

Sermon.

CHRIST THE POWER OF GOD. 1 CORINTHIANS I. 24.

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To the Jews Jesus of Nazareth was an offence, and his cross the symbol of weakness and shame. They demanded a sign from heaven, external supernatural evidence, as the ground of their faith. They despised and rejected the Son of Mary and the Son of God, whom Paul preached with all the energy of his great and loving soul as the only hope of humanity. The truths of the Gospel were too humiliating for their proud and carnal hearts to receive. Wisdom, or a science system, was sought, after by the Greeks. A sublime philosopher, building up grand demonstrations of the existence of the Supreme Being, the creation of matter, origin of evil, nature of virtue, present and future well being of man, was their object of desire. Expecting the teachings of the Academy, the Garden and the Porch to culminate in the great Jewish Prophet, they considered it an insult to be told that exaltation came from the humility of Christ, glory from His shame, blessing from his bearing the curse of the law, which man had broken, life from His death, and a triumphant immortality from His resurrection. To proclaim such a Gospel as this was foolishness, to believe it madness. Notwithstanding the Apostle held forth the crucified, declaring that to both Jews and Greeks, called of God, enlightened by His Spirit, and born from above, Christ was no longer an absurdity and a stumbling-block, but the manifestation of the All-wise and the Almighty One, the wisdom of God and the power of God.

What is power? It is an object of sense. It has been said that no proper notion can be formed of power, that it is a relation which the mind conceives to exist between one thing going before and another thing coming after. All that is perceived is succession. When one thing invariably succeeds another, they are not connected together as cause and effect, and viewed under that relation, but the idea of power is formed and the mind affirms that there is a virtue, efficacy, or force in the one to produce the other; and that the connection between them is not only uniform and unvaried, but universal and necessary. Now what is this, in its last analysis? To describe it as the ability to do something, or as that which in one person or thing originates or produces another, is saying nothing final or conclusive, for the question still remains. What is ability, virtue, efficacy, or force?

Power is derived from a word containing the idea of existence, as may be seen in such relative terms as possible, potency, potential. When we think of substance we form a notion of something that exists, that stays in existence, though it may change its form, and that has certain properties, but what are these but the powers it possesses. From mere existence, as in the case of stones, houses, steamboats, the mind passes to a higher substance, a life, an intelligence, a will, a personality, that impressed upon the stone its properties, formed the house, fashioned the boat, and put into water the expansive force which is developed by the application of heat, now indispensable to the commercial and mechanical progress of the world. Power is the result of life and intelligence. It is a property of mind. From the operations of mind the idea of power is generated. 1. The mind is affected through the senses by external objects. 2. Through the brain, the nervous and muscular systems, it acts upon foreign bodies. 3. It acts upon itself, changing and ruling its thoughts at pleasure. It is an old definition of mind and matter; mind is that which moves; matter is that which is moved; and there can be no motion without power, and no power without life and intelligence.

Power then is a manifestation of mind, and is in proportion to the amount of mind. Man has more than the creatures below him. In God the highest mind—Perfect intelligence—there is Almighty Power—its range infinity, its duration eternity, and eternity is "the life-time of God." Power in its last analysis is the manifestation of God. To this conclusion a classification of the various kinds of power will lead. Dr. McCosh classifies them thus: 1. Force in inanimate objects. 2. Vital power—vegetable and animal. 3. Reciprocal action of mind and body. 4. Mental action. 5. The human will. 6. Divine causation. God is the cause of causes—Himself uncaused. Jehovah is everlasting and omnipotent. God is the foundation of life, "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. There is no power but of God. The thunder of his power who can understand." Such is the testimony of Moses, David, and Paul.

