

POWERS OF THE AGE TO COME

Our Unchanging God

In our attempts to try to return to or restore first century Christianity we have emphasized many aspects of the life of the early Church, such as body life, love and care for one another, government and other aspects of the early believers. While all of these are wonderful and we need to have them restored, one of the areas that we seem to pass over is the way that the Lord manifested His power in signs, wonders, miracles, healing, and deliverance. This is what provided the vitality to their daily living. They walked with a present tense, active God that actually did things in the earth. We seem to have lost that powerful vitality of the expression of the Lord and His Kingdom. It needs to be restored. Desperately!

How did we lose this? What does it take for God to restore it? What type of changes do we have to make? These are some of the questions that we need to ask ourselves. We know that God doesn't change.

"For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. (Malachi 3:6 NASB)

Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday and today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8 NASB)

Since He doesn't change then the problem must be on our side. What changed between the first century and now? Well, for one thing, we have not only stopped practicing miracles but we have also stopped teaching about them and the power of God. Why? Maybe its because we have stopped laying the complete foundation of doctrine in the Church. We can't build anything until the foundation is completed. This was the essence of what the writer of Hebrews was saying about them in the last part of chapter five and the first part of chapter 6.

Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. (Hebrews 5:11 NASB)

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (Hebrews 5:12 NASB)

He was telling them that they were in kindergarten when they should have already graduated college. The elementary principles are the A B C's of Christ—the basic understanding upon which everything else is built. They were “dull of hearing” in the same sense that a kindergarten student who may be able to count to ten but would have no understanding of an algebraic equation. That is what has happened to us—ever since the first century the Church has been “dumbed down” in spiritual knowledge and understanding.

Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, (Hebrews 6:1 NASB)

of instruction about washings [baptisms] and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:2 NASB)

And this we will do, if God permits. (Hebrews 6:3 NASB)

The intention is that we leave the A B C's and move on to deeper things. Notice the list of these A B C doctrines:

1. repentance from dead works
2. faith toward God
3. instruction about baptisms
4. laying on of hands
5. resurrection of the dead
6. eternal judgment

How many of these have been fully laid as foundational doctrines in your life? How many of these have you heard actually taught from the pulpit? Is it any wonder then that the Church hasn't matured?

Notice that verse three says “if God permits”. This is in the context of moving on and leaving the elementary principles. Why would God not permit us to move on? For our protection, He doesn't allow us to move on if the foundational principles haven't been securely laid. The Church has been “dumbed down” because God has not permitted us to move on to deeper things because of our weak, incomplete, cracked, or missing foundation.

So, the first step in regaining the vitality of the early Church is to buckle down, apply ourselves and learn our spiritual A B C's.

The writer of Hebrews goes on to describe such a person.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, (Hebrews 6:4 NASB) and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, (Hebrews 6:5 NASB)

and *then* have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. (Hebrews 6:6 NASB)

This person has several characteristics:

1. enlightened (received light)
2. tasted the heavenly gift (Jesus, our salvation, been born again)
3. partaker of the Holy Spirit (baptized in the Holy Spirit)
4. tasted the good word of God's (continued in the word, become a disciple)
5. tasted the powers of the age to come (walked in miracles, signs and wonders)

While I realize that the rest of the verse deals with falling away and the impossibility of such a person to be restored (such a person would also have little chance of falling away), the point I am making is the fact that this is the normal progression of growth of a person and that it results in the expression of the “powers of the age to come”.

If we don't learn our A B C's and move on toward maturity, we will not walk in the powers of the age to come.

Demonstrated Power

Why did Jesus tell us that signs would follow those that believe (Mark 16:17)? Why did miracles accompany the work of the apostles? Why have miracles occurred at each new move of the Holy Spirit right up to the present day? The answer is contained in some of Jesus' words to the Pharisees.

"But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Luke 11:20 NASB)

Signs, wonders, miracles, deliverance, healing—these are demonstrations of the Kingdom of God coming into the world. Casting out demons is a direct result of the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness and testifies to the power of our Conquering King. These are some of the powers of the age to come.

Jesus tied receiving power to receiving the Holy Spirit.

but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NASB)

The results of receiving power was that they became witnesses to Jesus. This doesn't mean that they received power so that their words would be eloquent or that their logic would be unassailable but rather that they could demonstrate the authority of the King and His Kingdom.

This was exactly what Paul did when he ministered:

and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5 NASB)

Earlier in my life, I sold medical computer systems. One of the things that was necessary for every prospect was the demonstration of the software. It didn't matter how informative, or how attractive your literature was, nor how well you *talked* about the software and what it would do for them—they had to *see* it before they would buy it. This is what Paul was doing—he was *demonstrating* the power of the Spirit, which was a confirmation of the words that he spoke.

Today, not only do we fail to demonstrate the power of the Spirit, we don't even talk about the King properly. We say things like “just receive Jesus into your heart”. Where did we get that? Its not in the bible. We don't receive Jesus, He receives us when we repent! Not only have we stopped demonstrating the power, we have removed the power from our words too! No wonder our “converts” live such powerless lives, unstable, following every trick of deceitful men (Ephesians 4:14).

Why? Because we don't understand what it means to mature and walk in the powers of the age to come. Because we have stopped preaching the Kingdom of God. Because we have made the gifts of the Spirit venues for entertainment, greed, and self-promotion rather than instruments of the Kingdom of God.

