

Sermon delivered before the Southern Baptist Convention, Memphis, Tennessee, May 10, 1889, by Rev. J. P. Greene of Missouri.

Text: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:23,24).

Many good men have been clothed with the power of God and have thus been enabled to do super-human works. Christ is the power of God in a higher sense. He is not merely a man of God, but the God-man. All authority in heaven and on earth is given to Him, and His power is equal to his authority. In Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. True, He called himself the "Son of Man," and at times He seemed to be weak. But He also claimed to be the Son of God, and in His weakness He displayed divine power. All the circumstances of His death prove that He laid down His life. His death was submission, not defeat.

Christ is indeed the power of God, but only to believers. Unto Jews He was a stumbling block, and unto Gentiles foolishness; "But unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God!" He is charged with divine power, as with electricity; but the touch of faith is required to call forth His power. Unbelief is a non-conductor. The afflicted woman touched the hem of His robe in faith, and virtue flashed from Him to her instantly, and she was healed. He made no response to those that carelessly pressed against Him in the throng. In a measure He was powerless in the presence of disbelievers. He could do no mighty work, no "power" in Nazareth. But the disbelief of the many could not prevent Him from healing "a few sick folk" that

came to Him in faith.

Our Lord is no longer present with His people in the flesh, but through the Holy Spirit He reveals His power unto them in two ways, in saving them from sin, and in empowering them for service. I wish to consider these two manifestations of His divine power:

1. Christ is the power of God unto salvation.

"Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins." "For the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." He is "mighty to save." "He is able to save to the uttermost." The purpose of His coming was to save sinners, and He is fully equipped for the super-human task.

It is hard, perhaps impossible, for us to realize the magnitude of Christ's saving work. The greatest human power is not adequate to the salvation of the sinner. We are so accustomed to seeing the conversion of sinners and to hearing of the simplicity of salvation that we forget the mighty work of our Saviour. The traveler sits in the soft seat of a Pullman and whirls along in safety. Little does he think how much it cost to secure this safety ~~for him~~ and ease. How much time and money were required! How many brains and heads and hearts were worn out! How many tedious and fatal experiments were made before the best roadbed and best bridges and best locomotives and best cars were invented! What did it cost Jesus to make a plain, safe highway for us through this "waste howling wilderness?"

It is important that we should have a correct idea of sin, that we may appreciate the saving work of Christ. A false view of sin necessarily leads to a false view of the atonement. If the sinner is not in a very bad way, he does not need a very great Saviour.

Nearly all the serious religious errors of our time can be traced to unscriptural and false views of sin. In this age the sense of sin is terribly blunted; hence Christ is a respected Friend rather than an almighty Saviour.

What does the Word of God say of the sinner's condition and of Christ's saving work? The Bible has much to say of sin. Every phase of moral evil is there described and condemned. The words used by the Holy Spirit are significant and unmistakable. Such words as sin, iniquity, wickedness, transgression, and disobedience express God's opinion of moral evil. The sinner had fallen away from God, is depraved, is worthless, is trampling upon the divine law, is hostile towards God. He is in a state of discord and of slavery, and of false security, and of hypocrisy, and is becoming hardened all the time. And God holds him accountable for every sin, for every idle word. He is already condemned, and is heaping up wrath against that awful day of wrath!

Look also at the expressions used to describe Christ's saving work, and you will get a still clearer view of the sinner's condition. He is lost, and Jesus came to seek and to save him. He is a captive, and Jesus came to pay a ransom for him. He is in prison, and Jesus came to open the prison door and set him free. He is defiled, and Jesus came to wash him in his own blood. He is condemned before God and Jesus came to justify him. His mind of flesh is at enmity against God, and Jesus came to reconcile him to God. He is dead in trespasses and sins, and Jesus came to quicken him, to regenerate him. So desperate is his case that nothing short of a new creation will do him any good. The valley of dry bones is a fit illustration of this world of lost souls. "Can these bones live?" "O Lord God,

thou knowest! " The almighty Saviour must send forth His spirit and breathe eternal life into these dead souls, else there is no hope for them.

But God has given us the clearest expression of His view of sin in the crucifixion of his own Son. What is the meaning of this horrible scene? If the sinner is not in a dreadful state why did Christ suffer and die to save him? Why did not God, with His inexhaustible resources, find some easier way to rescue him? We must believe that the price paid was the sinner's debt. Our sins were laid upon Him. He suffered in our stead. God poured out His wrath upon our Substitute. Christ suffered the agony of a damned soul. No one can look upon the cross and consider sin a light matter.

