

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

"Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Rev. 22:12

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"THE POWER OF CHRIST" (Page 54)

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ROMANS 1:4

"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

THE statement in this verse is a continuation of that in verse three, or, rather, is the complement of that; so this article must be but little more than a continuation of the preceding one. We have learned what is embraced in the statement that Christ was made of the seed of David, "according to the flesh," and now we have to note what he is to us "according to the Spirit of holiness."

"And declared to be the Son of God, . . . by the resurrection from the dead." This must not be understood as meaning that Jesus was not the Son of God before his resurrection, nor that he was not declared to be the Son of God before that time. We well know that he was the Son of God before the world was, and he was then glorified with the glory of the Father. It was as the dearly-loved, only-begotten Son of God that Christ came to this earth. When he was baptized, at the beginning of his earthly ministry, the voice of God came from Heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Matt. 3:17. Upon the mount of transfiguration that voice again was heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Matt. 17:5. And all through his earthly life, Jesus did not hesitate to declare himself the Son of God. So we know that the resurrection did not affect his relationship with God.

It seems evident that the phrase, "according to the Spirit of holiness," must be the key to unlock the mystery. If we take the closing words of Jesus, as recorded by Matthew, we shall be upon the track of the correct explanation. He said :—

"All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach 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 alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28 :18-20.

The kind of power that was given unto Christ may be known from what the disciples were to do : "All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach." Their going and teaching was based upon the fact that Christ had all power, and promised to be with them always. And this agrees with what Paul says in the verse immediately following the one quoted at the head of this article : "By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name." Rom. 1: 5.

Now we may know how it is that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead. He was the Son of God, whatever took place. But by the resurrection from the dead he acquired power

to impart holiness to as many as should believe on him. It is true that thousands lived holy lives before the first advent of Christ, but they did so only by the power which Christ obtained for them by virtue of his promised death and resurrection. It will be seen that the Scriptures sustain this exposition. We first read Heb. 2 : 14, 15 :—

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise 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 life-time subject to bondage."

Christ took part of flesh and blood, in order that he might have power to redeem man. This does not in any way limit his power before he came to earth; but it is a simple fact that man could not have been redeemed except by the blood of Christ. The law could not relax its claim, and so the Law-giver consented to receive in himself the penalty of his own law, and thus God can be just and the justifier of him that believed in Jesus. More than this, by his life of suffering and temptation, he learned how to sympathize with poor, weak mortals. And so the resurrection, which was the triumphant close of his earthly work for man, the thing toward which all his previous life tended, is said to be that by which he obtained power to fill his followers with holiness.

The apostle Peter bears testimony to the same effect. He says :—

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-5.

As this text will come in again in our comment on Rom. 1:16, we pass it without remark for the present. In his second epistle Peter says:—

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue." 2 Peter 1:2, 3.

Here is comfort, indeed. All things that pertain unto life and godliness are given to us by this divine power of Christ. Surely there is no manner of excuse for anybody's failing of righteousness and eternal life. Read now what the apostle Paul says:

"We also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Col. 1:9-11.

The "glorious power" of God is shown in the heavens, which "declare the glory of God," and in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: This glorious power may be ours, so that we may be "strengthened with all might," to be able to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." This power Christ can bestow on us, because he has experienced the very lowest ebb of human weakness, so that he knows just what help is needed. Therefore he is able to save to the uttermost those that come to God by him.

It is a soul-cheering thought that human weakness, instead of being a bar to our overcoming, may be the very stepping-stone to victory. The apostle Paul had a weakness, which it seemed to him was an insuperable obstacle to his fulfilling his divine commission, and so he besought the Lord to take it from him; but the Lord said :—

"My grace is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

With this assurance the apostle said:—

"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." 2 Cor. 12:9,10.

But we are persuaded that it is not in physical weakness alone that Christ's strength is made perfect. The infirmities of the flesh, those tendencies which make us an easy prey to the temptations of Satan, call for the manifestation of divine power in an especial manner. In his list of the wonderful things accomplished by faith, the apostle tells of some who "out of weakness were made strong." Heb. 11:34. That is, the very weakness of their moral nature called for more of the divine power, and the greater the weakness, the more divine power was called for; and so it appears that the weakest point in our nature may, through the divine power of Christ, become our strongest point.

From this standpoint, then, we may even glory because of the weakness of our moral natures. Not that we should glory because we are or have been weak, but having been "strengthened with all might according to his glorious power," being "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might," we can glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world, with its lusts, is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.

"All power is given unto me in Heaven and in earth;" says Jesus. Let us not, then, tremble at the power of the enemy. Let us not talk about the power of the devil, for that will give him an advantage over us. By our very fear of him we give him power over us. He is a strong man armed, but Christ is the stronger than he, who has entered into his house, and bound him, and taken away his armor wherein he trusted. See Luke 11:21, 22; Rev. 1:18. His power is nothing in comparison with that of Christ. Let us, then, exalt the power of Christ, and joyfully trust it. No matter what the inherited or acquired weakness of character, nor how sorely the enemy may press, we may rest confident in the promise :-

"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be. There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." Deut. 33:25-27. And in all these things we may be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." W.