulpit I do two things. First of all I tell the Lord, "I can't do it." If that were the end of it, I'd never come to a pulpit; I'd go out the back door. But He has told me, "I don't ask *you* to do it. In fact, if *you* do it, *I don't want it!* You let *Me* do it through you." The second thing I do is yield myself to Him. That is all He asks.

A young boy by the name of Dwight L. Moody sat in the balcony. He heard an unknown preacher by the name of Henry Varley make this statement: "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man who is fully yielded to Him." That boy sitting in the balcony said, "By the grace of God, I'll be that man." In my opinion he was that man, but when Moody was dying, he said to his family around him, "When I was a boy, I heard Henry Varley say, 'The world has yet to see what God can do with a man who is fully yielded to Him,' and I said, 'By the grace of God, I'll be that man.' But I can say now that the world has yet to see what God can do with a man that is fully yielded to Him!"

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.

Not by brawn, nor by brain, but by the Holy Spirit, will anything be done for God.