The Bible idea of sin is just and true. We may appeal to the facts that come within the sphere of our observation, and corroborate the words of the Scripture. Sin is now and always has been just what God says it is. It has a history, dark and dreadful. And it does not require searching to find out its character. Look where you will and you must see it. The trail of the serpent is over all! There is no spot that that it does not defile, no individual that it has not corrupted. This vile weed has driven its roots so deep that no mortal hand can pluck it up. We are amazed at its aggressiveness and power. Every branch of human life has been invaded by it. It has overrun every valley and has entrenched itself on every high. Most of the earth is under its absolute rule. When we undertake to drive it out, we meet with crafty, stubborn, relentless opposition. No stronghold of sin has ever been captured and held. Every spot on earth is today defiled by the footprints of the devil. Where he does not go openly he goes by stealth. Even where he is not suspected there is the hiding of his power. Moral evil is a

dark, gigantic, colossal power. It is everywhere. It is organized. It is strong, almost invincible. Look at the ruin it has wrought. Why does it exist? It should not be here. Who will destroy it, or even check its work of destruction? When we face this problem, the sin of the world, we are bewildered, appalled, overwhelmed!

We know, too, that the sinner is in a bad way. Good sense forbids that we should make light of his condition. All that God says of Him is true. He is indeed lost, defiled, led captive, condemned, hostile towards God, and dead in sin. Let him turn to return to God. Let him turn away from sin. Let him break off his chains. Let him burst open his prison doors. Let him arise from the dead and live a holy life. There is no strength in him. I am tired of hearing the sinner's future state discussed. Those that wonder whether he ~~will~~ go to or not overlook the facts. He is already lost, and not going to be! He is not fit for heaven and he knows he is not. Every unrenewed man not only does not love God, but is also incapable of loving Him. Human decency is not spiritual life. One sin unpurged is enough to damn a soul. A garment that is defiled with one spot is not clean, and it will never be clean till that vile spot is washed out. Christ shocked His hearers when He depicted the rich man in hell. But where else could he go? Was he fit for heaven because he wore purple and fine lines and fared sumptuously every day? You can't convince these worldlings that they are lost. They persist in thinking that God cares as little for sin as they do. Even when they acknowledge their sins, they do not turn away from them. And many that desire to be saved die in their sins. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots! Some people think ~~there is a chance for the sinner from the error of his way.~~

that there is a chance for the sinner to be lost. He is lost! There is a chance for him to be saved. Look around you at the dead souls. Many of all ages and classes are passing along the broad way. When you try to turn ~~the~~ sinner from the error of his way, you will see how helpless you are, and how necessary is the divine, almighty Saviour. If I did not believe in Christ's power to save I should sink into despair.

What is salvation? It is not a superficial view of sin. The heart and life of the sinner must be changed. He must have a new heart. Christ takes away the old heart of sin and gives him a heart of righteousness. Joining the church is not salvation. Neither is reformation salvation. There must be a new creation! The hog that is washed will plunge again into the mire. God changes the unclean animal into a sheep. Old things pass away, and all things become new. One can hardly believe that such a change could be wrought. None but a divine power could ^{do} ~~do~~ it. God gives a new mind and a new love and new tastes. Think how hard it is for one to adopt a new way of living. A man that has lived many years in the country cannot content himself in town. We get used to certain kinds of food, and we should soon tire of the best French cooking. It is hard to teach an old horse new tricks. But Christ can make a completely new man of the sinner. He not only learns to love spiritual things, but also has an unquerable disgust for sinful things. He has tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and is a new man forevermore!

We have a great Saviour. I wonder at His ability. I wonder that He had the courage to undertake the salvation of sinners. I wonder at His unselfishness. I wonder at His tenderness and

patience. I wonder at His strength. I wonder at His works, the actual, visible results of His saving power. The crucified Christ is indeed the Saviour of sinners! He has saved us. He is saving men all around us every day. Let men make sport of sin and salvation, if they will. We believe in Christ, and unto us He is the power of God. We know, too, that the whole world lies in the wicked one, and that Christ is the only hope of salvation. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Every renewed soul has a sweet experience of His saving power.

2. Christ is the power of God unto service.

Those that have experienced the saving power of Christ are commissioned to tell the story to others. We cannot save men, but we can tell others. It is the purpose of Christ to evangelize the whole creation. It is indeed "a daring program." The conception is the fruit of divine mercy and wisdom. It never would have entered into the heart of sinful, selfish man to undertake such a work; and none but a renewed soul has the desire and courage to engage in it.