The power of God, the manifestation He makes of Himself is in keeping with His holiness, wisdom, and benevolence. "Righteousness and judgement are the habitation of His Throne." It is impossible for God to lie. "He is not a man that He should lie, neither the son of man

that He should repent." God works no contradictions. It would be unworthy of His perfection. A contradiction is not a reality. It is either an infirmity, or a logical quibble of a finite, sinful mind. God deals in facts and realities, in things that exist, and as He has made them. The Apostle argues that Jehovah's eternal power and Godhead are manifested and understood from the material creation, and in the intelligent creatures He has formed in His own image; into whose nostrils He has breathed the breath of lives; putting a spirit into them; and by His own inspiration giving them an understanding. But most of all is the power of the Almighty Father manifested in holiness, wisdom and love, in the gift of His only begotten Son, Jesus the Christ, the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person, God manifest in the flesh. Christ is the manifestation of God. Christ is the power of God.

That Christ is the power of God, may be established by considering Him before His incarnation, in His incarnation, and in His ascension.

First. Before His incarnation.

1. The Scriptures clearly prove the existence of Christ before His incarnation. The Evangelist declares that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." The same was in the beginning with God." Jesus said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was I am." In His prayer, before he entered on His agony, He used these words, "Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." David, in singing of the mighty and majestic Messiah, exclaims, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." In the Revelation He is described as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the Lord who was, who is, and who is to come—the Almighty. Christ is the true God and eternal life. "It pleased the Father that in Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." As God, Christ is Everlasting and Almighty. He always was, and He ever shall be, there is no bound, no limit, to His power.

2. Christ is the Creator of all things. Jehovah does not come forth and create. Clouds and darkness are round about Him. He hides himself. No man has seen God at any time. He is the King eternal, immortal, invisible. He purposes and determines. Christ reveals and executes. Christ is the Arm of the Lord—God in manifestation and action. The Spirit of God addresses us internally by moving immediately and directly on our minds and hearts; Christ comes to us externally in creation and His incarnation, and speaks to us through our senses, and thus the complex man is touched at both points of his being, and a practical argument for the Trinity of the God-head is found in the intellectual and spiritual wants of humanity. "All things were made by Christ, and without Him was not anything made that was made. Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things. By Him were all things created that are in Heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him, and he is before all things. He stretched out the north over the empty space, and hung the earth upon nothing. He fastened the foundations of the earth, laid the corner stone thereof, and established the world that it cannot be moved. Christ has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, meted out heaven with a span, comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. He stretched the heavens as a curtain, and spread them out as a tent to dwell in; made Arcturus, Orion, Pleiades, and the chambers of the South; binds the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and looses the bands of Orion; brings forth Mazzaroth in his season; guides Arcturus with his sons; commandeth the sun, and it riseth not, and scatheth up the stars; bringeth out their host by number; calleth them all by their names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power, not one faileth."

3. But Christ upholdeth all things by the word of his power. "By him all things consist." He keeps Nature steady and uniform in all its operations, and can bring in on the plane of its uniformity an extraordinary act of power whenever he pleases. The permanence of mind and matter is in Christ. The material universe is sustained by Him. Suns, stars, and systems—all worlds are preserved by Him. He keeps angels and men in existence. "In Him we live and move." Because He lives, we live also. All things and all created beings depend on successive acts of his will.

4. Christ governs and controls all things. The Eternal Father rules through His Son. He says, "I have set my King on my holy hill of Zion." Christ's throne is in the heavens, and His kingdom extends over all. He controls time and space, and all worlds. He reigns over the universe. The reins of empire are held by Him and he sways the sceptre of boundless dominion. The heights and depths, and lengths and breadths are embraced by His government, and subject to His control. "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hands, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The wrath of men and the rage of devils are overruled by him, so as to praise him, and the remainder he restrains. "The government is upon his shoulders, and of its increase there shall be no end. Let not the rebellious exalt themselves; let the kings and judges of the earth be instructed, and rejoice with trembling, lest he break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Secondly. Christ is the power of God in His incarnation.