Not only did Jesus link power to the Holy Spirit, He also linked the Holy Spirit to the Kingdom of God.

for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17 NASB)

This is the only clearly stated definition of the Kingdom of God that I can find in the Scriptures. This verse describes a spiritual condition of righteousness, peace and joy that is located in the Holy Spirit.

This presents the Kingdom to us now in spiritual form. There will come a time in the future when the Kingdom will be on the earth physically for a thousand years with Jesus reigning as King. Meanwhile, we walk in the powers of that age to come by walking in the Holy Spirit. He is our earnest, our down payment, the surety or pledge for that which is to come (Ephesians 1:14).

I was a part of the early Charismatic Movement of the late 60's and early 70's. One of the key phrases from that era was that "He is alive!" or "He lives!". I experienced the truth of this when I received healing in my body. Jesus is alive and He is still working today through the Holy Spirit. How do people know that He is alive—that He rose from the dead? How do they know that the future hope, which we declare, is true? By experiencing a demonstration of the power of the Spirit, by partaking of the powers of the age to come.

The Gospel of the Kingdom

We are not seeing a lot of the demonstration of the Kingdom of God here in the USA. In other places around the world this is not true. In some areas they could write another chapter to the book of Acts.

Why are there so few miracles here? Because, we have neglected the words and methods of Jesus. He drew a line through history, dividing it into two sections: the first was the proclamation of the Law and Prophets, the second was the preaching (proclamation) of the gospel of the Kingdom of God.

"The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (Luke 16:16 NASB)

Then, Jesus proceeded to preach the Kingdom of God. With this proclamation came the demonstration of the Kingdom when healings of every kind of sickness and disease occurred.

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming

the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23 NASB)

Later, Jesus informs us that what He said and demonstrated was to be preached in the whole world as a testimony of Him before the end would come.

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 NASB)

So, when the Great Commission says to “preach the gospel” it means the gospel of the Kingdom, not our watered down gospel of salvation (or “fire insurance”). Salvation is a part of the gospel but it is just the beginning point. Jesus is not just savior, but, He is also Lord. God has established Him as King, King of all kings and Lord of all lords. This must be included if we are to preach the gospel of the Kingdom.

The Kingdom of God is the reign of God, the rule of God, the government of God. We have already seen previously that the current location of the Kingdom is in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). This means that our experience of the Kingdom begins in our own hearts as we bring it under the government of the Lord.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7 NASB)

His government (rule) increases as our hearts are subdued. This produces in us peace and righteousness. It causes us to take on the characteristics of our King, to be conformed to His image. We become ambassadors for the Kingdom, representatives of His Lordship. And, because of the peace that comes with His rule, it makes us to be peacemakers.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9 NASB)

When we are baptized with the Holy Spirit, we receive the earnest or down payment of our future inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). There is an initial release through the Spirit of a taste of the powers of the age to come (the Kingdom Age). However, to maintain the power requires us coming under the Rule of Christ. Our hearts must be changed or we will use the powers of the coming age as self-serving gifts that glory us or our ministries rather than the Lord. The law of the Lord must be written on our hearts or we will practice lawlessness.

This verse reveals the result of not coming under His Lordship. Those mentioned performed miracles in the Name of the Lord, yet the Lord said that they practiced lawlessness.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.' (Matthew 7:21-23 NASB)

One of the alternate meanings of the Greek word translated as “knew” is “approved”. I think in

the context that this would be a better rendering of the word. Those who performed these miracles were doing it out of lawlessness without the Lord's approval.

Jesus told us to “seek first the Kingdom”. That puts His rulership, Lordship, Kingship as a priority in our lives. It also means that it requires effort on our part to “seek”. It takes more than a casual relationship with the Lord to walk properly in the powers of the age to come.

Three Steps

Jesus told us three things that we are to do. These actually correspond to the three stages of growth in the Lord given to us in I John 2:12-14 where John writes to “little children”, “young men”, and “fathers”.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7 NASB)

Little children are always asking for things. We are all to become as little children to the Lord. That is why we should be asking the Lord for the things that He desires for us. When we ask and receive, it is all a gift. The Father has gladly given us the Kingdom (Luke 12:32). We should be asking Him for all of the things that accompany the Kingdom.

As we grow spiritually from “little children” to “young men” we move into the “seeking” stage. While we will always ask for the things that are freely given by the Lord, we reach a point where we become more involved in the things of the Father. Some things we can't receive by only asking. We are told of at least two of these: 1)we are to seek His face; 2)we are to seek first the kingdom of God.

As we just mentioned, the Father has gladly given us the Kingdom. However, the rule of the Lord over us moves beyond what is given into what we must seek. We become involved. Seeking requires purpose, direction, and commitment. This means setting priorities, focusing on achieving the priorities, and total dependence on the Lord for finding the fulfillment of that which we seek.

As the Kingdom becomes a reality to us through our seeking it, we begin to operate in the powers of the age to come. That is why John tells us that the “young men” have overcome the evil one. They have experienced the power demonstration of the Kingdom of God.

The third step is knocking and relates to our maturing into “fathers”. Knocking has to do with the work of service to the Lord. We knock on the doors of service and the Lord opens those that are for us. The powers of the age to come are necessary to fulfill the work when we walk through “open doors” that the Lord has given us.