Turn your face toward the work the Master has given you to do. Look on the wide-spreading fields He has sent you to reap. The prospect is bewildering. Angels might possibly do this work, but ~~we~~ are we able? Let us not underestimate our foe. We do not contend against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Great difficulties are in our way. The whole world is in the possession of the devil.

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He has a strong hand in all the affairs of men. He rules the State. ~~maxxity~~ Commerce is carried on in his spirit. The love of money moves the world's business. Not one man in a thousand makes money for Jesus' sake. Not one State or city government is set against sin; not one upholds the cause of gospel truth. We may count ourselves fortunate if we are not opposed or persecuted by these governments. The first missionaries that went out from England had to go in a Danish vessel, and the Indian government would not allow them to settle in their possessions. The servants of Christ have suffered much from these worldly power. Paul appealed several times to his Roman citizenship to protect his life. But he never received any support from them; never dreamed of such a thing. Worldly men do not sympathize with this holy work. They regard us as fanatics, and our undertaking as foolishness. When we speak hopefully of our work, they hurl discouraging statistics against it. Even when there is no open opposition there is a strong under current against us. But none of these things would move us, if sinners were anxious to hear the message. It is a rare thing for a city or nation to welcome the messenger of the Cross. Most of our missionaries must labor for years to make one convert. In a vision Paul saw a man of Macedonia beseeching him. "Come even unto Macedonia and help us." He did not see all the Macedonians. Remember how he was treated at Philippi. Men love darkness, rather than light. Think of the system of idolatry and unbelief that confront us. These false religions have been in the field for ages and have the veneration and love of the people. They have their temples and priest-hoods. Underneath them is the strong arm of the State. The rich offerings of generations are heaped up around their altars. Do we dare attack these gigantic organizations of the evil one? Can these souls that are

buried in darkness of ages be brought out into the light of the Cross? Right here in our own favored land of liberty super-human difficulties confront us. How shall we reach the unchristian masses? We are all asking this question. In our cities are whole blocks and wards that are given over to Satan. The Christian feels his heart sinking within him as he walks through these godless precincts. It requires great courage to approach one sinner, even the feeble one. Many active Christians will not attack a sinner. It is storming the cannon's mouth. How helpless we feel in the presence of a sinful child! The door of the heart is closed against us. Not one Christian in four is actively engaged in the work of soul-winning.

"Who is sufficient for these things?" When we look within we see greater difficulties than those that are without. Was there ever a Christian that felt that he was able to do this work? The master has to drive most of us into His service. We do not hesitate because we do not love him nor the souls of men. It is a pleasure to us to serve Him, and we rejoice in the salvation of sinners. But we are conscious of our weakness of absolute unfitness for this work. I do not wonder that Jonah fled to Tarshish. We doubt our ability to make the sacrifices and endure the hardships required of us. Sinners regard us with suspicion, with contempt, with hatred. Our proud hearts writhe under this treatment. And sin is a loathsome thing. We must give up our tastes and delicate sense of decency, and go down among the lowly and debased and live with them and love them. The defiled garments of the sinner thrills us with horror when we take hold of him to pull him out of the eternal burning. Have we the tenderness and tact for this work? One that engages in the service of Christ must be a hero and a martyr. It is folly for us to think that we are sufficient for this work; we over-

estimate our ability. We must be endowed with power from high. All our help must come from Christ. Apart from Him we can do nothing. But we can do all things through Him who strengthens us.

In our day Christians place too much dependence on human means. Material helps receive too much emphasis. We must have fine houses of worship and fine choirs and fine preachers. If we have plenty of worldly means for carrying on our religious work, it never occurs to us that we can fail. And we have little hope of succeeding without these means. Some ardent souls have declared that we could evangelize the world in a few years if we had enough money. Is Mammon the god of missions? Money rules the world, indeed, but it does not rule the kingdom of Christ. The devil offered our Saviour all the resources of the world. But He spurned the offer. He does not need these things. Let us not fall into this old snare of the evil one. It is not by might, nor by power, but by the spirit of the Lord. Our weapons are not carnal but spiritual. Why does the cause of Christ languish? What is the matter with our moribund churches? Involuntarily we exclaim, "We need more money! In every department of our work we need more money. Give us the money, and we will move the world!" A glance at ~~such~~ ecclesiastical history is enough to explode such a notion, without referring to the word of God. Why is it we cannot see that it is the power of Christ that we need? Not long ago a member of a village church wrote to me and asked me if our church would not give them a bell. He said all the other churches had bells, and they could never do anything until they got one! Anything but Christ! We are all so slow in seeing our only great need. If we have him we will have all things and abound. And if we had all earthly things and Christ were lacking, we should be wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked!