1. But some man may say there is a loss of power here, and that God in human flesh ceases to be God. It might as well be urged there was

a loss of power in Christ when he created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. In creation Christ made matter; in His incarnation he entered into it, and thus showed a greater degree of power over it. He took not on him the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham. He made Adam, and in the fulness of time he not only came near to humanity, but took it upon him; and "as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." In his humiliation Christ placed his power under voluntary limitation. He held it in repose and reserve, to be used only at his Father's command but there is no loss of divine energy. It is adjusted and fitted to the accomplishment of certain ends determined by the Triune God, and which could not be brought about in any other way. Man could not go up to God, but God could come down to man in human form, and take that form up with Him to the highest heaven. It is faculty and genius in a man to come down to impress, attract, instruct, and elevate childhood. Christ showed his greatness in coming down to be a Servant and a Saviour. A little girl's idea of God was, "That he was so large that heaven could not hold him, and so small that he could come into her little heart."

2. The incarnation of Christ is an amazing exhibition of power. The very name Jesus, which designates more especially the manhood of the Redeemer, signifies I shall be powerful. Jesus is the Son of Man, and at the same time the Son of God. He limits himself, and still retains his essential divinity—he veils his splendour, and yet loses not his native glory. In his humanity he reveals God to man, and man to himself; strikes at the root of human selfishness and vaulting ambition aiming at the high places and grand prizes of earth and furnishes strength and sympathy to his disciples in the trials of life and godliness. Christ is the revelation of the highest virtue, and the embodiment of the purest love. He comes down to save and exalt the children of men. Alfred was greater, when disguised as a shepherd minstrel he entered the Danish camp alone, than he might know the strength of his enemies and take steps to drive them from the shores of his beloved England, than when in Royal state he was surrounded by his courtiers. Touching the wants of a sinful race, Christ was greater and more powerful in the manger and the garden, on the cross and in the sepulchre, than when He created the world and the sons of God shouted for joy, and He received the homage of angelic hosts. The child is the mighty God, the son is the Everlasting Father. Great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.

3. Christ is the power of God in his life. His life was perfect, rounded and complete. Apart from the salvation of our souls, we are infinitely indebted to God for the gift of his Son—a sinless man, a perfect example. One who could say to his foes "Which of you convinceth me of sin; and again, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." Though tempted in all points like as we are, yet he was without sin. He was faultless and without rebuke; holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. In this respect Christ stands alone, and is not to be numbered among the sons of men. He is God's only begotten and well-beloved son. In him the *Thrice Holy One* finds no blemish, and declares himself well pleased. How impressive is the life of Christ. Who can read it, and believe it, and not be moved by it? The life of the God-man is the power to subdue, save, and exalt the children of men, and raise our world, the abode of sin, until it becomes one of the outposts of the New Jerusalem.

4. The power of God is felt in the words of Christ. The Samaritans said of Simon the sorcerer, pretending to foretell future events, that he was "The great power of God." But Christ in his teaching is the demonstration of the spirit and of power. "Never man spake like this man," is the testimony of the officers sent by the Sanhedrim to apprehend Jesus. Christ declares that the words he speaks are spirit and life. "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am the Resurrection and the Life. Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Christ's disciples feeling the virtue of his life-giving words say to him, "To whom can we go, thou hast the words of eternal life." The multitudes acknowledged that Christ spoke with authority and power. His utterance convinced his hearers that he understood them thoroughly, knew the thoughts and intents of their hearts, and that there was nothing hidden in their inmost souls from his omniscience. To hungry and thirsty souls his words came as did the manna in the desert and the water from the flinty rock to the distressed Israelites. They were sweeter than honey and the honey comb. On those that were opposed to his reign of meekness and love, his denunciations flashed like lightning and fell like thunder. His word is the same now, for the Christ that is in it is mighty, and it never can become weak and old. It shall always flourish in unfading youth. "It is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

5. But in the miracles of Christ the power of God is plainly seen. The words used in the New Testament to express these manifestations of divine energy are wonders, wonderful things, signs, glorious things, strange things, mighty works of power. Here power is evidently the root term, and the source of the signs, wonders and glorious things, and at once carries the mind up to God; as Nicodemus said to Christ, "No

man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." There is no difficulty between the miracle and the order of nature when it is considered that nature signifies that which is born, evolved, developed, and that it looks toward the future, implying that which shall be as well as that which is. Nature is a part of the established order of creation, expressing the immanent presence and energy of creative power; and the supernatural is the transcendent act of God indicating the transcendence of the divine will. The natural and the supernatural belong to one system; both are produced by the one infinite mind; both make up the unchangeable plan of Jehovah. Granting the being and perfections of God, there is nothing improbable in the supernatural, and a miraculous event may be established by the testimony of approved witnesses; and such is furnished in the Scriptures of Truth. The miracles of Christ, proclaiming his benevolence, his redemptive character, his victory over the kingdom of evil, and his almighty power, have been beautifully classified in a recent volume by one of the masters in our Israel.

1. His power over the conditions of time and space. He cured the nobleman's absent son.

2. His dominion over nature. (a) Over the properties of nature; turning water into wine. Here was a change in quality. The increase of the loaves and fishes was a change in quantity.

(b) Over the laws of nature: He walked on the waters of Galilee, and stilled the storm.

3. His dominion over physical evil: He cast out devils.

5. His dominion over his own person, over his own destiny, absolute and complete, in which he shapes that destiny in the interests of redemption: He arose from the dead, ascended and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

6. Christ's control over himself is the greatest evidence of power. Himself he would not save. Every pang appointed him he endured. He drained the bitter cup to the very dregs. He never passed over limitations which he had prescribed for himself in obedience to his Father. Had he drawn on his reserve of almighty power to save himself from suffering, then Satan had gained a victory; but as in the wilderness, so in the gloomy garden, he resisted the temptations of the devil, wrestled with the powers of darkness alone, and came forth in his bloody sweat and extreme physical weakness, the conqueror of the legions of hell. He died voluntarily. No man took his life from him; he laid it down of himself, and he took it again. Not like Aaron and the sons of Levi, who were made after the law of a carnal commandment; the Great High Priest, in the power of an endless life, rose from the dead, tore away the bars of death and the grave carried captivity captive, and was declared to be the son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness. And having spoiled principalities and powers, making a show of them openly, triumphing over them, his humiliation and death the means of his victory, he ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high.

And death's last hope, his strongest for and prison, is shattered, never to be built again; And He, the mighty captive—He is risen, Leaving behind the gate, the bar, the chain."

The sublime utterances of Isaiah and David may be applied to the exaltation of Jesus and the rapture of the heavenly hosts beholding their ascending King: "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" And the Glorious One asserts, "I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore mine arm brought salvation unto me." And they sang, "lift up your heads, oh ye gates, and be lifted up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle."

Thirdly. Christ is the power of God in his ascension.

1. If Christ was the power of God before his incarnation, and when he was humble and found in the likeness of men, most evidently he is the power of God in his ascension, victorious and glorified, to his seat on the middle throne beside the Eternal Father. His power is more apparent now, and felt more than ever before. The progress of Christianity makes it more and more manifest. He is not only the embodiment of power, but he has all the authority and advantage of the highest rank and the greatest resources. Jehovah has said unto him, "Sit at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies." Jesus rules over all worlds. He has all power in heaven and earth. The glorified humanity of Jesus, in eternal union with uncreated divinity, is on the throne of the universe, and all forces, material and spiritual visible and invisible, are subject to his control and obedient to his command. The thought of Christ's exaltation is one of great impressiveness. When the Jews heard that God had made the same Jesus whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ, they said unto Peter and the rest of the Apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" The power of the living and ascended Christ, as expressed in the miracle wrought on the impotent man laid at the gate of the temple, filled the beholders with amazement, and carried conviction to their hearts. Christ's ascension is a source of strong consolation to them that believe in him. Because he lives, they shall live also. He ever liveth to make intercession for them. They shall be with him, where he is, see him as he is, reign with him, share his glory, and be forever with the Lord. (Concluded in four next.)