I am not decrying the use of material helps in the Lord's work, nor do I say that we have all the money His dear cause needs. I am insisting on Christ as the power of God unto Christian service. Wall our resources come from Him. When we need money He will give it to us, if we trust Him. If we are full of His spirit we should not fear to undertake His work, even when there is not a cent of money in sight. Look at His commission. "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world!" This commission was delivered to above five hundred brethren. But they were poor, unlearned and unknown men. They had no worldly possessions. The church was their only organization. They did not even have a house in which to meet. How could the evangelize the whole world? Christ presented himself to them as the source of power. He had all authority. He could be with them, even unto the end of the world. Nothing was said about learning or money or worldly influence. None of these things are essential to success. The Master wisely kept these things out of sight, that they might look to Him alone, the only source of real power. ~~Paul was a mighty source of real power.~~ Paul was a mighty servant of the Lord, a real giant, a "mighty man of valor." His conversion was miraculous. That great revival in Jerusalem that carried many unbelievers over to Christ did not move this impetuous spirit. But when Jesus met him in the way he became an easy captive. Then he began that wonderful life of service. What did this man endure? What did he accomplish? His life is the greatest miracle of the apostolic age. Where shall we look for the secret of his power? He tells us that

Christ enabled him. Christ appointed him to the ministry. When he became a Christian, he lost all his worldly power. What things were gain to him he counted loss, his learning, influence and worldly prospects. He counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. After he was thoroughly emptied of the world Christ filled him with His own mighty spirit. When he became weak Christ made him strong. "My grace is sufficient for thee." He gloried in this divine energy. "No longer I, but Christ liveth in me!" This is the only way we can account for the marvelous power of this man. Humanly speaking, he was poorly equipped for evangelizing the Gentile world. He had no influential friends and no money. The learning that the world respected he threw away, and took up this foolish, odious theme, the crucified Christ. With this puny weapon he smote the Gentile world till it trembled from center to circumference, and temples and thrones fell into hopeless ruin. Sum up the results of his missionary journeys, mark what he accomplished, and note well the meagre human resources at his command. Christ wrought through this man and his successors, before the end of the second century, nearly the whole habitable world was evangelized, and this grand work was done without money, without schools, and without a single meeting house! Add to this lack of resources the opposition and fierce persecution endured by these heroic servants. Now analyze this wonderful success. When you get down to the hiding of their power, what do you find. CHRIST!

I might bring forward examples of modern times to show how God has poured contempt on the pride of human strength; how he has taught us to look to Christ alone as the source of all power." I might speak of the origin of foreign missions. The idea sprang up in a circle

of humble Baptist preachers in a rural district in England. The first missionary meeting was not held in London, but in the village Kettering. William Carey, the humblest of that circle, was the first to propose the work and the first to undertake it. When he and Thomas sailed for India there was not enough money in the treasury to pay their fare. When they began their work among the heathen they were utterly destitute-- the wolf was at the door. But the Lord was with them. I might point you to Judson beginning his work in Burmah. Day after day he sat in the little open chapel and sowed the seed by the wayside. Very few people stopped to hear what the strange man was saying. Most of the time he spoke to the wind. But God made the wind his messenger, and on its wings it bore the words of life through the whole land, and into other lands. The word went forth and did not return void. I might also call your attention to the work of our fathers in this fair land. They were poor and unlearned and despised. With such poor human equipment how could they do such great work? How many Baptists churches in this country, and you can hardly find one that did not begin in a feeble way! Those men were giants, spiritual Titans. Christ was the strength of their heart and their portion.

Scripture and history both point one way, to Christ. All spiritual energy must come from Him. He is the only source of power. Those that put their trust in Him shall never be confounded. But those that trust in the arm of flesh will fail. First seek him and his righteousness, and all material blessings shall be added. The life is in Him. This life produces fruit. Our missionaries preached Christ first. Then

Then followed civilization and all Christian institutions. Our fathers began with Christ. On this foundation they built. Now we have wealth and learning and influence. These visible, material means are the fruits of divine power. There is no power in these things. If we put our trust in him he will honor our labors and establish our works, but if we turn away from him and deify human strength, we shall sure fail. The golden cald did not bring us outx into the land of promise. Would you be a strong, useful servant of the Lord? He must clothe you with power. He must energize you for service. If you trust him he will be to you the power of God and the wisdom of God. A grain of faith in him will remove mountains. "Be strong and of good courage; be not affrighted, neither by thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest."

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